



ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ
HELLENIC REPUBLIC



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Accreditation Report **for the Undergraduate Study Programme of:**

Education Sciences in Early Childhood
Institution: Democritus University of Thrace
Date: 25 September 2021

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

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Part A: Background and Context of the Review	4
I. The External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel	4
II. Review Procedure and Documentation	5
III. Study Programme Profile	7
Part B: Compliance with the Principles	9
Principle 1: Academic Unit Policy for Quality Assurance	9
Principle 2: Design and Approval of Programmes	11
Principle 3: Student- centered Learning, Teaching and Assessment	14
Principle 4: Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification	17
Principle 5: Teaching Staff	19
Principle 6: Learning Resources and Student Support	22
Principle 7: Information Management	24
Principle 8: Public Information	27
Principle 9: On-going Monitoring and Periodic Internal Review of Programmes	29
Principle 10: Regular External Evaluation of Undergraduate Programmes	31
Part C: Conclusions	33
I. Features of Good Practice	33
II. Areas of Weakness	33
III. Recommendations for Follow-up Actions	33
IV. Summary & Overall Assessment	34

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 in **Education Sciences in Early Childhood** of the **Democritus University of Thrace** comprised the following four (4) members, drawn from the HAHE Register, in accordance with Laws 4009/2011 & 4653/2020:

- 1. Prof. Leonidas Kyriakides**
University of Cyprus, Cyprus (Chair)
- 2. Prof. Emeritus Athanasios Gagatsis**
University of Cyprus, Cyprus
- 3. Prof. Mary Ioannidou-Koutselini**
University of Cyprus, Cyprus
- 4. Prof. Panayota Youli Mantzicopoulos-James**
Purdue University, United States of America

II. Review Procedure and Documentation

Due to travel restrictions and lockdowns, the accreditation of the Undergraduate Study Programme on Education Sciences in Early Childhood (ESECH) of the Democritus University of Thrace (DUTH) was conducted fully in a remote mode, using the Zoom teleconferencing tool. The Hellenic Authority for Higher Education (HAHE) provided the External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel (EEAP) members with a packet of materials ahead of the review process that included: The Department's Accreditation Proposal, a Quality Assurance Policy Document, Quality Assurance Goals, and Quality Data, as well as a wealth of supportive material and appendices. The Department further provided the EEAP with the accreditation file and appendices for easy access, as well as additional supportive material including videos, sample of student work, course assignments, practicum assignments, student theses, and faculty scholarship samples. The Panel was also provided with HAHE's accreditation guidelines and was invited to attend an orientation session before the accreditation visit.

The EEAP met as a group before the accreditation teleconferences to plan ahead, coordinate division of work and process to be followed, and discuss issues that emerged from the preliminary study of the material at that point.

The virtual accreditation visit extended over three days, starting on September 20th, 2021. We first met with Prof. Zoe Gavriilidou, Vice Rector of Academic Affairs and Student Welfare, and President of MODIP as well as with Assoc. Prof. Georgios Mavrommatis, Vice-Head of the Department. We then met with OMEA and MODIP representatives. On the second day of our visit, we met with teaching and administrative staff members, as well as with students. We were also given an on-line tour of the classrooms, lecture halls, libraries laboratories, and other facilities and we then discussed the facilities presented in the video produced for this purpose. Finally, we met with graduate students and discussed their experience of studying at the Department and their career path. During the third day of our visit, we met with employers and social partners and discussed their relations with the Department. All three days were concluded with debriefing meetings with EEAP members only. During the third day of the visit, we met also with OMEA and MODIP representatives and addressed several points/findings which needed further clarification.

From the very beginning, the Department of Education Sciences in Early Childhood (DESECH) welcomed us with warmth, collegiality and openness and they were all eager to answer our questions and address our concerns. Their presentations were informative, emphasizing the University's commitment to quality improvement in teaching, research and community outreach. A good number of faculty attended our meetings, a sign of involvement in departmental affairs.

During our online visit we met with members of the leadership, faculty members and administrative-support staff, current students and alumni as well as community partners. From our interactions and conversations with these representatives we recognized that the Department takes its commitment to quality assurance seriously, constantly working towards greater compliance with the HAHE quality standards.

In closing, the EEAP would like to note the challenges of conducting an accreditation virtually. Despite the flawless and truly exemplary organization of the virtual visit on the part of our hosts,

we feel that an on-site visit would have given us a much better sense of the work that is taking place, would have done justice to the Department's achievements, and would have given the Panel more formal and informal opportunities to inquire about different aspects of the accreditation process.

III. Study Programme Profile

The development of the programme follows a well-defined procedure that corresponds to the policy for quality assurance established by the University and the Department.

The academic profile and orientation of the programme, the objectives, subject areas, structure and organization, expected learning outcomes, and intended professional qualifications align with the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education and the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The revision of the programme complies with the basic requirements described in the Standards and takes into consideration the following:

- The Institutional strategy – MODIP.
- The students' course evaluations.
- The experience of external stakeholders from schools and associations.
- The smooth progression of students throughout the stages of the programme.
- The staff shortage.
- The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System.
- The provision of work experience to the students during their studies.
- The linking of teaching and research.
- The relevant regulatory framework and the official procedure for the approval of the program by the Institution.

There is a continuous and close collaboration between the Department and MODIP, which led to very productive results concerning the self-evaluation of the Department and the programme's compliance with the quality standards of Higher Education. The relevant information provided by the President of MODIP, OMEA, and the DESECH staff indicated their commitment to regular revisions of the study programme, the updating of the content and design and the adequate allocation of ECTS. The relevant regulatory framework and the official procedure for the approval of the programme by the Institution comply with the ESG and the MODIP's guidance.

The programme is regularly evaluated by student surveys. The number of participants, who completed the course evaluations prior to the pandemic, is impressive in comparison with the students' participation in remote evaluations. Overall, the results indicate students' satisfaction with the programme and communicate their readiness to serve the schools and the community. These findings are consistent with the experiences of external stakeholders and graduates who are employed in a variety of settings, including schools, hospitals, museums, libraries. The fact that the practicum experience is implemented in formal (school) and informal community (libraries, museums) contexts is an advantage for students and the community, benefiting both. Nonetheless, during the EEAP meetings with students and graduates, they pointed out the insufficient duration of student teaching which is limited to just one month.

The meetings of the EEAP with students, graduates and stakeholders revealed their gratitude for the department's contributions in handling difficult cases successfully, particularly when the community was faced with the challenges of including large numbers of migrant students in the schools. Students and graduates alike favourably referred to the support they received from the teaching staff during their studies. They also noted the curricular emphasis on multiculturalism and Inclusion, a matter that is particularly relevant to the schools and the society of Thrace, given the demographics of the region. Also mentioned was the collaborative climate during teaching and learning which promotes mutual respect, values students' diversity, and is

attentive to their individual needs. The spirit of collaboration, that is characteristic of the department, extends to fruitful cooperations across the University and the community.

The staff shortage is a serious problem that forces the department to cover its teaching needs by non-permanent academic staff. There is a dire need for academic positions that can promote the department's visibility through research and publications. The permanent member of the staff who is currently in the rank of Professorship is going to retire soon.

In closing, the EEAP would like to highlight the excellent work of the MODIP and the initiatives directed to the redesign and alignment of the Institution's and the Department's procedures to

- promote the quality assurance of the programme,
- promote student-centred teaching, learning and assessment, and
- safeguard students' rights by establishing new and novel offices and implementing procedures that protect students' interests.

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 policies and procedures of the Undergraduate Study Programme on ESECH at DUTH, are in line with those of the University and are monitored by the University's Quality Assurance Unit (MODIP). In general, the Quality Assurance Policy aims to support the academic content and scientific orientation of the undergraduate programme in accordance

with international academic standards and the current national legislation. To that extent, there is a policy in place for improving the educational experience of undergraduate students and the quality and quantity of the overall research output of the department.

The main dimensions of the Department's quality assurance policy concern the following:

- Enhancing the extroversion of the Department through the organization of international and national conferences, symposia, and workshops. These result in both the strengthening of links between the Department and other internal or external departments, as well as the dissemination of the results of projects carried out in the Department in the wider education community.
- Strengthening the Department's international presence through the publication of research, conducted by staff members and students, in international scientific journals.
- Development of the Department's connections with the local community and the educational community.

The main body of the quality assurance policy in the DESECH is the Internal Evaluation group (OMEA) which works in cooperation with the University's Quality Assurance Unit (MODIP) and conducts an annual detailed internal evaluation. Annual evaluation procedures are carried out in accordance with the criteria set by HQA. The DESECH has developed a series of quality assurance processes, which involve self-evaluation, and have resulted in reorientation of goals, the reprogramming of various actions, and the development of new support structures. For example, they have established a Teaching and Learning support office, an office of the Student "Ombudsman", an Erasmus and a Student Career Office, a Student Internship Office, a Gender Equality Committee and an Ethics Committee.

A new and innovative structure in the Department focuses on the Philological Supervision of student works/essays and is especially noteworthy because it highlights the Department's interest in and vision of the quality of work expected of students. A graduates' questionnaire has also been developed and it is expected to provide valuable feedback to the programme study committee.

The EEAP generally verified that clear objectives are set, and concrete actions are established to implement the vision of the DESECH, including input from all parties involved.

Panel Judgement

Principle 1: Academic Unit Policy for Quality Assurance	
Fully compliant	✓
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 DESECH of the University of Thrace offers a four-year Bachelor programme entitled Education Sciences in Early Childhood Education. The programme was revised in 2017 according to the official procedures for programme approval by the Institution and to the recommendations included in the External Evaluation Report. Annual revisions are also made based on student course evaluations, staff feedback, stakeholders' suggestions, and the availability of teaching staff. MODIP provides the Guide for the Revision of the Programmes of Study and facilitates the documentation and rationale for the revisions.

According to the Department's website:

'The key objective of the Department's Curriculum is to shape educators-researchers who will be in a position to interpret and analyse the educational and social reality and be able to re-adjust their choices as professional educators throughout the educational process'.

The Department has set broad learning objectives aligned with the European Quality Framework for BA programmes:

- *Construct a broad humanitarian education capable of critically interpreting contemporary challenges.*
- *Understand and interpret scientific theories and concepts from the field of education sciences and effectively transfer and apply them in early childhood education settings.*
- *Understand a variety of factors that contribute to the social and educational reality. Apply educational practices and methods that have as a focal point the child's holistic development, its personal rhythms and its perspectives of integration in the cultural environment.*
- *Design, implement and evaluate innovative educational programmes (curricula) in institutional and alternative early childhood educational areas and self-evaluate themselves.*
- *Direct and manage early childhood institutions.*
- *Design and implement programmes for the internal evaluation of educational units.*

The [structure of the programme](#) consists of obligatory courses, obligatory electives, free electives, foreign languages (English or French), and obligatory units of the School Experience Programme. Music and Art are not included in the programme as separate subject matters, but they are offered as Units of the School experience (3 ECTS). The units of the School Experience are allocated 32 ECTS and have a practical orientation.

The Department's presentation of the curriculum specified that the emphasis of the curriculum is to provide graduates with the appropriate information, concepts, skills, and attitudes to successfully work in the field as competent teachers and educators with broad pedagogical knowledge and sensitivity towards local and contemporary educational issues. There are strong linkages between the content of the programme (and its specific courses) and the community and the schools' multicultural context. MODIP and OMEA, as the internal quality assurance boards, successfully promote the educational and community's objectives and the smooth progression of students throughout the stages of the programme, which lasts four years. Each academic year is divided in two semesters (fall and spring) and 30 ECTS are allocated to each semester. Each semester consists of at least 13 weeks of classes and usually three weeks of examinations. Students may choose to complete a senior thesis during the fourth year of their studies or take three additional elective courses instead. Students who opt to complete an undergraduate thesis have the choice to work on their thesis individually or in pairs.

The structure of the programme consists of 6 broad areas that address:

1. The Philosophical, sociological, anthropological, and historical approaches to
2. Psychology
3. Pedagogy – Didactics
4. Culture and Education
5. Sciences
6. Methodology

The DESECH works synergistically with other departments of the University to cover the teaching of subject matter for which there is no staff in the Department. Great emphasis is given to disciplinary content with theoretical links to Education (areas 1, 2, 4, part of area 3) and less emphasis is given to skills development (student teaching experiences), an issue that needs careful consideration in future programme revisions. It is noteworthy that students and graduates also called attention to this need during their meetings with the EEAP. They characterized the programme as 'theoretical' and voiced their interest in the enhancement of the school practicum experience and its practically oriented units.

A total of 840 active students are enrolled in the programme. The student workload complies with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). The studies are structured

in 8 semesters with workload of approximately 30 ECTS per semester. The total workload during the four years of study at the Department corresponds to 240 ECTS. However, students may accumulate more than 240 credit units if they successfully attend additional, elective courses offered in the program. Two foreign languages are offered in the Program (i.e., English and French) and students choose one of them during their studies.

The School Experience programme starts from the first semester, and it is offered in all the subsequent semesters through a variety of activities, watching lessons, preparing teaching, contributing to school activities, conducting small scale projects. The student teaching experience is limited to one month. As noted above, and consistent with information gathered during the EEAP interviews with students and graduates, this short amount of time allocated to practice is not sufficient to meet the programme's goal, namely, *to develop the practical skills and experiences that prepare students for their future roles as teachers at schools*. The EEAP points out that the duration of time that students spend in the classroom as teachers, having full responsibility of the timetable of the school and activities, deserves revisiting.

The Department's response to the challenges presented by the pandemic, which involved the use of simulations to replace the face-to-face teaching in schools, was favourably commented upon, indicating the department's readiness to provide appropriate and rewarding experiences to the students. An additional favourable comment should be made on the department's initiative to provide teaching experiences for the students in informal contexts, i.e., museums, hospitals, libraries. Both students and stakeholders expressed their appreciation for the department's initiatives in alternative settings. The collaboration with the Medical School and TEEFA for supporting the work experience in different contexts is an effective synergy that promotes the programme's learning outcomes.

The Department applies the published regulations covering students' admission criteria, progression, and recognition. Students receive documentation (Diploma Supplement) explaining the qualifications earned, including learning outcomes achieved and the context, level, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed.

Information on the programme's structure is published in Greek and English in the Department's webpage and also in the Student Guide. Regular revisions of the webpage will support the consistency of information.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

Better balance in the content of the programme between theoretical background and development of practical skills in teaching the main courses of the school curriculum.

Principle 3: Student- centered 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 structure of the programme favours student-centred teaching, learning, and assessment, due to the availability of elective and obligatory elective courses. The Department encourages students to take an active role in their learning process, by offering courses as electives and also by inspiring students to choose from the pre-defined elective Units of the School Experience programme. Meetings and work in the Department's [laboratories](#) can provide further assistance and individualized support to all students. Moreover, students are given feedback and advice on their learning and have the opportunity to meet and work closely with the faculty.

Students stated that they are given opportunities for active participation during teaching and learning, even in the amphitheatres (big rooms), where they have the opportunity to discuss and participate in the learning process. The newly established 'Teaching Award' by MODIP is a very positive step for promoting exemplars of student-centred Teaching and Learning. [Organization of symposia, lectures and events](#), extend the students' experiences and participation, and they were offered remotely during the pandemic through teleconferences.

Students have the guidance needed to progress smoothly through the stages of the programme through the published [Study Guide](#) for each academic year and the support of the academic and administrative staff.

The external stakeholders had very positive attitudes towards the students' work in the community that welcomes their presence in schools and informal learning settings, including hospitals and libraries. The percentage of students answering the Student Questionnaire is very high and the results indicate that they hold positive attitudes towards the programme, the staff, and the teaching process. Moreover, during the EEAP meetings, the students expressed appreciation for the staff's support in meeting diverse teaching challenges in a multicultural school and classroom environment.

The Department has organized [12 internal regular committees](#) and it is supported by the Central Services of the University, such as the Office of students Affairs, the Career Office, the Unit of Innovation and Entrepreneurship, the Office of the School and Work Experience. All these departmental and Central Committees serve the interests of the students and support the implementation of student-centred teaching, learning and assessment. Additionally, the students' participation in the [organization of symposia, lectures and other events](#), extend the students' experiences.

The Student Advocate Office, directed by a staff member of the School of Law, is an innovative resource that has been implemented recently by the University, in line with the student-centred approach. The Office handles students' complaints and appeals and promotes students' rights.

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge the high student/faculty ratio – approximately 56 students per instructor – which may reduce the mentorship and personalized advice opportunities for students. Also enrolled in the Department are 21 doctorate candidates, a relatively large number, when taking into account that one student per year earns the PhD degree, according to data provided by the Department.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

The Institution and Department aim to cover necessities that derive from innate deficiencies of the system in Higher Education such as the shortage of the staff, regulations for transferring personnel from the schools (metataksi), limited funding for Erasmus students, lack of promotion regulations that ensure publications in refereed journals and research, and a competitive promotion environment. Therefore, to address these issues, the EEAP recommends increasing the number of academic (DEP) staff.

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

Student admission to the Department follows the Greek law according to which students are admitted once they have passed the Panhellenic entrance examinations. It is important to note that there was an increase in the overall average score of students entering the Department during the academic year 2021-2022.

All aspects of the admission process are clearly specified within the relevant documents of the Department. In order to graduate, a student needs to follow the rules and regulations for relevant courses. These are clearly provided in the webpage of the Department. Specifically, in order to receive their degree, students have to earn a total 240 ECTS. For each semester, they earn approximately 30 ECTS. The courses are core/compulsory for all, electives from a limited list, and free electives. Each student needs to make her/his selections carefully so that he/she can meet the graduation requirements.

Students are also informed about the structure and stages of their studies from a variety of sources that include Course Outlines, Study Guide, the University's Website and the Undergraduate Study Regulations. Additionally, each student is paired with a faculty member of the Department (i.e., DEP members) who acts as the advisor-professor from the beginning until the end of their studies. Unfortunately, the ratio between DEP members and students (approximately 1/56) makes for a very heavy advising load, with each faculty member advising a large number of students.

During the interviews with students and graduates of the Department, the EEAP noted that one of the Department's strengths is the close collaboration of faculty and students. Students and graduates affirmed the willingness of faculty and staff to support them in their careers and academic pursuits. Students are also satisfied with the feedback they have been receiving on their progress.

The Erasmus student mobility program includes clear criteria of participation. Those individuals who have a priority of participation are clearly mentioned in the regulations. During the interviews with the teaching staff and the students, it was mentioned that there is a flexibility on the “recognized courses” within the Erasmus mobility program. However, the EEAP established that the number of agreements that the Department has with other European universities is limited. Nevertheless, during the interview with the faculty staff, the newly appointed DEP members mentioned that they are planning to establish links of the Department with additional Universities and in this way students will have more opportunities to participate in the Erasmus student mobility program. It is finally important to note that financial support of students participating in the program is also limited and therefore incentives to students to participate in the Erasmus mobility program should be provided.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

The EEAP suggests that the Department takes the necessary steps to increase the collaborations with other universities and provide incentives to faculty and students to participate in the Erasmus mobility projects.

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

Currently, the DESECH at DUTH comprises:

- 15 DEP members (one of whom is on public service leave);
- 3 Specialized Laboratory Staff (EDIP; Egastiriako Didaktiko Prosopiko);
- 5 Specialized Teaching Staff (EEP; Eidiko Elpaideutiko Prosopiko);
- 3 Teaching Staff on Contract (EDBM; Symbasiouhoi Didaskontes);
- 4 Administrative Support Staff.

The breakdown of DEP members by rank is as follows: 1 full professor, 7 Associate Professors and 7 Assistant professors. According to a report provided by the Department, there are 11 DEP members from other departments who contribute to the teaching of DESECH courses.

Data over the period covered in this evaluation, beginning with the 2015-16 academic year, indicate a decline in DEP staff from a total of 18 faculty (2015-16) to the current number of 15 faculty (2021-22). However, 2 new DEP hires are being processed for the next academic year. (*Applied linguistics and Bilingual Education, Anthropology of Education*). Both positions are at the Assistant Professor level.

Faculty development opportunities exist through exchange programs with other Institutions of Higher Education either in Greece or abroad. Currently, there are 2-day, ERASMUS agreements with 8 other universities in Bulgaria, Spain, Norway, and Germany. However, individual faculty have teaching- and research-related collaborations with over 16 European institutions of higher education. When faculty participate in professional development opportunities, the

Department's needs are covered following joint discussions and decision-making at the Department level. The Department does not have a formal mentoring program for EDIP staff.

The Department publishes an e-journal, [*Hellenic Journal of Research in Education*](#), that is peer-reviewed and uses a double-blinded evaluation of submitted manuscripts prior to publication. The Journal is indexed in international databases.

The faculty are active in presenting at national/international conferences with the total number of presentations in the Department being 94 over the period of this evaluation (2015-16 to 2020-2021). In addition, the Department serves as the host site for a number of conferences every year.

Over the period of this evaluation, faculty members have published a total of 14 books and 90 refereed journal articles (*Quality Indicators Reports, HAHE; 10-22-2021 Report Provided by the Department to the Evaluation Committee*). However, the evidence suggests that, on average, the publication rate in refereed journals is less than one article per DEP member. Beyond publications in Greek journals and conference proceedings, not all faculty are actively publishing in refereed international journals. Of note, there are no agreed-upon, yearly publication guidelines for the DEP members.

Additional evidence of faculty productivity is gleaned from the number of citations in scholarly outlets and funded projects. The number of citations of DEP faculty members range from 111 (2015-2016) to 446 for the 2019-2021 period. The number of funded research projects has remained relatively stable from 2015 to 2021 and ranges from 7 to 10. *Quality Indicators Reports* (shared by HAHE), spanning the period of this evaluation, indicate that there has only been 1 funded project (2015-2016) headed by a DEP faculty member in the Department. As a rule, the faculty participate as external collaborators in these projects.

Conducting research, serving as Principal Investigator of funded research projects, and publishing in refereed journals are all key productivity indicators that contribute to the Department's visibility and recognition. These should be an area of greater focus for the Department. It may be helpful to establish a set of realistic and achievable goals about research productivity. Concurrently, explicit support (e.g., assistance with matching DEP faculty members to calls for research proposals, technical guidance on proposal writing) should be provided to facilitate faculty members' efforts.

Faculty employ digital technologies, as evidenced by their preparedness and efficacy in moving to a remote, online learning environment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, faculty encourage, invite, and support student participation, even in the context of courses that take place in large rooms or the auditorium and are attended by large numbers of students.

The Department's practices for faculty recruitment and promotion are governed by Greek legislation which provides specific criteria for hiring and promotion at each rank. The process is open and multilevel, as allowed by law. Although the administration has final decision-making on hiring new faculty, there was mention that faculty discuss their program's needs and make recommendations to the administration. This process along with recommendations intended to address faculty shortages are detailed in the [*Department's 5-year plan*](#) (2020-2025).

To promote and reward teaching excellence, the Excellence-in-Teaching Award was instituted. The process is initiated through external nominations, made by students or other faculty, and is

based on the evaluation of documents (e.g., syllabi, student evaluations) by an external committee.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

Beyond the recommendations made by the Department in its 5-year plan, which we endorse, we suggest the following:

- Develop formal mentoring mechanisms for faculty and staff.
- Develop formal mentoring mechanisms for DEP faculty and staff.
- Articulate specific areas of focus (signature areas) that highlight the Department's strengths and reflect its scholarly identity. This will contribute to the visibility of the Department and will help attract other scholars and students with related interests, potentially supporting the faculty's external funding efforts. These signature areas can be built around existing areas of faculty interests and expertise that, based on information we received during this visit, include, but are not limited to:
 - The early education of young children from linguistically and culturally different backgrounds.
 - Early learning in informal learning contexts (e.g., museums and libraries).
 - The contribution of theatre arts to the socialization and learning of young children.
 - Educational programming for young children with health needs in hospital settings.
- Develop achievable and realistic plans for research productivity. These should address yearly expectations for: published research articles per faculty member; securing funds for research; initiating and serving as Principal Investigators on funded research projects.
- Create mechanisms of support that are accessible to faculty and facilitate their external funding efforts (e.g., help faculty identify calls that are "best matches" to their scholarly interests and expertise; provide technical guidance on proposal writing).

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

Because of the pandemic, the evaluation meeting was conducted online. Therefore, the Panel did not visit the campus facilities in person. However, information was provided by the Department about the setting via photographs and videos of the campus and its buildings including faculty offices, the library, and classrooms.

Given the faculty-to-student ratio (1:56), instruction is primarily delivered in large-group formats. The department's resources seem adequate for this purpose and include 5 large rooms that seat between 80 and 220 students, a theatre education room (60 seats) and three smaller rooms with 20 seats each. Rooms are equipped with adequate computers and audio-visual devices for PowerPoint and video presentations. Nonetheless, both faculty and students expressed concerns that, although the existing structures may suffice for instruction, there is a dire need for additional facilities to enhance the campus life and promote academic and social interactions among students. In response, we were also informed during the interviews that construction plans are under way for an expansion that will meet this need and will connect the department with the larger campus as well as with the paediatric wing of the state hospital that serves as a key practicum site.

The Department has a dedicated IT unit that provides support to: (a) students who take the education technology course sequence; (b) faculty and staff so they can effectively use the technologies available at the University. The IT laboratory and its staff were recognized during the interviews for the seamless services they provided to students and faculty during the transition from face-to-face teaching to online learning platforms. In addition, the IT unit is

responsible for maintaining and updating the department's website which has dedicated sites for students with information about (a) the academic aspects of the undergraduate program, (b) student-specific services.

Students' teaching experiences are supported through practica in local preschools and the state hospital. In addition, students have diverse opportunities to participate in the design and delivery of educational programs in *informal learning contexts* in the community (local libraries, museums, and a local detention facility).

A number of new student resources include the provision of a legal advocate (supported with volunteers from the law school) and the academic counsellor. The latter role is fulfilled by DEP members and is intended to provide direct guidance to students on academic matters throughout their program of study. The specific duties of this new role, however, need to be made explicit and considered within the totality of the faculty workload. This is important, particularly given the large number of students per DEP faculty, and the existing demands on faculty time. As a way of managing this additional role, faculty have organized group seminars during which they provide guidance and respond to students' questions.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

- Once the new campus construction is completed, the department should monitor students' use of the facilities, and satisfaction with the resources.
- The department should clarify the role of the academic counsellor by outlining the faculty tasks and considering them within the existing faculty workload. Monitor the success of this new resource using both faculty and student input.

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 DESECH aims to provide students with theoretical knowledge, research and critical thinking skills, and practical training in Early Childhood education, in accordance with the European and the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education.

The DESECH as well as all the departments of the DUTH use the procedures and forms for gathering information proposed by MODIP. This is done through the unified electronic system of MODIP which is used by both teachers and students and aims at collecting and analysing data and information coming from both the Department and the Institution. This system includes the following five subsystems: the Teachers' and Courses Census Bulletins, the Department's Exhibitions, the Services' Exhibition, and the Institution's Report. At the same time, this system can draw information from the secretariats of the departments concerning statistical data, such as the number of students, their scores, etc. This interface is efficient and ensures the accuracy of the data. The information concerns teacher- and students, as well as -data along with course statements made by students. A variety of other online resources of an academic or institutional interest include APELLA, and Eudoxos.

It is worth noting that the Department's Student Guide is written and/or updated annually in Greek and English.

Core in this process is the role of OMEA, the internal evaluation committee made up of faculty members from diverse disciplinary fields within the Department. The OMEA follows the system of quality management established by MODIP. The OMEA collects survey data – both qualitative and quantitative – from faculty and lab directors about the content and mode of instruction, research and teaching activities, and community outreach activities. Other sources of data document internal department procedures and include accountability reports from different committees and units of the Department, of open assemblies - discussions between students and teaching staff, of discussions with student representatives and requests of the student association (Syllogos Foititon). Additional information is gathered upon requests from the educational staff and literature related to studies in schools of education or to the graduates of pedagogical departments. Finally, data are collected, as mandated by existing legislation and any amendments or changes relating to educational studies or to the vocational rights of graduates. Information, collected via all these avenues, is used to revise the curriculum, implement novel teaching methods, improve infrastructure and department facilities, facilitate the use of ICTs, the organization of conferences, workshops, invited lectures and so forth.

The students gave feedback to the EEAP indicating that they value and rate very highly the educational experiences provided by the DESECH. They expressed satisfaction with the diversity of the course offerings and stated that the curriculum: (a) provided them with a good understanding of the connection between practice and research; (b) prepared them well for the job market/workforce.

Some graduates continue their careers in other Universities in Greece or abroad as postgraduate students, while others work as teachers in public or private schools. This was regarded by all interviewed as important because it increased the bond and sense of community among students, as well as between faculty and graduates thus supporting the potential for future collaborations, teaching opportunities, and availability of practical experiences.

The Alumni who participated in the review with the EEAP, enthusiastically noted their strong connection with the Department and added that they felt welcome to participate in educational opportunities offered by the Department (e.g., events, symposia, conferences, seminars, co-authored papers, PhD programs). They also expressed their deep appreciation for their training across theoretical, practical and research directions, as well as their study at Universities abroad. The Association of Graduates of the Department of Education Sciences in Early Childhood, which was founded recently, is expected to play an important role in the professional placement of its members and is an important contributor to educational and cultural activities.

The Department does not seem to be presently collecting data on student employability and the career paths of graduates. These data would help the Department gauge its ability to position its graduates and would foster future connections and collaborations.

The EEAP has determined that the Department has established a multidimensional information management process that informs both internal and external evaluation efforts as well the accreditation processes. A multidimensional process has also been adopted on the ways and modes of disseminating information.

Overall, the EEAP concludes that the adopted processes, the levels of satisfaction expressed on surveys, and the decisions being made following the analysis of these data are sufficient.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

It would be useful for the Department to further develop the Alumni Network so that it can serve a dual purpose: a) keep graduates informed about the Department's events, workshops and activities; and b) maintain contact in order to collect targeted alumni information through surveys, questionnaires, etc.

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

Based on reviews of evidence provided to the EEAP as well as a series of interviews with the Deputy Chairman of the Department, members of MODIP, OMEA, faculty, administrative staff and students, the EEAP determined that the Democritus University of Thrace (DUTH) and the Department of Education Sciences in Early Childhood (DESECH), in particular, have put in place a comprehensive public information system. The EEAP examined materials that exhibited evidence of extensive information-sharing avenues with students, faculty members, external partners, and the community at large. Information about the Department is available on the Department's website (www.psed.duth.gr) and on the website of the University (duth.gr) and it is accessible via the world-wide web. The website of the University was constructed in 2018 replacing the previous one. So far, the content of the website is available in Greek. A parallel version of the website is accessible in English and, although it contains much information about the department, this site has not yet been completed.

The main menu options of the website are the following: "The Department", "Staff", "Undergraduate Studies", "Postgraduate Studies", "Students", "Research", "Actions", "Announcements". Each basic option can include up to three sub-options. The sub-option "General data" includes the following: (a) Summary of the Department, (b) Brief History of the Department (establishment of the Department, establishment of the School of Education Sciences, renaming of the Department, mission of the Pedagogical Departments, the former Chairmen and Deputy Chairmen of the Department), (c) Administration of the Department, (d) Secretariat, (e) Academic Calendar, (f) General data on the Democritus University of Thrace (DUTH) (g) General information about the city Alexandroupolis.

The basic option "Research" includes information concerning: (a) books and edited volumes that members of the Department have authored; (b) the scientific journal [Hellenic Journal of Research in Education \(HJRE\)](#), published by the Department¹; (c) ethical and ethical issues in research; (d) postdoctoral research; and (e) useful guides.

The basic option "Activities" includes information concerning events organized or co-organized by the Department: (a) Symposia-Conferences; (b) Workshops-Two-day Workshops; (c) Educational and Training Activities; (d) Theatrical Activities, and (e) Invited Lectures to the Department.

¹ The HJRE is peer-reviewed and uses a double-blinded evaluation of submitted manuscripts prior to publication. The Journal is indexed in international databases and some articles published in it are cited by other researchers.

Additional information is provided through other websites, printed and electronic announcements published by the Department's staff, press releases for the Department's activities and events, e-mails, platforms addressed to researchers, etc. The staff members of the Department devote time to informing each interested party in Greek and English.

The content of the webpage is constantly updated. The EEAP found that It includes all recent decisions and announcements concerning, for example, information on the registration process and the acquisition of an institutional account, explanations for the Undergraduate Curriculum, etc.

During the meeting of the EEAP with graduates of the Department, they were all very enthusiastic about the important role the Department has played in their careers and noted that they continue to have close relations with their professors. Further, they commented on the open flow of information with and about the Department through social media or the electronic and printed press for conferences, workshops, and cultural events of the Department, and have participated in some of them.

Nevertheless, the EEAP believes that it would be useful to improve the e-publishing activity of the Department by creating an e-Newsletter and posting testimonials and short, engaging videos about their achievements. In this way, the thousands of students and alumni of the Department, the numerous collaborators and school partners, social partners and the community in general could have more direct information about important educational, research and other cultural activities of the Department.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

- The EEAP encourages the Department to consider creating an e-Newsletter as a way of maintaining contact with students, alumni, schools, social partners and other stakeholders
- The EEAP would like to suggest that the Department upgrade and further develop the English version of their website.

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 Department has adopted a strategic direction based on the external evaluation report of 2013 and has developed a Strategic Plan for continuous improvement. MODIP presented to us important material in relation to the evaluation of the undergraduate curriculum. These include specifically: a questionnaire for graduates and for graduates' employment agencies as well as for student-centred learning; the establishment of the Excellence-in-Teaching Award; a quality guide for education, as well as a guide for the revision of the undergraduate program of study.

The Department is regularly reviewed, and program revisions are made with the participation of students and faculty members. The teaching process and the delivery of the courses, as well as the practical training, are regularly evaluated with the aim of a more effective educational experience and to meet learning objectives. This is done on a weekly basis by the instructor himself/herself, who, in the context of self-assessment, makes adaptations to the materials and his/her teaching.

The educational process is evaluated through questionnaires completed each academic semester and for each course. It is clear to the EEAP that students' course evaluations are an important part of the quality monitoring procedure. The information collected is analysed and the program is revised according to the new data. Any changes in the curriculum take place after the recommendation of the Undergraduate Studies Program Committee to the General Assembly of the Department.

It is important to note that the Quality Assurance efforts, along with the quality of the Department's scholarly community, have seemingly helped ensure good pedagogy and practical experiences for the students and their overall welfare at the Democritus University of Thrace. EEAP interviews with the faculty, students, alumni, and external stakeholders provided evidence of a very high level of satisfaction with the program, as implemented.

Among the challenges that the Department is called to manage and address with future actions are the following: The increased number of students who delay the completion of their studies beyond the scheduled time and the low admission grades through the Panhellenic Examinations.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

The EEAP encourages the department to obtain feedback more formally from external stakeholders (e.g., alumni, employers, social agency directors) by operating an “alumni-external partners” committee.

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

The DESECH participated in an external evaluation that was completed in September 2013. The report of this external evaluation was made public through the Department's website https://www.psed.duth.gr/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Final_Report.pdf

The DESECH has made efforts to address the recommendations made by the EEAP. With respect to strengthening the practicum experiences of their students, the department added 1 DEP member (Euthimia Penderi) along with 2 EDIP and 1 EEP staff who contribute to the teaching of practicum experiences. These hires have been completed in the last year. In addition, the department has taken steps to address the development of a course on educational psychology and to adjust the course sequence in the program of study. They have also developed two elective courses on music and movement in the early years of school. These new courses have been developed by and assigned to existing DEP members.

Additional changes to the program in response to the previous external evaluation include the development of a Committee on Research Ethics, the creation of clear guidelines for the conduct of undergraduate research theses, and the implementation of yearly conferences and seminars to promote cross-department collaborations and share faculty research.

The Department noted two issues that were recommended by the previous external evaluation panel but still demand attention. These involve the development of a Centre of Excellence and the creation of new avenues to promote the presence of undergraduate students on campus beyond course attendance. An additional recommendation from the previous evaluation was the development of a Research Centre *"in collaboration with the Department of Education that can provide scientific support (e.g., writing a proposal, statistical analysis, etc.) and disseminate information about available grants and funding"* (p. 16). We encourage the Department to consider this recommendation as it will likely support faculty productivity, including opportunities to secure external funding.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

None.

PART C: CONCLUSIONS

I. Features of Good Practice

- The DESECH has developed a series of quality assurance processes, which involve self-evaluation, and have resulted in reorientation of goals, the reprogramming of various actions, and the development of new support structures. In this context, the EEAP recognizes the Philological Supervision of Works/Essays which is an innovative structure that highlights the Department's interest in and vision of the quality of work expected of its students.
- Students' rights are safeguarded by establishing new and novel offices and implementing procedures that protect students' interests.
- Academic faculty are devoted to teaching and to their students. Student-centred teaching, learning and assessment are recognized as important and promoted in the Department.
- Excellent relations exist between the Department and external stakeholders from the private and the public sector.

II. Areas of Weakness

- Heavy teaching and administrative workload are barriers to research productivity.
- Insufficient DEP faculty with expertise in STEM, a key curriculum area for Early Childhood.

III. Recommendations for Follow-up Actions

The Department is encouraged to:

- Articulate specific areas of focus (signature areas) that highlight the Department's strengths and reflect its scholarly identity. This will contribute to the visibility of the Department and will help attract other scholars and students with related interests, potentially supporting the faculty's external funding efforts.
- Take the necessary steps to increase the collaborations with other universities and provide incentives to faculty and students to participate in the Erasmus mobility projects.
- Articulate expectations for research publications.
- Publish an e-Newsletter as a way of maintaining contact with students, alumni, schools, social partners and other stakeholders
- Obtain feedback more formally from external stakeholders (e.g., alumni, employers, social agency directors) by operating an "alumni-external partners" committee.
- Better balance in the content of the programme between theoretical background and development of practical skills in teaching the main courses of the school curriculum.

IV. Summary & Overall Assessment

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

The Principles where substantial compliance has been achieved are: **5.**

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

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

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

The members of the External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel

Name and Surname

Signature

1. Prof. Leonidas Kyriakides

University of Cyprus, Cyprus (Chair)

2. Prof. Emeritus Athanasios Gagatsis

University of Cyprus, Cyprus

3. Prof. Mary Ioannidou-Koutselini

University of Cyprus, Cyprus

4. Prof. Panayota Youli Mantzicopoulos-James

Purdue University, United States of America