



ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ  
**Α.ΔΙ.Π.**  
ΑΡΧΗ ΔΙΑΣΦΑΛΙΣΗΣ & ΠΙΣΤΟΠΟΙΗΣΗΣ  
ΤΗΣ ΠΟΙΟΤΗΤΑΣ ΣΤΗΝ ΑΝΩΤΑΤΗ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗ

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HELLENIC QUALITY ASSURANCE  
AND ACCREDITATION AGENCY

## EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN MACEDONIA

February 2014



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MINISTRY OF EDUCATION & RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS, CULTURE & SPORTS  
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### **External Evaluation Committee**

The Committee responsible for the External Evaluation of the Department of Primary Education of the University of Western Macedonia consisted of the following five (5) expert evaluators drawn from the Registry constituted by the HQA in accordance with Law 3374/2005 :

1. *Dr Stephanos Efthymiadis*  
*Professor, Dean of the School of the Humanities and the Social Sciences,*  
*Open University of Cyprus, Cyprus*  
(Coordinator)
2. *Dr Petros Gougoulakis*  
*Associate Professor, Department of Education, Stockholm University,*  
*Sweden*
3. *Dr Helène Papadoudi-Ros*  
*Maître de Conférences, Laboratoire Interuniversitaire des Sciences de*  
*l'Éducation et de la Communication, Université de Lorraine / Nancy II,*  
*France*
4. *Dr Despina Varnava–Marouchou*  
*Assistant Professor, Management & Marketing Department, European*  
*University, Cyprus*
5. *Dr Manolis Koutouzis*  
*Assistant Professor, Educational Leadership, Department of Educational*  
*Sciences, European University, 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**

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- The External Evaluation Procedure
- After an introductory meeting at the offices of the Hellenic Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (HQA), the External Evaluation Committee (henceforth: Committee) visited the Department of Primary Education (henceforth: Department; also abbreviated as ‘DPE’) on the campus of the University of Western Macedonia at Florina from 24 to 26 February 2014. To prepare for the visit, the Committee members had individually read and studied the Internal Evaluation Report (including other relevant documents) which the Department had earlier submitted to ADIP/HQA. The Committee also had access to links from the University website. During the on-site visit, the Department Head provided a CD-ROM with all documents pertaining to the evaluation material and packets assembled by the DPE staff. During the presentation of the Department’s *Curriculum* and Teaching Activities, the Committee received further material requested by its members like the proposal for restructuring the Master’s Programme, for the establishment of new and renewal of old Laboratories, and hard copies of student written work (*i.e.*, PhD, Master, and graduate theses). Additional material for the Strategic Planning was also submitted at a later stage of the Evaluation Process.
- On 24 February 2014, the Committee members were welcomed at the airport Makedonia of Thessaloniki by the Department Head (Professor Konstantinos Photiades) and the member of the MODIP (Associate Professor Demetris Pneumatikos) and were transported to Florina by car. After the check-in at a local hotel, they were conveyed to the University campus for a first meeting with the five members of the Department’s Internal Evaluation Committee (Professors Konstantinos Photiadis, Demetris Pneumatikos, Sophia Eliadou-Tachou, Anna Spyrtou, and George Iordanides). During this meeting they had an overview of the University and the Department and were acquainted with

the problems which have affected the institution's function in the last years. In the next morning, the Committee was again escorted to the Department, where they were welcomed by the faculty (22 'DEP' members, one of whom is the Dean of the School of Education) and Departmental support staff. During the all-day long visit, the Committee visited the Department's Secretariat and Research Laboratories, met undergraduate and postgraduate students and inspected the infra-structure of the Department. More precisely, the Committee met:

- The Academic staff (Senior and Junior Faculty)
- Laboratory associates from the Department
- Special technical staff members
- Undergraduate Students (around 15)
- Postgraduate students (over 30)
- PhD candidates (around 5)
- Administrative / secretarial staff
- Finally, in the evening of the same day the Committee had the opportunity to attend a musical concert masterfully performed by the Tsaourides brothers (one of whom is a teaching assistant at DPE) and witnessed the active participation of the students in the event. The Committee also watched a seven-minute documentary animation film (also available at the Youtube) on the electric power produced in Western Macedonia and the potential of its development. This film is the product of the Laboratory of Physics and was integrated into a European research project.
- On the next day (26 February 2014) the Committee visited the Laboratories of Computer-New Technologies and Physics. The sojourn at Florina was rounded up with visiting the local Experimental (*Peiramatiko*) Primary School which supports the practicum (*praktiki askisi*) of the Department and is sustained in its activities by the Department's staff. In the late afternoon the Committee members reached the Makedonia airport of Thessaloniki and traveled back to Athens. Thereafter they met in three consecutive day-

meetings at the Acropolis Hill Hotel to work on the External Evaluation Report.

- All in all, the Committee members have greatly appreciated the professionalism and full cooperation of all DEP members and other staff experienced during the evaluation process.

## **A. Curriculum**

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

### APPROACH

#### 1) Undergraduate

The goals and the objectives of the Curriculum were clearly stated by all the participants and their presentations. More specifically the main goal of the Curriculum is to prepare teachers as professionals, researchers and scientists in order to be effective in their professional life. There seems to be clear consideration of skills and knowledge required for effective teaching in Greek primary school which gives a more practical, training profile in the Curriculum as opposed to other academic profiles. This orientation is shared not only among staff members but also among students.

The way this objective is planned to be achieved is through the four (4) main components of the Curriculum:

- Educational Sciences
- Education in Specific Teaching Subjects
- Didactics
- Practicum (*Praktiki Askisi*)

DPE has adopted the European Credit Transfer System and has allocated sixty (60) ECTS in each year of study.

For graduation, the student has to complete fifty-six (56) courses comprising 240 ECTS units. Of the courses forty-two (42) are compulsory and fourteen (14) are elective. Practicum courses are both compulsory and elective. There is an elective

graduate thesis which can replace three elective courses.

A decisive factor for the construction of Curriculum is the teacher skills and competences as required by the Greek Primary schools Curriculum. It is not, however, clear how these were assessed and pieced together. The department's experience and expertise as well as their close collaboration with the Experimental School at Florina have obviously contributed to the development of the Curriculum. As a result and to a great extent, the Curriculum is consistent with the requirements of Greek society as its main objective is to prepare effective and efficient teachers.

Another significant factor which has seriously affected the decisions concerning the Curriculum is the specialization areas of the available members of academic staff. Due to the significant shortage of staff during the last years and the unlikely appointment of new members in the future years, it has not been possible to cover with permanent staff fields such as Sociology of Education, Comparative Education, and School Psychology that are important and necessary for any department of Primary Education. Therefore, temporary appointments are used to cover relevant gaps. At the same time this results in imbalance and over-representation of some disciplines in the Curriculum.

Another characteristic of the Curriculum is that it does not include elements which could expand the graduates' scope and prospects as educators in Life Long Learning, as it exclusively focuses on primary education. Although Adult Education and Lifelong Learning are included in the Department's Foundation Document (PD 544/1989), they do not appear in the Curriculum.

DPE revises and partially renews its Curriculum every year. Revision and renewal depend on the availability of teaching staff. Since 2012, the Department has been in the process of a major revision of the Curricula. This has been postponed on account of the ongoing reform in Higher Education in Greece.

#### IMPLEMENTATION

To align the Curriculum with its missions and goals, the Department offers an eight-semester, 56-course programme to undergraduate students. Each course carries a different number of ECTS. The Curriculum is rational and functional as it develops from theoretical courses in the first year of study to more practical and training courses from the second year onwards. There is an even distribution of the four

different components of the Curriculum and the competences covered therein.

A significant part of the Curriculum is comprised by the practicum (17%) which involves the supervision by teachers employed in primary schools and as adjunct tutors detached to the University. Unlike in previous years and because of the country's financial crisis, the Department was implemented by only one such person during the current year, a fact which has seriously affected the smooth running of the practicum.

The available infrastructure supports the implementation of the Curriculum at a satisfactory level. The Department hosts three officially established laboratories that serve undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral students. Three other operating laboratories are yet to acquire official status. In all six laboratories students have the opportunity to delve into their areas of scholarly interest with greater depth under the supervision of the teaching staff who express great enthusiasm for these interactive opportunities. Nevertheless, the Department lacks in the necessary supporting personnel, a fact that affects the efficiency of the laboratories' function.

The Curriculum is also supported by the library and electronic library facilities, an e-class platform, and also the Computer Laboratory.

## RESULTS

The Department is achieving its goals as it provides the optimal preparation of students who seek careers as primary-school teachers. The Department lays much emphasis on the practicum (*Praktiki Askisi*), thereby fulfilling its mission as a trainer of teachers who will enter Greek primary schools with the skills and applied training needed for success. The task of offering a practicum to large numbers of students is substantial, especially in view of the limited number of primary schools in the area of Florina. However, the Department has sought to find flexible ways to meet this inconvenience, by establishing good relations with local schools and by the involvement of postgraduate students in supporting roles. To further support the practicum, the Department has launched the so-called Extended Practicum (*Dieurymeni Praktiki Askisi*), which involves the training of students in alternative field experiences pedagogical in character (e.g. museums, environmental organizations, cultural institutions). Arguably, the Extended Practicum responds to the need that the Practicum of the main curriculum lead to acquiring knowledge

about Life Long Learning. Interviews between the Committee and faculty and students substantiated the above.

#### IMPROVEMENT

The Committee shares the Department's concern about some inconsistencies between the formulation and the implementation of the Curriculum. It also notes the Department's willingness to improve it. In order to heal these inconsistencies, the Committee suggests that the Department consider enforcing a more balanced, mutual, and interrelated collaboration with the Department of Early Childhood Education. This will not only partially heal the problems arising from the reduction in staff numbers but will make possible the overall implementation of the Curriculum. Also, the Department could expand its scope and prospects by including a unit on Life Long Learning. It should be mentioned at this point that, towards developing this direction, the Department launched an ERASMUS Intensive Programme for three years (2009-2012), which could be tentatively re-contextualized in order to be integrated into the Curriculum in the future. This will somehow disentangle it from its exclusive focus on primary education.

#### **POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMS:**

The Department offers two postgraduate programmes: a) in Educational Sciences (*Epistimes tis Agogis*) b) in Museology (in cooperation with three departments of the Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki). The first admits eighteen (18) students and the second thirty (30) students every two years.

a) The postgraduate course in Educational Sciences offers three directions which correspond to three specialization areas:

i: Pedagogy and New Technologies

ii: Humanities and New Technologies

iii: Science and New Technologies

In all three directions there are four (4) compulsory courses in the first semester (7.5 ECTS for each of them) and one compulsory course in the second and third semesters (10 ECTS each). In addition, in the second and third semesters students attend courses according to the direction they choose (two courses/semester – 10

ECTS each). During the fourth semester students write a dissertation which they present during a colloquium.

The Committee observed that in all three directions New Technologies forms the second component. However, this is inconsistent with the structure of the Curriculum as there are only two relevant courses (20/120 ECTS) reflecting the New Technologies. Taking into consideration the courses of the different directions it is not clear how New Technologies are incorporated and combined with the other courses, especially in the two first directions. In addition, the specialization areas do not correspond to the titles of courses appearing in the study guide. The above results in lack of coherence in the Curriculum in the different directions. In response to this, the faculty of the Department acknowledged the issue but explained that as from the next year the problem will be radically reconstructed. The proposed programmes seem to shift the focus of the postgraduate programmes.

- b) The postgraduate course in Museology is an interdepartmental course in cooperation with three Departments of the Aristoteleion University of Thessaloniki. The course consists of core courses in six (6) thematic areas that cover the interdisciplinary field of Museology. In this Programme only a few faculty members are involved.

#### Doctorate

DPE offers a doctorate programme. There is no clear curriculum for that programme as students basically attend meetings with their supervisors (ten two-hour meetings per semester) and participate in colloquia. The ratio of candidates/doctors is 8/2 for the academic year 2012-2013.

#### **IMPLEMENTATION**

Courses are taught by most members of the teaching staff (both junior and senior faculty). The shortage of staff has affected the teaching of all courses listed in the programme, especially those in New Technologies. The Committee acknowledges that the programme has been designed to comply with state law, according to which three types of courses should be offered: compulsory/required, electives offered by the divisions, and free electives. As such the Master will cease to be offered after the

end of this academic year. A new one is planned with new directions in its programme.

Evaluation and grading in each course are based on a written assignment and an examination. In the Museology Master, in addition to written essays and examinations, a variety of teaching and evaluation methods such as lectures, laboratories, seminars, symposia, educational visits to museums in Greece and abroad and reports of the visits, internships in museums are employed.

The Committee's interviews with the Masters' students revealed enthusiasm on their part for the quality of their studies. It appears that the student-teacher interaction within the Department is continuous and strong. Postgraduate students take an auxiliary role in teaching activities (they support the practicum) and some of them are employed in the Experimental High School of Florina.

A list provided by the Department shows a fair number of PhD dissertations to have been later published as monographs in Greece.

## RESULTS AND IMPROVEMENTS

Like the undergraduate programs, the postgraduate programmes are designed by the General Assembly of the Department to fulfill its mission as a trainer of primary-school teachers. The programmes retain their professional orientation which also characterizes the undergraduate programme. This accounts for its popularity reflected on the high number of applications each year.

The Department is currently in the process of revision of the Curricula. However, any significant change is unlikely to take place as there is considerable shortage of staff who could support other disciplines that might be proposed. The Committee encourages a closer cooperation with the Department of Early Childhood Education in postgraduate programmes too. An inquiry into financially supporting students admitted in the new Master Programme is advised.

With regard to the doctoral programme the Committee suggests a more coherent curriculum (with the inclusion of courses in research methodology and epistemology) and the institutional organization of seminars in which PhD candidates share and discuss their ideas and progress with their colleagues and members of the teaching faculty.

## ***B. Teaching***

### APPROACH:

The Department adopts a clearly defined pedagogic policy and this provides the basis for reflection, discussion, and modifications when needed.

A large range of teaching methods is used which includes lectures in amphitheatres, tutorials, group work, work in the laboratories, and writing individual assignments. The Department has implemented throughout the use of an e-class platform, which allows students and tutors to both access and upload teaching material and also to engage in electronic communication.

As far as the undergraduate programme is concerned, students also have the opportunity to be involved in an extensive teaching practice, which includes, in the first place, observation of others' teaching at schools and, in the second place, acting as teachers. The active participation in this two-fold process is further supplemented by documentation on a regular basis. Students are asked to fill relevant forms and report on their experience (evaluation sheets) both as attendants and as teachers.

For compulsory courses the ratio is 1/100 in the amphitheatres and 1/25 in the laboratories but for this year the ratio has been affected due to the increased number (by 50%) of the students admitted and lack of teaching staff. Therefore, as it now stands, the ratio has turned to 1/145 and 1/55, which makes it clear that the Department is understaffed. This causes an additional workload for the present staff members, which inevitably affects the quality of teaching and working conditions.

The Committee has also observed students' satisfaction with the quality of their cooperation and relation with the staff members. Beyond what students expressed during their interview, this is reflected in their high evaluation scores of the teaching staff. In the postgraduate programme students are given the opportunity to participate in various research activities, involve in discussions regarding their experience (e.g. in teaching and research), and present their work in colloquia.

Students are provided with at least one course book which they can select out of two and also have access to other teaching material through the e-class platform and the library. Classes are equipped with new technology facilities but the use of ICT tools in teaching is not as extensive as would be desired. There is an e-class platform, wi-fi access inside the University building, and access to the use of computers through the

laboratory. Lack of sufficient supporting staff has caused the closing of the laboratory at 3 pm, thereby limiting the access of students to computers beyond this time.

There is a variety of evaluation practices. The Committee welcomes that, apart from taking part in the written examination in the end of the semester, students are also evaluated by the essays they prepare on assigned topics, oral presentations, and their overall participation in class.

As far as the curricula of the individual disciplines are concerned, these are left to the discretion of the individual staff responsible for each discipline but have to be approved by the general assembly. Feedback from evaluation by the students is taken into consideration when it applies to possible (minor) alterations of the content.

In view of the above, one could argue that the Curriculum is a practically oriented 'compromise' between the primary teachers job requirements in Greece and the staff's availability and expertise.

The Department is currently in the process of revising the Curricula. However, any significant change is unlikely to take place as there is considerable shortage of staff members who could support other disciplines that might be proposed.

#### IMPLEMENTATION

As far as the Committee can judge from the material that was consulted, the quality of teaching in the Department, overall, compares favorably to international and national standards. It is the staff's endeavour to keep the material and teaching methods up-to-date and as effective as possible. DPE maintains a close collaboration with the Experimental Primary School of Florina whose teaching staff mainly consists of its former students and current PhD candidates.

Undergraduate students feel that courses are offered with consistency and regularity to enable them to complete the degree within the standard four-year period. Faculty members are available to students beyond their office hours and respond to their e-mail requests in short period of time.

More structured and proactive course guidance would be advised. Students seem to be unaware of the availability of student advisors although this appears as an institution in the Student Guide.

Postgraduate and doctoral students report that they receive high-level guidance and direction for theses and dissertations from faculty advisors. However, although a Scientific Writing Guide is available on its website, the Department is lacking in well-organized and established mechanisms which would provide research orientations to doctoral students. As a matter of fact, there are no taught courses at the doctoral programme.

There is evidence of mobility of academic staff and students which is directly linked to the effectiveness of research with teaching. There are nineteen universities which the Department has official collaboration links through the Erasmus Exchange Programme. Yet, as mobility depends on financial resources provided by IKY (Greek State Scholarship Institution), the number of DEP members and students who have benefitted from this programme has been very limited. Aside from this, the Committee notes the successful completion of the Erasmus IP Borders of Western Macedonia programme titled 'People and space in the borderland of Western Macedonia' which involved the organization of teaching courses and seminars attended by 78 students.

Undergraduate students are regularly invited to evaluate their teachers in the end of each semester by filling in a given questionnaire. Even though not all of them participate in this process, the score the teaching staff receives is high.

## RESULTS

The positive evaluation of teaching by the students is indicative of its quality and good results. The satisfactory level of employability of holders of B.A. from the Department until recently attests to the efficacy of teaching they received during their study. It is no accident that members of DPE have been recruited by the Ministry of Education's service to author primary school textbooks and other teaching material. Several undergraduate students reported that, thanks to its good reputation, DPE was high in their priorities among relevant Departments. The same applies to its Master Programme which is not attended only by DPE's graduates.

## IMPROVEMENT

The Department is proposing to find new solutions with regard to teaching, ranging from the wider application of new technologies, restructuring the examination

system, introducing courses offered in three international languages (English, French, German) to offering new elective courses supported by other Departments. Likewise, the Department envisages a new format for the practicum which will relieve much of the faculty's teaching load and will benefit from the newly-introduced institution of 'mentors' who will take over the supervision of students while working at schools. The Committee hopes that this change will not affect the quality of the practicum, which has been one of the major strengths of DPE.

As stated by the Faculty and postgraduate students alike, laboratories must be re-organized so that they can be offered for research and teaching purposes. Moreover, although the computer laboratory has been implemented with many new computers, student accessibility is limited. The Department should strive to find alternative solutions and must extend the opening hours of the laboratory to the students.

### **C. Research**

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

#### **APPROACH**

DPE's research policy is claimed to promote new knowledge in the field of educational sciences, by encouraging research activities on education and learning processes, and other studies of significance, within the field of professional preparation and development of teachers. However, the department's research ambitions are thwarted by a fiscal reality which results in the staff's limited support which would ensure a more frequent participation in scholarly conferences and other fora. These activities would favour conditions for academic excellence. This being so, the staff has demonstrated a wide participation in conferences nationally and internationally. Cooperation in research and development projects at different levels and with a variety of partners is also worth mentioning. Financial incentives to conduct research aided from the Department's regular budget are minimal, while various attempts have been made to submit research proposals. In terms of available human resources, the research process, from formulation to implementation, is very much substantiated by undergraduate and graduate students. Research results are disseminated through publications in Greek and international journals, monographs, collective volumes, workshops, and presentations at conferences.

A sound medium of diffusion of research carried out by members of the teaching staff, as well as by their colleagues from different countries, is the electronic edition of the Journal of the School of Education, *Menon* (see <http://www.kosmit.uowm.gr/site/content/menon-journal-educational-research>).

*Menon* is designed to meet international standards of scientific publications, with a wide range of academic issues. The journal is multilingual and articles may be published in one of the three international languages : English, French, and German.

Two laboratories of Natural Sciences are established and shared with the Department of Early Childhood, for teaching and experimental purposes alike. They are assisted by four faculty members. Infra-structure must be upgraded and updated and their space be extended in order to be sufficient for storing valuable instruments and devices. Meanwhile, the Department operates two institutionalized laboratories for the teaching of mathematics and local history; these lack in specific facilities. For that reason, the staff is occasionally compelled to use other rooms, such as the computer lab, although the milieu is not always suitable for the above purpose. Furthermore, despite the fact that the library has recently been renovated, there are no sufficient places to support collaboration and self-directed learning activities among students.

The financial support of DPE's research depends on funding from occasional European and Greek programs rather than regular budget resources.

DPE covers a broad range of research from basic to applied. This is supported by the research laboratories in order to advance productivity across multiple domains, ultimately promoting research-based teaching.

Publications by members of the Department cover different topics. Paper presentations in scholarly conferences with referees, though without proceedings, have generated 31.7% of the total publication volume which in terms of quantity constitutes the largest category. The other largest group of publications consists of papers published in reviewed conference proceedings (29.55%). Publications in refereed journals, Greek and international, amounts to 18.62%. In all categories 467 publications are recorded for the academic years 2011-2013. The average publication rate per faculty member amounts to approximately twenty (20) items.

Considering the fact that faculty members represent different disciplines and research

areas, the Committee noticed variation in the number of publications among the individual members of staff, and strongly recommends to the Department to reflect upon its policy concerning the faculty's academic development.

#### IMPLEMENTATION

The Department seeks to familiarize undergraduate students with current trends in research-based education and learning processes, and encourage its staff to engage the interest of students in carrying out research work. This involves exploring and analyzing primary sources, designing and structuring of scientific reports, reflecting in a critical way, taking into consideration the scientific conditions of knowledge production and its limitations, etc. In the Department prevails a culture of student participation in research programmes directed by faculty members, usually in the form of thesis supervision which later ends in joined publications in scientific journals and scientific conferences.

Throughout the undergraduate and graduate Curriculum, DPE promotes and supports research among students through offering research methodology classes.

PhD students are also expected to act as team members in research projects under the responsibility of their supervisors. Nevertheless, it is important to note that there are currently more than 30 PhD candidates in DPE. The Committee believes that PhD students should receive financial support to present their papers in international conferences and to receive valuable feedback in order to improve the quality of their studies.

#### RESULTS

From the list of publication it appears that during the last three years the percentage of publications in international peer-reviewed journals remains at a not high level (0.54 papers per staff member). It must be also stressed that the number of 234 citations for the same time-span provided by the MODIP does not reflect an equally balanced distribution among staff members in terms of quantity and quality.

Much of the research output is undoubtedly the twenty-seven (27) doctoral dissertations that have been defended at the Department. Of these, five have so far been published by commercial publishers in Greece. It should be emphasized that the content of almost all of these theses deals with issues related to teaching in various

subjects and to teachers' professional development at primary schools. Indicative is also the local dimension in some of the themes treated in the issued doctoral theses (e.g. *Teacher education: an evaluation of the practicum for graduate students at the Department of Primary Education in Florina*).

The Committee also noticed that, apart from aesthetic quality, doctoral theses submitted to DPE lack uniformity and academic/institutional identity with regard to their editorial design.

## IMPROVEMENT

According to the Department's policy there are three main ways of supporting faculty members to undertake research and development projects. First, faculty members are encouraged to establish research laboratories and cooperate with other colleagues in an interdisciplinary way to develop research proposals of high quality. As no internal funds for supporting research are available, it is absolutely necessary for the University to provide opportunities for internal funding on a competitive basis. DPE acknowledged the need to provide internal funds for research projects but the available budget does not make such support possible. Second, DPE encourages faculty members to participate in research projects and strives to facilitate its academic staff to improve their research proposals. Third, DPE is in the process of enhancing its strategic collaborations with other institutions, taking parallel initiatives to organize international and national events (e.g. conferences) in Florina.

The production of research of good quality requires the existence of creative research environments. Such environments favour communication, dialogue, and cooperation and, among other things, enrich teaching with research findings. In turn, this requires a strong commitment by the Department to strengthen its research ground (methodology and epistemology) through strategic recruitments and course development.

The Department has set specific standards as to improve the quality of academic writing, graduate theses, and dissertations. This work is important and must continue. However, given that one of the main objectives of the Department is to prepare reflective professionals, with readiness to applying science-based teaching and

learning methods, the preparation of a graduate thesis (*ptychiaki ergasia*) must be mandatory for all students. An additional reason for its integration into the Curriculum would be to harmonize the structure of the programme to other EU members teacher training regime.

Regarding scientific publications of the faculty members, the Committee notices a disproportionately large number of conference proceedings. At the same time it seems that only a relatively small proportion of the publications are published in prestigious journals across many of the areas of their activities. The Committee recommends that faculty members continue to make efforts to publish in internationally reputable refereed journals. This would presumably raise DPE's competitive research proposals at the national and, not least, at the international level. More external funding would inevitably create opportunities to securing doctoral funding.

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

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

#### **APPROACH AND IMPLEMENTATION**

After surveying the Departmental facilities (laboratories, faculty and secretarial offices, library, auditorium), the Committee finds that support services for the academic community are adequate. The Secretariat of DPE currently consists of a director and three administrators, one of whom deals with postgraduate and doctoral students. The recent administrative reform which dictated that a considerable number of Greek Universities staff be transferred to other services or dismissed has not affected the Department. An internal evaluation extended to DEP members and students at the DPE records their overall satisfaction on their part for the administration's efficiency and readiness to help. Administrators argued that they respond to students' e-mails and provide necessary statements in short time. Yet electronic services like electronic student registration are still a desideratum. In spite of the distance, the communication with the central administration of the University which is in Kozani has not faced serious problems.

DPE is seriously concerned about the adequacy and resources of the library which, due to lack of funds, cannot be updated in the supply of books and journals. Electronic access to journals and databanks depends on renewal of subscriptions which is not currently self-evident. In sum, the library does not cover the needs of faculty member and students as it should.

Attendance during teaching practice in schools and laboratories is mandatory. Though optional, the student presence in all other courses is satisfactory. In interviews with the Committee, the Department stated that they constantly expressed their wish to the Ministry of Education to stop large enrollments in DPE but to no avail. In fact, they have been asking that fewer students be admitted into the Department so that they can maintain their tradition of close interaction with students. Facilities with regard to athletic activities are limited; however, there is no evidence to suggest that they are widely explored by the students. The access of students with special needs to the building of the Department is not always possible.

## RESULTS

The majority of services which support the teaching and administrative function of the Department is satisfactory. All in all, students' evaluation of these services is positive. Although teaching classes have recently been renovated, there are concerns about the sanitary conditions and the aesthetics of the buildings in which students spend most of their daily time.

## IMPROVEMENTS

A major reconstruction of the buildings of the University at Florina has been planned. It is hoped that this will also improve current infra-structure (e.g. the laboratory of Music's security system and the acoustics of the athletic pavilion) and enhance the provisions offered by the University.

## Collaboration with social, cultural and production organizations

The Internal Evaluation Report and Interviews with the academics of DPE revealed that there is a strong tendency to build collaborations and expand the Department's academic mission into activities which embrace the local society. This mission can be achieved through further sustaining the extended practicum (*dieurymeni praktiki askisi*) which by definition favours contacts with external partners.

Of particular merit is the Programme on literacy and numeracy initiated by the Dean of the School and five DEP members of the Department. Apart from favouring the idea of volunteerism, this aims at developing the skills of Primary schools students in language and the Mathematics and has had an enthusiastic reception by the municipality of Florina, the Directorship of Primary Education in the area, and the students of DPE.

Of equal interest were the initiative to organize in Florina the 1<sup>st</sup> Festival on Natural Sciences and Techonology in summer 2013, exhibitions on the genocide of the Pontos in several cities of Macedonia, and activities in support of the function of the train which links Florina to the rest of Greece. The same can be held with the collection of historical material to promote the study of local history.

Such initiatives as the short film on the use and potential of electric power produced in W. Macedonia may generate a closer collaboration with the State Company of

Electricity (D.E.I.) which is responsible for financially supporting the area. This collaboration may result in providing significant funds which will help the Department's research activity.

### ***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.*

DPE has a long and distinguished history and plays an important role in the intellectual, cultural, and social life of an area located at the Greek border. This long-established tradition calls for DPE to maintain high standards of educational quality. However, there are inhibiting factors which affect the healthy running of the Department at three different levels.

#### a. At State level:

1. The budget has been severely reduced and is neither stable nor predictable.
2. Student numbers have increased to more than those whom the Department can admit and support by its facilities. Faculty members are often called on to do additional work such as teaching in postgraduate programmes and offering instruction for which they receive no extra income.
3. Changes at the Curriculum of the undergraduate and Master Programmes heavily depend on central Greek State administration (the Ministry of Education), a fact that makes developments and changes a slow process. As a result, innovative initiatives are discouraged.
4. There is no stable framework securing external partnerships with schools and other educational centres, etc., that are necessary for student training and outreach.
5. Delays in electing and appointing academic staff affect the function of some important activities (e.g. the case of ICT specialist).

#### b. At Institutional Level:

1. Lack of research infrastructure, support, and funding.
2. Conditions of insecurity as to which extent the programme of foreign languages, of courses in computers, and of Greek languages can be offered.

c. At Departmental Level:

1. Disproportionate numbers of academic staff in some research fields.
2. Lack of a well-structured and coherent Research Plan which would exclusively address pedagogical issues and would aim to the contribution of DPE to the theoretical development of the field internationally. This is particularly obvious in the current structure of the Master Programmes.

***Planning, Perspectives for Improvement***

The Committee received a revised version of the Strategic Planning which records the Department's intentions and ambitions with regard to its future development. As already stated, the Master is under reconstruction which will reshape much of its actual programme and will lead up to its rationalization in terms of the running of human resources.

DPE offers a strong combination of theory and practical training. Its students can be hired as teachers in primary education. DPE has managed to employ faculty members committed to the mission of their Department who are keen on supporting student learning and undertaking various research projects. Their aim to establish a closer relationship with neighbouring universities in FYROM and Albania is commendable. This may be achieved through student and staff exchanging programs and conducting research projects of common interest.

This said, the Department envisages the following actions and initiatives which refer to its structure and human resources :

- presence of visiting professors from Greece and abroad
- more extensive use of e-class platform
- acquisition of a software which detects plagiarism
- establish a wider network of libraries in Western Macedonia
- institutionally establish and integrate the programme of extended practicum (*dieurymeni praktiki askisi*) into the Curriculum
- the continuation of the Department's educational role in the local community
- further support the Festival of Natural Sciences and Technology which brings

closer science and technology to society

- developing the pilot programme of volunteering which would help children facing learning difficulties (i.e. literacy and numeracy)
- create a centre of Greek Language Learning which will teach the language to foreigners and members of the Greek diaspora
- confirm the regular function of the *Menon* journal issued by the School of Education and its integration into international databanks
- encourage the function of summer schools on a regular basis and with the endorsement of ECTS (e.g. the one in the village Kladorachi)

The Committee strongly supports the idea of the reconstruction of the Master Programme and recommends a tighter collaboration with the Department of Early Childhood Education. A coherent proposal and a not widely extensive programme, closely linked to the research interests of the faculty, will warranty its better function. Given that fees will be introduced, a possibility of providing scholarships should be considered.

The Committee is full-heartedly supportive of the above planning which contrasts the difficulties and pessimism now experienced in all Greek universities. It is believed that such planning will reinforce the visibility of DPE and strengthen its educational role at a local and a national level. Several of these developments are already implemented and under way whereas some others are contingent upon external resources.

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

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

The Department traces a long history in the training of primary-school teachers in Greece. It boasts of several honorary distinctions awarded to its members. Its function in a town located at the Greek border and the commitment of its staff to promote its cultural role in the area substantially adds to its academic profile. Its current Curriculum embraces all three levels of higher education (undergraduate, postgraduate, doctoral). In view of these factors and its overall academic quality, the Department is in a position to achieve higher standards. Although it acknowledges

the current financial difficulties facing the Department, the Committee believes that the following recommendations, especially those focusing on internal adjustments, will facilitate this progress.

**A. About Curriculum:**

- Develop a mechanism to ensure the effective implementation of the Curriculum
- Improve the implementation of the current Curriculum by supporting the teaching of topics that are currently not secured and thus maintain the balance of theory and practice in taught courses
- Restructure the Curricula of both postgraduate and doctoral Programmes in order to achieve coherence, efficiency, and adequate academic support of students
- Integrate aspects of teaching which demonstrate originality and are not offered in other peer Departments (extended practicum, summer schools, etc)
- Familiarize students with the institution of the academic advisor and introduce the role of counsellor as an important part of student life in the Department
- Offer courses on academic writing and research methodology at the doctoral level
- Achieve uniformity and coherence in editing matters for the doctoral theses submitted to the Department

**B. About Teaching:**

- Build on the strategic plan of the Department and reinforce the extroversion of its teaching and research practices
- In order to further the Department's mission to education promote a life-long learning perspective at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels
- Promote regular visits of academics from Greece and abroad

**C. About Research**

- Try, where possible, to develop a strategic plan, coherent and visible across specializations in the Department, for coordinating and harmonizing its

strengths and expertise

- Create a culture conducive to publishing more peer-reviewed research in good international venues (including scholarship written in English), even as current activities in peer-reviewed Greek publications continue
- Involve experts in writing research proposals under the auspices of the Governing Board of the University of Western Macedonia
- Maintain the publication standards for the journal *Menon* and publicize its electronic edition more extensively

#### **D. About Funding and Resources**

- Rationalize the distribution of resources to extant and active Laboratories
- Engage with possible sources of funding postgraduate and doctoral students, especially from local industries

#### **D. About Collaborations**

- Establish a cooperation between the postgraduate course of Museology and the laboratory of local history in order to create a museum that could be also used for educational and research purposes
- Confirm and reinforce all initiatives (festivals, music performances, etc) which involve cooperation with local partners
- Establish cooperation with other partners in order to make the Greek Language Teaching Centre function on a regular basis
- Explore collaborations and shared-courses with the University's Department of Early Childhood Education
- Enrich the School's library with books, international journals, and other educational electronic material. Familiarize students with its use

## The Members of the Committee

Name and Surname	Signature
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