Accreditation Report
for the Undergraduate Study Programme of:

Early Childhood Education

Institution: University of Thessaly
Date: 12 December 2020

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

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PART A: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE REVIEW

I.   The External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel

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

1. **Prof. John Spiridakis, (Chair)**
   St. John's University, New York, USA

2. **Prof. Leonidas Kyriakides**
   University of Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus

3. **Assoc. Prof. Eleonora Papaleontiou-Louca**
   European University Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus

II.   Review Procedure and Documentation

The review process included work conducted via Zoom.

On Monday, December 7. 2020, the External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel (EEAP) attended an HAHE briefing regarding the mission, standards and guidelines of the Quality Assurance accreditation process and National Framework of Higher Education Institutions. Prior to the briefing and at the briefing, the EEAP members were provided with all necessary documents regarding the proper procedures to conduct the site-visit and evaluation. Prior to the start of the virtual site-visit, the EEAP had also been provided by the University of Thessaly (UTH), Department of Early Childhood Education (DEC) - via HAHE – a panoply of key documents to review in preparation of the evaluation process. The EEAP members held a private "debriefing" session.

On Tuesday, December 8, 2020 the EEAP members teleconferenced with the Vice-Rector/President of MODIP, Professor Theodorakis and the Department of Early Childhood Education (DEC) Professor Tsilimeni. The EEAP received an overview of the UTH and MODIP findings from the Vice-Rector and an overview of the DEC operation and data from the DEC chair related to the accreditation.

Following that meeting, the EEAP met with the members of OMEA and DEC MODIP representatives. OMEA members including the DEC Chair and several core faculty members representing different academic disciplines and responsible for certain research laboratories discussed their process of complying with the QA accreditation standards, referring to their documentation efforts, as well.

Thereafter, the EEAP members teleconferenced with DEC faculty members representing a range of subject matter specializations, e.g., theatre arts, dance/movement arts, research laboratories and adjunct faculty, to discuss the DEC's program efficacy, required/elective coursework issues, faculty workloads, faculty-student engagement and ratios, class size, student satisfaction levels, research, practical training component.

Next, EEAP members teleconferenced with current students at different stages of study. The EEAP sought to determine the role of students in the QA process as well as their experiences with the DEC program components such as coursework, faculty engagement, mentoring, practical training, evaluation of courses and overall satisfaction. Following the meeting, the EEAP had a "debriefing" session.

On Wednesday, December 9, 2020, the EEAP first was given a virtual "tour" of the facilities related to student learning support. EEAP teleconferenced with faculty members and administrative staff regarding research laboratories and facilities such as classrooms, library and the secretarial area.

Next, EEAP members teleconferenced with graduates (alumni) and obtained further evidence regarding their experience with the DEC program, e.g., efficacy of the DEC's professional development: course content, relevance of pedagogy, their current careers, opportunities to

refine their teaching and research skills during the program's practical training, mobility and research opportunities and their sense of confidence as teachers derived from the program.

The EEAP's final meeting of the day involved teleconferencing with employers and social partners in order to verify the nature and extent of collaboration with the DEC faculty members and students and the opportunities provided to DEC students for effective field experiences.

On Wednesday, December 9, 2020, the EEAP members had a final teleconference meeting with OMEA and MODIP representatives to discuss EEAP points of clarification and questions based on initial findings. Following this meeting, the EEAP held a "debriefing" to discuss presentation of initial findings.

Immediately after, the EEAP members had a "closure" teleconference with the Vice-Rector, DEC Chair, OMEA and MODIP representatives wherein EEAP members shared certain preliminary salient findings from the review of documents and virtual site-visit meetings with all parties.

On Thursday, December 10 through the next several days, the EEAP members collaborated virtually to prepare for submission the final draft report based on their findings.

III.   Study Programme Profile

The Department of Early Childhood Education DEC) is one of the first three Departments of the University of Thessaly that were founded in 1984 in Volos. It belonged to the School of Humanities and finally belongs to the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. Respectively, the original name of the department was Pedagogical Department of Nursery-School Instructors and got its current name in 2000. In June 2003, elections were held for the autonomy of the Department and the election of President and Deputy President. The Department is already in its 36th year of operation. It is staffed with 18 faculty members, 4 ΕΔΙΠ members, one ΕΤΕΠ member and 3 employees for secretarial and administrative support; it also collaborates with ΕΣΠΑ fellows and other instructors where and when teaching needs arise and when there is availability for this purpose.

The main purpose of the DEC is the promotion of theoretical and research knowledge and its correlation with practice, so that its graduates have a high level of skills that enable them to respond successfully to both their complex pedagogical, teaching and research role, as well as the dynamics of scientific and professional developments in the near future.

The priority of the DEC is the training of critically minded scientists in the broad field of education at an early age, who do not rely on traditional type assumptions, but operate in the context of a critical thinking and personal search based on current scientific research findings. The department also aims at promoting knowledge within modern and flexible learning environments with the support of new technologies, interactively connect the theoretical with the practical experience of knowledge in the context of the development of teaching and learning processes related to early childhood education.

The courses are supported by the asynchronous distance learning platform (e-class), through which the students can be informed about the content of the courses, as well as to follow the announcements and developments of the courses. All relevant information is provided on the website of the University of Thessaly.

Facilities of DEC. also include 5 classrooms, 1 PC Room, 1 Postgraduate Room, 2 amphitheatres, 1 Research Activity room and 1 Teleconference Room.

The studies at DEC last four years and to receive a degree, the completion of 18 compulsory courses, 2 tutoring courses, 2 seminars, 20 elective courses and 2 foreign language courses is required. The thesis is optional and is equivalent to 2 elective courses.

From 1991 to 2019, a total of 2,213 students graduated from the (undergraduate) Program of Studies, 1,081 students graduated through the Simulation Program, 208 Graduated at a Masters' Level and 59 received a PhD degree. Currently the Department has 964 active students and 41 PhD candidates.

Some of the DEC weaknesses noted include the lack of adequate numerical support of administrative - technical staff, as well as the lack of laboratories and research areas.

Finally, the DEC of the University of Thessaly (UTH) is in regular collaboration with a wide range of social, cultural and educational institutions, aiming to connect with the local, regional

community, but also with the whole country. In its actions there is the dimension of extroversion through several activities of the members of the DEC

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 Department of Early Childhood Education (DEC) of the University of Thessaly (UTH) has in place a Quality Assurance (QA) system that seeks to ensure that the structure and operation of the DEP program is consistent with several critical criteria. Specifically, the QA policy subsumes the European and National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education and is in accordance

with the UTH QA policy. The policy is delineated in a link on the UTH DEC website. The MODIP and OMEA in consultation with the DEC curriculum committee and input from external stakeholders regularly review the curriculum to ensure optimal conditions for teaching and learning. The EEAP verified that clear objectives are established to implement, measure and ascertain the effectiveness of critical program mission of achieving the best learning outcomes in a pervasive "student-centered" and democratic learning program milieu. The OMEA conducts regular reviews of program operations that include input from all parties involved: faculty, students, administrators of field experience and practicum sites and community partners both local and national. Data from a variety of sources provides useful information to analyse for program and curriculum reform as warranted. For example, the QA includes but is not limited to collecting student evaluations of courses and the entire program of study. The surveys allow students to assess every critical course and program characteristic needed to achieve the DEP's mission.

The overall mission of the DEC is to prepare students who graduate with critical thinking skills, creative pedagogy and research-based practices. At the same time, the DEC is committed to organizing rich clinical experiences and providing valuable information that ensures graduates may enjoy career mobility and career options. The coursework is reviewed periodically to ensure it conforms with the latest research and pedagogy so that graduates are confident in from "day one" in their classroom assignments.

EEAP's review of the OMEA's QA Policy confirmed fidelity of faculty members to reviewing and modifying course content, instructional and research strategies, and mentored field experiences that helped students link theory to practice and to ensure creative pedagogy in the core early childhood education subject areas such as mathematics, science, the arts and digital literacy. Faculty have noted the need to formalize a research policy and agenda.

EEAP has verified that the DEC has worked closely with MODIP and OMEA during the past several years since the 2013 External Evaluation Committee (EEC) report. The DEC has works with the OMEA (Internal Evaluation Group) and all faculty to ensure that the QA Policy and management plan is implemented. The DEC OMEA collects significant program operation data (See Quality Indicators and Internal Evaluation Report, 2019) that identifies areas of need for action. OMEA and DEC collect and analyse key indicators such as the required and elective courses including syllabi; student evaluations of courses and program, faculty productivity including quality of publications, external funding, conferences, collaborations; enrolment figures and graduation rates.

The DEC obtains valuable feedback from the "field": external partners such as school administrators, regional directors of teacher and parent organizations and directors of community and social welfare agencies. Such communication leads to symbiotic benefits, with external partners providing ideas for infusing the DEC curriculum, courses and practicum seminars with relevant pedagogical, social change and cultural insights while the DEC faculty (and students) apprise the external partners as to current early childhood pedagogy, technology, and research developments.

The OMEA 2019 Internal Evaluation report notes its desire to formulate objectives that will help the DEC flourish in the years ahead.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

- Articulate future goals and objectives including but not limited to a research policy
- Enable systematic feedback and data collection from graduates and external partners

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 DEC has designed an appropriate, well-structured program able to meet universally accepted standards for early childhood teacher preparation. A revised program that subsumed the External Evaluation Committee's (2013) suggestions, the official state framework that determines the organization of education in Greek kindergartens and the curriculum of Pre-school Education, the comments of the committee for preparing the program's guide and lastly, the findings of the students' evaluation of their courses, have been implemented during the academic year 2018-19.

A great emphasis is given to the development of students' research skills and practices (in conducting both quantitative and qualitative studies) since three research courses are included in the program of study as compulsory. However, at least one compulsory student assessment course should be added since students should learn how to conduct formative assessment especially since research reveals the strong impact of such assessment on promoting learning outcomes.

Additionally, during the EEAP interviews of alumni, there was a consensus that a course or more emphasis on parental involvement should have been included in the program. However, since this was only pointed out by the specific group of students interviewed and not by the teaching staff, it cannot be clearly determined that such a need really exists. Therefore, a systematic way of collecting data from alumni and also from external consultants and policymakers is warranted so that changes in the program are well justified.

The DEC implements the European System of Credentials (ECTS). The program of study is structured in 8 semesters with a distribution of 30 ECTS per semester and a total of 240 ECTS for the completion of the studies. The basic compulsory courses of the first two years are charged with 6 ECTS, the elective courses with 5 ECTS, the compulsory Internship Seminars with 5 ECTS and the Internship of the 8th semester with 15 ECTS, while the foreign language courses with 3 ECTS. Part of the workload is planned to be laboratories, research projects and exercises, depending on the nature of each subject/course.

Panel Judgment

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

Panel Recommendations

- Committee for establishing the program should consider input of stakeholders, alumni and external experts in a more systematic way to improve the curriculum and courses
- At least one compulsory course on student assessment should be included in the program of study
- The DEC should consider alternative ways for helping students in selecting courses since needed courses are often unavailable
- Consider adding a course "Emotional, Moral and Spiritual Development and Education" and a course or course emphasis on Parental Involvement

Principle 3: Student- centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment

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

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

The student-centred learning and teaching process

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

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

Study Programme Compliance

The teaching staff of the DEC takes into consideration modern theories and principles of teaching and learning, methods that actively involve the learner in the learning process and, in many courses, the assessment of DEC students is done with various additional methods aside from traditional written examinations (see Study Guide).

In addition to lectures many other methods of teaching and deliver content are applied in the courses, such as: laboratory and experiential exercises, participation of students in the design and preparation of assignments, lessons where small group assignments are made, group

presentations during the lessons, discussions, feedback and reflection, comprehension exercises, use of audio-visual material, educational visits-processing of museum spaces, seminars, discussions in groups of students (tutorials), production of experimental plans of pedagogical material, presentation of projects and micro-teachings. Through the application of such methods, an effort is made to respect the diversity and the different needs of the students, enhance teacher-student communication, as well as more frequent and systematic evaluation of the student.

Instructors also support students during the hours of cooperation with physical presence, by e-mail, as well as through the e-class platform.

Instructors also provide students with the opportunity to revise their writing through feedback and enabling reflection with the aim of improving the work before its final submission.

Student evaluation criteria and the evaluation method are announced at the beginning of each semester and are published in advance in the e-class of the course and are posted in the course profile on the DEC website.

The quality and effectiveness of the teaching is evaluated at the end of each semester by the students, with the aim of improvement by the instructors who have access to the course evaluations.

However, the large number of students admitted in comparison to the number of faculty and the limitation in facilities such as laboratories, research sites, etc. (due to the lack of financial resources) may hinder the DEC' faculty members efforts to maximize the quality of their teaching.

Finally, students might need some more support in the procedures required for Erasmus mobility.

In collaboration with the "ΠΡΟΣΒΑΣΗ" structure, students with special educational needs choose the way they are examined and receive general support. Support is also provided by faculty members and their fellow students who take on the role of volunteers facilitating students in need. It might be useful if the DEC / University could also be equipped with the 'Braille' system for those students needing it.

The academic advisor is responsible for the initial level of management of student complaints and fostering a positive atmosphere in the university community. At the next level, the student issues are referred to the Student Affairs Committee of the DEC and to the General Assembly, where the written requests of the students are discussed and dealt with. It may be helpful to ensure all students are aware of the aforementioned procedures.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

Consider offering students some more support concerning the procedures related to Erasmus mobility and ensure that all students are aware of the Department's procedures.

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

The DEC's admission policies and procedures of recognition and certification are regulated by the Ministry of Education of Greece. Students are enrolled in the program through the "Panhellenic" examinations given at the end of each school year. Secondary students learn about the Early Childhood Education Program during a 'New Student Welcoming Event', which is organized every year by the DEC.

Students are also informed about the structure and stages of their studies from a variety of sources: from the Course Outlines, Study Guide, the University's Website and the Undergraduate Study Regulations. Also, each faculty member of the DEC acts as the advisor-professor of a group of approximately eight students, from the beginning until the end of their studies.

The Erasmus student mobility program includes clear criteria of participation. Those individuals who have a priority of participation are clearly mentioned in the regulations (e.g., students with special needs). It is also pointed out that there is a flexibility on the "recognized courses" within the Erasmus mobility program. However, financial support of these students is limited and other ways to support the Erasmus students should be identified.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

None

Principle 5: Teaching Staff

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

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

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

Study Programme Compliance

The DEC follows the current legislation on the selection and development procedures of the members of its teaching staff. More specifically, all procedures of announcement, selection, development, and recruitment are posted in the information system APELLA. The details of these procedures are accessible to candidates and voters, ensuring the transparency of the procedures and securing a meritocratic result.

In recent years, the DEC has established a transparent process of evaluation of instructors by students. More specifically, the students at the end of each semester make a sound electronic evaluation of both instructors and their courses. The specific results are communicated to the DEC Chair and then to the instructors in question, to make changes and improvements in their courses. The results of this evaluation are made public and considered in the development process of the teaching staff.

The DEC encourages the mobility of faculty members by signing agreements with domestic and foreign institutions for research and teaching purposes. It also supports the participation of its teaching staff in conferences at home and abroad by offering a small financial support. This financial aid, though, seems inadequate for the expenses needed for International Conference participation.

In addition to this, the DEC might consider alternative ways to increase the faculty's international scientific collaborations and research activity.

As far as research promotion, the DEC offers a relevant course to introduce undergraduate students to research and requires from graduate students a research thesis. Instructors also

support students in participating in conferences and publishing their dissertations for their degree.

Research of faculty members includes both European research programs (Erasmus) and small research projects sponsored by the Research Committee of the University of Thessaly.

In addition, faculty members participate in international and national conferences and publish their work in scientific journals, conference proceedings, collective volumes, monographs, and books. They also engage students in those research projects and encourage them to participate in scientific conferences, seminars, and training days. In addition, the operation of the 6 laboratories contributes significantly to research activity of the DEC, often leading to the organization of conferences and workshops that involve both instructors and students.

The announcement of teaching staff positions is posted in the media as well as on the main website of the institution, to inform all interested parties and looking forward to attracting high level academic staff.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

Consider developing a professional development centre at the University level for faculty development and professional growth (if not offered officially by the University, at least in cooperation among the academic staff). The Centre might provide professional development on new pedagogical trends as well as opportunities to strengthen faculty-student engagement, learn about new technologies, e-learning teaching skills, IT skills and digital literacy, advanced statistical skills, or writing proposal for research grants.

Principle 6: Learning Resources and Student Support

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

> *Institutions and their academic units must have sufficient funding and means to support learning and academic activity in general, so that they can offer to students the best possible level of studies. The above means could include facilities such as libraries, study rooms, educational and scientific equipment, information and communications services, support or counselling services.*
>
> *When allocating the available resources, the needs of all students must be taken into consideration (e.g. whether they are full-time or part-time students, employed or international students, students with disabilities) and the shift towards student-centred learning and the adoption of flexible modes of learning and teaching. Support activities and facilities may be organised in various ways, depending on the institutional context. However, the internal quality assurance ensures that all resources are appropriate, adequate, and accessible, and that students are informed about the services available to them.*
>
> *In delivering support services the role of support and administrative staff is crucial and therefore they need to be qualified and have opportunities to develop their competences.*

Study Programme Compliance

The EEAP was not able to inspect in person the facilities and therefore a virtual tour was given of the buildings, laboratories, lecture halls and administrative offices.

The DEC is located in the (coastal) building complex of Papastratos (Volos), while it also utilizes other spaces rented by UTH.

The teaching areas are sufficient to meet the needs of the students who attend classes. However, since attendance is not obligatory, many students do not attend classes. If more - or all – students were to attend class, the teaching areas would be insufficient to meet the additional capacity needed. The teaching spaces are generally adequately equipped and have at least one computer (connected to the internet) and a projector. The main teaching premises meet the requirements and conditions for access by students with disabilities. However, interviews with the faculty members have raised important issues regarding the absence of heating/air conditioning.

The DEC marginally covers the needs for training in ICT courses and similarly, there is a limited space for constructions in the lessons of the "Visual Arts" and the "Puppet Theatre". In addition, it does not have a space specifically designed for music lessons, although it does have equipment and musical instruments. Finally, the Department has a rather limited space for research activity.

The offices of the Teaching Staff, which are also used as places of cooperation (meetings) with students, are currently sufficient (as a result of the reduction of the teaching staff). The equipment of the teaching staff's offices varies both in terms of its adequacy and in terms of its quality, while the economic tightness of the last decade does not allow its enrichment and the renewal of the equipment to the desired degree.

The DEC makes use of modern technology and information systems which are available within the University of Thessaly such as the "Electronic system to support the learning process (E-class)", the "Electronic platform of administrative support (Studentweb & Classweb)", the e-library and the department's web page. However, there is a lack of staff members responsible for providing technical support to the teaching staff of the department.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

DEC's facilities are in need of expansion as it pertains to available space in order to meet students' and personnel's demands.

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 DEC in line with the existing legislation and the procedures of evaluation and certification of the study programs, systematically collects various data, for further use in the context of decision making and policy making.

The DEC collects a large amount of data of various types (quantitative, qualitative), in a number of axes (students, staff, courses, services), utilizing various data collection methods (e.g., questionnaires) as well as electronic information management systems (e.g., Electronic Secretariat, MODIP information system) with a given frequency. The department has defined both the data collection procedures and the respective committees in charge of monitoring this collection. At the same time, the department follows procedures for analyzing this data at individual and collective level.

Data collection

Data Collection Axes. The focus axes and their variables are described below:

(a) Students

- profile: demographic and social data
- performance: per semester, year, course unit, total
- course of study: completion / dropout rate
- satisfaction with courses they attend
- availability of resources: aids, educational material, bibliography
- study patterns: attending lectures, time devoted to homework

(b) Staff

- didactic activities: PPS courses, PMS, lectures
- research activities: research, research projects
- writing activities: articles, books, minutes
- other activities: events, social and educational activities

(c) Lessons

- objectives
- organization of the course
- content
- prerequisites
- interesting

(d) Services

- support students in matters of study
- informing the community about events
- links with society

It seems that a more systematic monitoring and utilization of feedback from DEC graduates is warranted. Graduates could offer valuable insights to inform the DEC's operation and development.

Data Collection Methods: Institutionalized procedures for data collection have been determined by the DEC, are standardized, and usually include questionnaires given periodically. On the other hand, informal methods depend on the performance of the respective actions (e.g., social or educational) and the data collection in this area is not standardized.

More specifically, the sources for data collection include the following:

(a) DEC Secretariat - Electronic Secretariat

(b) Course Evaluation Questionnaire by students

(c) Data Submission Forms by staff

Data processing is performed on two levels: First, for the quantitative data (e.g., questionnaire replies), common indicators and statistical methods of analysis are used (e.g., percentages, frequency distributions, indicators, dispersion indicators, graphical representations, etc.). Respectively, in the case of qualitative data (e.g., interviews, free comments on questionnaires, etc.), thematic content analysis is mainly utilized.

Data Utilization

The results from the analysis of the collected data are utilized in various ways such as:
- making improvement decisions regarding aspects of the program that are found to be problematic (e.g., the adjustment of the Internship due to the reduction of staff in the last two years).
- support for students who have learning disabilities
- systematic use of ICT to support the teaching-learning process (e.g., e-learning)
- organization of scientific events such as workshops and meetings (e.g., due to feedback from its graduates).
- renewal of the program of study, based either on faculty's research activity or on suggestions proposed by students and /or the Curriculum Committee.

Overall, the DEC consistently manages data collection and processing procedures for evaluation and certification purposes, making corrections, revisions, and improvements whenever necessary.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

None

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

The EEAP reviewed the DEC's web page which provides all necessary and important information about the DEC's staff, undergraduate and postgraduate studies, research programs, the department's evaluation, and policies.

The site is user-friendly and presents material about the activities of the DEC and its academic structure. Information about the faculty members is presented very clearly (i.e., staff's CVs and short bios). Updated CVs are published on the website and, in most cases, in both Greek and English. Contact information of faculty and availability is also displayed.

The information presented on the DEC's website concerns both current and perspective students. As a result, students, through the website, can obtain a clear picture of the program's requirements, expectations, and opportunities.

The wealth of on-line information leads to greater transparency in the DEC's public communications of information about its mission, actions, and processes. Evaluation reports and other important documents about the policies of the DEC are available publicly.

However, there are a few issues that need improvement. One of them concerns the English version of the website. The information available in the English version of the DEC website does not correspond well with that of the Greek version (for example staff information and homepage). More specifically, the Greek version of the Homepage provides information about the Announcements and the Events of the Department, while in the English version these are not visible. Modifying the English version of the website accordingly and making it comparable to that of the Greek version is important given that the English version is accessible to the global community.

A second issue is that of providing information to graduate students and the public about future occupational and career possibilities. It would be helpful if the DEC offered a Quarterly or monthly newsletter where they can present news on seminars and research and/or teaching activities and events. News and accomplishments of graduates, alumni and faculty can be included. This could function as a conduit between the community and Department.

Finally, the DEC's website could be more interactive if it includes links for communicating with the public for example via social media (i.e., Facebook, twitter).

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

- Modifying the English version of the website accordingly and making it comparable to that of the Greek version (especially the Homepage and Staff page) to make the website more accessible to the global community.

- Consider offering a Quarterly or monthly newsletter where the Department can present news on seminars, research or teaching activities and events. This will enable opportunities for interactivity and networking with alumni and the community. It could also function as a means to continuing the engagement of alumni to the program.

- The DEC's website could be more interactive if it includes links for communicating with the public for example via social media (i.e., Facebook, twitter).

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

EEAP interviews and review of the 2013 External Evaluation Report findings, the 2014 DEC Response and conclusions, the collection of "Quality Indicators" data by OMEA and curriculum committee in ensuing years leading up to the recent 2019 DEC Internal Evaluation Report demonstrate that the DEC took effective steps to appropriately respond to External Evaluation as part of the DEC's QA "Internal" Review policy and procedure. It should be noted that the years of the DEC's QA data management process described previously spanning several years includes observance of the EU and National Guidelines for QA and accreditation as well as an eye on current research trends relevant to early childhood education curricula, courses, and "extracurricular" activities. The DEC in the years since the 2013 External Report findings has continuously gathered and analysed a host of data (Quality Indicators) in order to maintain fidelity to the mission and goals of the DEC to graduate well-prepared students after four years of the program. The DEC's 2019 Internal Report succinctly elaborated as to how it undertook to revise goals, courses (ECTS), practicum and to enhance activities related to external partners and international collaboration. The DEC has made significant revisions to the required and elective coursework and credits including but not limited to strengthening the practical experience curriculum component, such as more effective mentoring and enhancing course linkages of research and teaching.

These modifications of key DEC program components reflect a fidelity to "quality assurance guidelines" for institutions of higher education. Critical elements of coursework and the program in general in light of factors such as current research, student evaluations, feedback from external partners and current societal needs and demands. For example, changes were made to the curriculum courses to include topics and approaches to strengthen research

laboratory experiences and also make them more accessible, the creation of an enhanced technology laboratory. Course modifications also were completed to enable greater research activity as well as to subsume connections between research and practice, and richer, practical field experiences at local, national and international exemplary training sites.

The culture of transparency in data collection and internal review by MODIP, OMEA and faculty members also seem to have helped shape clear conclusions and findings that should help to engender goals for future action. Regular interaction and monitoring by faculty members with external local, national and international partners, has also contributed to curricular changes.

The DEC has benefitted from continuous monitoring and assessment of the programs, student progress, faculty achievements, etc. The close connection and coordination among MODIP, OMEA and DEC faculty help ensure the effective transmission of information that can be transposed into data for analysis and consequent action. The OMEA meets on a bi-monthly basis to process up-to-date information to share with MODIP and the faculty as appropriate. The close and open communication channels result in faculty and students being informed about the most current opportunities in areas such as grants, research funding, rich field experiences and national and international mobility.

The QA efforts have seemingly helped ensure exemplary pedagogy and a feeling of resilience in students, including the feeling of their overall welfare at UTH. EEAP interviews with the faculty, students, alumni, and external stakeholders evidenced a very high level of satisfaction with the program as implemented. The faculty were given credit for providing creative pedagogy and instilling critical thinking and democratic, global, and socially just values.

The EEAP verified valid changes to the curriculum's field experiences and practical training were accompanied by closer faculty- student engagement in the form of mentoring/advisement to ensure the best learning support for students based on their preferences and realities of the untenably large faculty-student ratio and classroom size challenges.

The "student-centered" approach of the faculty has pervaded the curriculum and extra-curricular activities. Current students as well as graduates noted that as a result of their professional development, they felt ready to confidently embrace novel situations.

Internal review mechanisms described have also enhanced research activities of faculty and students' opportunities for public and private sector funding, local, national, and international lectures, conferences and collaborative research activities.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

It may be useful to obtain feedback more formally from external stakeholders, e.g., alumni, employers, parent advisory group representatives, social agency directors by operating an "alumni-external partners" committee or advisory board.

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

In order to ascertain the DEC's fidelity to QA principles reviewed and recorded in this report including this Principle 10, the EEAP conducted extensive online interviews with the Associate Rector, DEC Chair, members of MODIP, members of OMEA, DEC faculty, secretarial staff, students, graduates and external stakeholders. The EEAP also examined a rich array of documents and web pages provided for its review. The EEAP notes the evidence shows that the DEC has carefully and thoughtfully responded to findings and recommendations in the External Evaluation Report of 2013 concerning key aspects of the DEC's structure and delivery of professional development. The EEAP also notes that the DEC's response since the 2013 External Evaluation included as well as adherence to relevant national and EU regulations and laws related to and guiding the internal QA policies and procedures.

The value of the External review process to the functioning of the DEC is evident in the systemic program changes initiated, structured and implemented by MODIP, OMEA and, ultimately, the DEC. The DEC revised its comprehensive QA policy and procedures as noted in Principle One of this Report to analyse and respond to these "external contributors to QA" that elaborated ways the DEC could consider and respond to recommendations and international standards for operating an effective undergraduate early childhood education program. The DEC had welcomed the External DEC program review in 2013 and has diligently prepared for the current external review evaluation by cataloguing its major achievements, areas needing attention and reciting its intent to further improve based, in part, on external evaluations. The DEC's goal of improving delivery of services to students from faculty members, external partners and the international community is evident in its recognition of, and responses to, findings and recommendations of external panels and relevant national and international standards.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

None

I. Features of Good Practice

- Research courses
- Information Management details
- Faculty-student engagement
- Effective community involvement
- Use of internal evaluation and data collection for formative program review and improvement

II. Areas of Weakness

- Faculty-student ratio
- Building infrastructure (heating and laboratories)
- Adding course or adding more emphasis in a course in parental involvement and adding Staff for technical support

III. Recommendations for Follow-up Actions

- Consider enabling greater, systematic input from alumni and external stakeholders
- Add course or incorporate into existing coursework tools for student assessment
- Articulate an action plan for future program development

IV. Summary & Overall Assessment

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

The Principles where substantial compliance has been achieved are: **2**

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   **Signatures**

1. **Prof. John Spiridakis, (Chair)**
   St. John's University, New York, USA

2. **Prof. Leonidas Kyriakides**
   University of Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus

3. **Assoc. Prof. Eleonora Papaleontiou-Louca**
   European University Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus