



ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ
HELLENIC REPUBLIC



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Accreditation Report
for the New Undergraduate Study Programme in
operation of:

Early Childhood Education and Care

Institution: International Hellenic University

Date: 4 October 2022



Επιχειρησιακό Πρόγραμμα
Ανάπτυξη Ανθρώπινου Δυναμικού,
Εκπαίδευση και Διά Βίου Μάθηση
Με τη συγχρηματοδότηση της Ελλάδας και της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης



Report of the Panel appointed by the HAHE to undertake the review of
the New Undergraduate Study Programme in operation of **Early
Childhood Education and Care** of the **International Hellenic University**
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 new undergraduate study programme in operation of **Early Childhood Education and Care** of the **International Hellenic University** comprised the following five (4) members, drawn from the HAHE Register, in accordance with Laws 4009/2011 & 4653/2020:

- 1. Prof. Petros Gougoulakis**
Stockholms Universitet, Stockholm, Sweden (Chair)
- 2. Prof. John Spiridakis**
St John's University, New York City, New York, USA
- 3. Assoc. Prof. Helene Papadoudi-Ros**
Université de Lorraine, Nancy, France
- 4. Ms. Ioulia Paidi, Student**
School of Early Childhood Education, Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki,
Thessaloniki, Greece

II. Review Procedure and Documentation

The External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel (EEAP) studied the material provided by the Hellenic Authority for Higher Education (HAHE) in advance of its review process that was carried out on site from 31 October – 4 November 2022. The EEAP had an orientation meeting in Zoom on Thursday, October 20th, with the Director General Dr Christina Besta, where she briefed about HAHE's mission and standards, as well as the guidelines for the accreditation process. In order to coordinate its work, the EEAP met in private the first day (Monday, October 31st), and allocate tasks and priorities ahead of the scheduled visits and meetings with the representatives for leadership, staff, students and stakeholders of the undergraduate programme on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) of the International Hellenic University (IHU).

The EEAP's first meeting took place on Monday, October 31st (2022), in the IHU's main campus, outside the city of Thessaloniki in Sindos, where the Department of Early Childhood Education and Care is located. In this meeting the EEAP members were warmly welcomed by the Vice President of IHU Stamatis Aggelopoulos and the Head of the Department Professor Vasilis Grammatikopoulos, who provided the panel with an overview of the history, academic profile, current status, strengths and challenges of the Undergraduate Programme.

The presentation focused on the mission of the Department with emphasis on the development of collaborations with higher educational institutions in Greece and abroad, the cooperation with relevant stakeholders, the use of modern technologies in teaching and other educational activities of the Department, the conduct of research by all faculty members for an education based on scientific research, and the best possible professional preparation of their students. Moreover, a comprehensive account of the University and the Department covering facts and figures, history and current status, academic profile and vision, strengths and possible areas of concern was provided followed by a very constructive discussion in a collegial manner.

During their two-days presence at Sindos campus, the EEAP members were also shown around the premises and had the opportunity to meet with

- a) representatives of OMEA and MODIP, to get an orientation in the work of IHU and the Ministry on quality development and quality assurance,
- b) teachers, students and administrative staff to get their views and experiences of the current undergraduate programme and clarify possible differences with the previous one before the incorporation into IHU,
- c) a selection of stakeholders, i.e., representatives of different kindergartens and pre-schools, municipal and private, that receive the programme's students for their internship, to discuss about their cooperation and interaction, and how this can be strengthened for mutual benefit.

Under MODIP's management, the internal quality assurance group (OMEA) of the Department of Early Childhood Education and Care operate to meet the requirements for continuous follow-up of the quality assurance plan in order to provide the necessary support to the staff, students and stakeholders when required.

All meetings and conversations with representatives of the Early Childhood Education and Care - leadership, faculty members and administrative staff, current students and alumni as well as stakeholders – were well planned and organized and the Accreditation Panel would like to express its great gratitude for the reception and responsiveness to the undertaken review process.

III. New Undergraduate Study Programme in operation Profile

The department under evaluation and accreditation belongs to the School of Social Sciences of the International Hellenic University (IHU) and was established by Law 4610/2019 (Government Gazette/ΦΕΚ 70/A/7-5-2019). The current Department and the specific undergraduate programme on Early Childhood Education and Care, was designed and implemented in the academic year 2019-20, when the former Alexandreio Technological Educational Institute of Thessaloniki (ATEITH) merged with and became part of the IHU.

The four (4) year Early Childhood Education and Care programme (ECEC) is an evolution of the preceding programme of the Department of Early Childhood Education of ATEITH. The latter is offered in parallel during a transitional period for students admitted prior to the merger with IHU. Notably, the undergraduate program that is being accredited operated normally during the first semester of 2019-20 and then went into a distance mode for about 2 years due to the COVID pandemic. With the first batch admitted in 2019-20 no students have yet graduated from the new programme.

According to the documents authored by the Department and the oral information of its Head, the revision of the Undergraduate Study Program Early Childhood Education and Care is in alignment with the international scientific and educational developments within the field of knowledge. The study program offers a wide range of professional options to its graduates and attracts a large number of prospective students. According to the national university entrance examinations of 2020, the Department holds the 6th highest admission base among the 31 departments of IHU and the 1st place regarding first preference of those admitted throughout IHU (50% of those admitted had the programme as their 1st - 3rd choice of preference) and 5th nationwide among the departments active in the area of preschool education and early childhood. Since its establishment in 2019, the Undergraduate Programme has admitted candidates for three academic years 2019- 2020 (127 students), 2020-2021 (130 students) and 2021-2022 (174 students). The current academic year (2022-2023), 135 students are admitted, and more are expected to be added due to ongoing transfers from other universities, mainly from two corresponding departments of other HEIs, whose students have the right to transfer to the Department of Early Childhood Education and Care (DECEC) of the IHU. These are the Department of Early Childhood Education & Care, University of West Attica, and the Department of Early Childhood Education & Care, University of Ioannina.

The curriculum of the Department covers the area of education and care of infants and preschool children (from birth to the age of starting compulsory education) and also focuses on the contact with and support of their families.

The mission of the Department is to promote the creation, development and transfer of knowledge in the sciences of early childhood education through teaching and applied research.

Furthermore, by combining theory with practice, it aims to train early childhood educators who will possess firm scientific knowledge and skills that constitute the necessary foundation for their scientific identity, and their professional development throughout their career paths. The Department disposes infrastructures that meet the basic needs for the smooth implementation of the programme, such as classrooms (which though need to be amplified in order to meet the growing number of students and the proper teaching and learning design of individual courses), computer rooms and digital infrastructure, library and laboratories.

The teaching staff involved in the Undergraduate Programme consists of nine (9) faculty members, five (5) members at the rank of Professor and four (4) members at the rank of Assistant Professor, with specializations falling within the scientific fields of early childhood education and care. In addition, there are one (1) emeritus Professor and two (2) members of the category Laboratory Teaching Staff, of whom one holds a doctoral degree and the second a master's degree. Furthermore, two faculty positions have been elected at the rank of assistant professor and are due to join the teaching staff in the spring semester of the current academic year. The teaching staff of the Department is supplemented by Temporary Teaching Staff. Fourteen (14) of them are Doctoral Fellows with academic experience and one (1) seconded upper secondary school teacher. Moreover, the Department has 2 administrators who staff the Secretariat.

The workload of the existing permanent staff is high due to the structure of the programme, but also due to the fact that from 2019-20 two study programmes are running in parallel, along with the “universityisation semester” for ATEITH graduates who want to obtain a university degree. For these reasons, combined with the very small number of permanent faculty members, the average weekly teaching load in the academic year 2020-21 was more than double the minimum set time.

Specifically, while the teaching workload for faculty members in the Department, by law, is a minimum of 6 hours per week, all faculty in the Undergraduate Program undertake additionally responsibility for the supervision of examination theses, for research activities and administrative work. The Department's need for recruitment of additional permanent faculty members, as well as administrative staff, is deemed necessary considering the volume of offered classes and the required administrative support to serve 778 registered students, the faculty members and the Department's leadership.

PART B: COMPLIANCE WITH THE PRINCIPLES

Principle 1: Strategic Planning, Feasibility and Sustainability of the Academic Unit

Institutions must have developed an appropriate strategy for the establishment and operation of new academic units and the provision of new undergraduate study programmes. This strategy should be documented by specific feasibility and sustainability studies.

By decision of the institutional Senate, the Institutions should address in their strategy issues related to their academic structure in academic units and study programmes, which support the profile, the vision, the mission, and the strategic goal setting of the Institution, within a specific time frame. The strategy of the Institution should articulate the potential benefits, weaknesses, opportunities or risks from the operation of new academic units and study programmes, and plan all the necessary actions towards the achievement of their goals.

The strategy of their academic structure should be documented by specific feasibility and sustainability studies, especially for new academic units and new study programmes.

More specifically, the feasibility study of the new undergraduate study programmes should be accompanied by a four-year business plan to meet specific needs in infrastructure, services, human resources, procedures, financial resources, and management systems.

During the evaluation of the Institutions and their individual academic units in terms of meeting the criteria for the organisation of undergraduate study programmes, particular attention must be placed upon:

a. The academic profile and the mission of the academic unit

The profile and mission of the department should be specified. The scientific field of the department should be included in the internationally established scientific fields of Higher Education, as they are designated by the international categorisation of scientific fields in education, by UNESCO (ISCED 2013).

b. The strategy of the Institution for its academic development

The academic development strategy for the operation of the department and the new study programme should be set out. This strategy should result from the investigation of the factors that influence the studies and the research in the scientific field, the investigation of the institutional, economic, developmental, and social parameters that apply in the external environment of the Institution, as well as the possibilities and capabilities that exist within the internal environment (as reflected in a SWOT Analysis: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats). This specific analysis should demonstrate the reason for selecting the scientific field of the new department.

c. The documentation of the feasibility of the operation of the department and the study programme

The feasibility of the operation of the new department should be justified based on:

- *the needs of the national and regional economy (economic sectors, employment, supply-demand, expected academic and professional qualifications)*
- *comparison with other national and international study programmes of the same scientific field*
- *the state-of-the-art developments*

- *the existing academic map; the differentiation of the proposed department from the already existing ones needs to be analysed, in addition to the implications of the current image of the academic map in the specific scientific field.*

d. The documentation of the sustainability of the new department

Mention must be made to the infrastructure, human resources, funding perspective, services, and all other available resources in terms of:

- *educational and research facilities (buildings, rooms, laboratories, equipment, etc.)*
- *staff (existing and new, by category, specialty, rank and laboratory). A distinct five-year plan is required, documenting the commitment of the School and of the Institution for filling in the necessary faculty positions to cover at least the entire pre-defined core curriculum*
- *funding (funding possibility from public or non-public sources)*
- *services (central, departmental / student support, digital, administrative, etc.)*

e. The structure of studies

The structure of the studies should be briefly presented, namely:

- **The organisation of studies:** *The courses and the categories to which they belong; the distribution of the courses into semesters; the alignment of the courses with the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).*
- **Learning process:** *Documentation must be provided as to how the student-centered approach is ensured (modes of teaching and evaluation of students beyond the traditional methods).*
- **Learning outcomes:** *Knowledge, skills and competences acquired by graduates, as well as the professional rights awarded must be mentioned.*

f. The number of admitted students

- *The proposed number of admitted students over a five-year period should be specified.*
- *Any similar departments in other HEIs with the possibility of student transfers from / to the proposed department should be mentioned.*

g. Postgraduate studies and research

- *It is necessary to indicate research priorities in the scientific field, the opportunities for interdisciplinary research, the challenges towards new knowledge, possible research collaborations, etc.*
- *In addition, the postgraduate and doctoral programmes offered by the academic unit, the research projects performed, and the research performance of the faculty members should be mentioned.*

Relevant documentation

- *Introductory Report by the Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) addressing the above points with the necessary documentation*
- *Updated Strategic Plan of the Institution that will include its proposed academic reconstruction, in view of the planned operation of new department(s) (incl. updated SWOT analysis at institutional level)*
- *Feasibility and sustainability studies for the establishment and operation of the new academic unit and the new study programme*
- *Four-year business plan*

Study Programme Compliance

a. The academic profile and the mission of the academic unit

The Department of Early Childhood Education and Care (DECEC) was founded in 2019, as a Department of the International Hellenic University of Greece (IHU) and belongs to the School of Social Sciences. The scientific field of the Department is part of the internationally established scientific fields of the Higher Education (ISCED 2013) and is consistent with society's needs for childcare professionals.

b. The strategy of the Institution for its academic development

The philosophy of the DECEC's academic development strategy is based on the principles: dynamic adaptation, interdisciplinarity, transparency & consensus, planning & accounting processes, extroversion, monitoring - disclosure & improvement. The academic development strategy of the DECEC is implemented through teaching and research and focuses on three pillars:

- a. the creation of a modern academic environment adapted to social changes (globalization multiculturalism, digitalization) and current international trends in higher education, with special regard to education and care sciences,
- b. the creation of an attractive educational institution for students, scientists, and professionals, qualitatively upgraded at national and international level, and
- c. the development and improvement of the material infrastructure (e.g., appropriate classrooms, laboratories, didactic materials and technological equipment).

The process of formulating the strategic academic development of the Department and the ECEC programme is shaped collectively, through discussion and decisions taken by the Department Assembly, following well-founded recommendations from the Curriculum Committee, the Committee of the OMEA, and the Director of the Department's Research Laboratory, in alignment with the IHU's strategy for the cultivation and provision of high quality, internationally oriented studies. The Department's aim, therefore, is to increase the number of permanent faculty members over the next five years to fifteen (15). However, this goal cannot be achieved without a commitment from the Faculty of Social Sciences or the IHU leadership, as the faculty has no authority over the allocation of positions, while the IHU has not yet received a commitment of a certain number of staff (faculty) positions, including temporary hired teachers, laboratory staff and administrators), so that the Department can plan the allocation of these positions for the next five years.

The ECEC programme is a development of the pre-existing one of the incorporated ATEITH, which had recognized prestige and quality, and good occupational opportunities for its graduates in Greece and abroad. The current programme maintains the same infrastructure and equipment that existed before the integration into the IHU and most of the highly trained and experienced staff (Administrative, Teaching, Technical), albeit limited.

The small number of permanent faculty and staff members in relation to the number of students is due to a) the freeze on recruitment during the economic crisis, b) the large number of temporary staff employed by the HEIs and c) the increase in admissions decided by the Ministry of Education.

Other less favorable elements relate to a) the understaffing of administrative and technical services, b) the lack of funding for maintenance of existing and construction of new premises, c) the bureaucratic framework for the recruitment of new positions resulting in excessive delays and d) the lack of systematic documentation of various internal administrative procedures.

With the recent merger, the department has all the potential to expand its turnover by placing more emphasis on teaching at all three levels and on research, on the internationalization of the programme and on its extroversion, with potential to render it a Centre for Lifelong Learning and Regional Development.

c. The documentation of the feasibility of the operation of the department and the study programme

The need of the existence of the Department and the ECEC programme, is dictated by the growth prospects of the Greek economy and the need for quality pre-school education and education with access for all children. This is also required for reasons of equality by offering all men and women the opportunity to join the labour market. Investing in early childhood education enhances children's socialization, economic development, and gender equality, and creates conditions for more sustainable, peaceful, and resilient societies.

It is also confirmed by scientific studies that investment in high quality programmes that support children's health and learning from early childhood underpins children's development and, in the long term, improves their quality of life.

At the national level there are two more departments offering programmes with similar content and orientation to the ECEC; one at the University of Ioannina and the other at the University of West Attica. All three departments have the same title (Early Childhood Education and Care). All three Departments have similar curricula grounded on interdisciplinarity, including courses from the disciplines of Health - Care (safety, well-being, practices, etc.), Education (learning, teaching methods, etc.), Social Psychology (relationships,

etc.) and Research methodology. The theoretical courses enhance the students' practical experience, providing them with analytical tools for their professional development. The graduates of the above-mentioned programmes have the same exclusive professional rights to work in places and structures that accommodate children aged 0 to 4 years.

At the international level, it is worth noting that corresponding study programmes last from 3 to 4 years and cover similar subjects of study belonging to educational sciences, specialized teaching subjects (e.g., music, physical education, literacy, etc.) and practical training.

d. The documentation of the sustainability of the new department

The EEAP members were guided to the premises of the Department and found that the educational and research facilities (buildings, rooms, laboratories, equipment, etc.), the available staff and other services (central, departmental/student support, digital, administrative, etc.) are in place to support the needs of the programme. However, as mentioned earlier, and confirmed by the official documents related to the Academic Accreditation of the ongoing Undergraduate Programme, immediate measures are needed to strengthen the building infrastructure, along with the number of teaching staff and the rest of the logistical infrastructure (high-speed internet, classroom equipment, etc.), for a smoother implementation of the programme. The content of the programme, due also to its practical nature, requires additional funding to cope with the didactical challenges that this entails. Learning outcomes are not easily met when too many students per class are compelled to attend seminars, crammed into small classrooms.

Nevertheless, the high level of the teaching staff's competence should be underlined, which significantly ensures the achievement of the learning objectives of the study programme despite the adverse conditions mentioned.

With few exceptions, all permanent, and most of the contracted faculty members hold a doctorate or are working on a doctorate and are active in research with significant activity in their field of knowledge.

The extremely high faculty-student ratio of active students (<v+2) is 40.17/1 and makes it one of the largest in Europe. Also, the lack of enough permanent staff makes it difficult to properly plan and enrich the instruction with new thematic units, which is further burdened by the large number of contract holders who are constantly changing due to the delay in signing their contracts.

e. The structure of studies

The program's content covers early childhood education and care sciences according to recent scientific and social developments. It is based on a horizontal (scientific fields) and a vertical axis (time series). The horizontal axis includes courses from the scientific fields of Health Care (safety, well-being, practices, etc.), Education (learning, methods, teaching methods, etc.), the Social-psychological dimension (relationships, communication etc.) and Research.

The vertical axis chronologically starts with courses that set out the scientific/theoretical foundation, followed by practice-oriented courses (application) and finally courses that highlight the research dimension of the studies.

The practical training is conducted for students in the 5th semester of their studies in a collaborative daycare center. The experience and knowledge acquired by the students serve as the basis of reflection documented in a diary and commented on by the supervising tutor. It is utilized as a “building block” for the subsequent three semesters of courses and especially for choosing a research theme for the final thesis.

In total, the Study program offers Compulsory Courses of 198 ECTS, distributed among 28 courses of which 30 ECTS are compulsory elective courses (5 out of 32 in total offered), and 12 ECTS free choice courses (choice of courses from any department of IHU).

During the dialogue with the leadership of the Department and the stakeholders, the EEAP commented on whether it is appropriate and more effective from a pedagogical point of view for the students' internship to take place at one concentrated period in the fifth semester.

f. The number of admitted students

The ECEC undergraduate programme was established in 2019, and until now it has admitted students for four academic years: 2019-2020, 2020-2021, 2021-2022 and 2022-23.

The Department admitted 127 students for 2019-20, 130 students for 2020-21, 174 students for 2021-22 and 135 for 2022-23. The total number of students admitted since the Department joined the IHU is 532. The total number of all enrolled students, including students before the universityization, amounts to 778, while the number of active students in the current academic year is 683.

The number of admitted students increases significantly beyond the allocated places including through transfers from the respective Departments of the Universities of West Attica and Ioannina. As the number of admissions is under the absolute jurisdiction of the Ministry, no prediction is made for the number of admissions in the future. The department intends to update its recommendation on the desired number of admissions for the next five years, based

on the available staff of the department - which also depends on the jurisdiction of the Ministry and the priorities of IHU.

g. Postgraduate studies and research

The Department participates in the Interdepartmental Postgraduate Programme "Digital and Soft Skills in Education" (Government Gazette/ΦΕΚ 4977 (11/11/2020) (<https://digital-skills.the.ihu.gr/genikagia-to-metaptuxiako/>), in collaboration with the Department of Computer Engineering and Electronic Systems.

The aim of the particular master's degree is to enhance the professional profile of teachers and educators by developing their ability to use new technologies in the learning process.

The master's programme received its first 226 applicants in 2021 in two rounds (121 in March and 105 in September). The Department also offers a Doctoral Studies Programme, according to the Government Gazette/ΦΕΚ 3284 (6/8/2020). The first three (3) doctoral thesis proposals were submitted for evaluation in 2021 and additional four (4) are expected to be submitted in the winter semester 2022/23. Another joint master's programme, entitled "Special education and care/training of marginalized groups with special needs", is expected to be launched the Spring semester 2013 in cooperation with an Italian university.

The Department's faculty members participate either as scientific coordinators or as external researchers in European competitive research projects, as well as scientific coordinators in ΕΣΠΑ-development projects.

Following research projects are indicative of faculty external research initiatives:

1. *Umbrella - Support of Social Care Interventions for Students of the International Hellenic University.* (Human resource development, Education, & Lifelong Learning 2014-2020.

Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. Code: MIS 5021787. Duration: 2018-2022).

The purpose of the "Umbrella" project is to create and support a network of volunteers (i-Mentors) for individualized assistance and guidance of students from vulnerable groups on an academic, social and emotional level. An i-Mentor is a volunteer student of older semesters who demonstrates systematic attendance and smooth progression in his/her studies.

2. *SWPBS - Building school-wide inclusive, positive, and equitable learning environments through a system-change approach.* (Erasmus+, KA3 Support for policy reform. Code: 606687-EPP-1-2018-2-CY-EPPKA3-PI-POLICY. Duration: 2019-2022).

The SWPBS project is based on the Positive Behavior Promotion System (PBS), a scientific approach that provides the organizational framework for a school unit and its staff to act proactively with the support of external trainers to address undesirable behaviors. The SWPBS

project aims to promote the problem-solving model, where the school's administrative team and staff strive to identify school needs, design and develop an action plan, and evaluate its implementation.

3. *ProW - Promoting the well-being of educators by fostering positive behaviour in early childhood education.* (Erasmus+, KA3 Support for policy reform. Code: 626146-EPP-1-2020-2-EL-EPPKA3-PI-POLICY. Duration: 2021-2024).

During the EEPP meetings with faculty members it emerged that it is a deliberate policy of the Department to encourage participation of the staff in research projects. The pursuit to include colleagues in research applications may be attributed to the positive/supportive climate that permeates the interpersonal relations in the collegium.

For a complete list of the research programmes see the Department's website: <https://ecec.ihu.gr/eprograms/>

The Department has developed an appropriate strategy for the establishment and operation of the reviewed undergraduate programme, which is documented by specific feasibility and sustainability analyses. With regard to the principle of Strategic Planning, Feasibility and Sustainability of the Academic Unit, the EEAP has been able to confirm the fidelity of the ECEC programme to the requirements it has promulgated.

Panel Judgement

Principle 1: Strategic planning, feasibility and sustainability of the academic unit	
a. The academic profile and the mission of the academic unit	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	
b. The strategy of the Institution for its academic development	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	
c. The documentation of the feasibility of the operation of the department and the study programme	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	
d. The documentation of the sustainability of the new department	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	
e. The structure of studies	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	
f. The number of admitted students	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	X
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	
g. Postgraduate studies	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	X
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Principle 1: Strategic planning, feasibility and sustainability of the academic unit (overall)	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

The EEAP notes that the quality of the programme cannot be maintained and ensured in the longer term unless teaching staff, teaching facilities and other learning resources are in line with the Department's increasing student population and teaching volume. Also, the lack of permanent teaching staff (with extremely high faculty-student ratio) makes it difficult to properly plan and enrich the instruction with new thematic units, which is further burdened by the large number of contract holders who are constantly changing due to the delay in signing their contracts.

Principle 2: Quality Assurance Policy of the Institution and the Academic Unit

The Institution should have in place an accredited Internal Quality Assurance System, and should formulate and apply a Quality Assurance Policy, which is part of its strategy, specialises in the operation of the new academic units and the new study programmes, and is accompanied by annual quality assurance goals for the continuous development and improvement of the academic units and the study programmes.

The quality assurance policy of the Institution must be formulated in the form of a published statement, which is implemented by all stakeholders. It focuses on the achievement of special annual quality goals related to the quality assurance of the new study programme offered by the academic unit. In order to implement this policy, the Institution, among others, commits itself to put into practice quality procedures that will demonstrate: the adequacy and quality of the academic unit's resources; the suitability of the structure and organisation of the curriculum; the appropriateness of the qualifications of the teaching staff; the quality of support services of the academic unit and its staffing with appropriate administrative personnel. The Institution also commits itself to conduct an annual internal evaluation of the new undergraduate programme (UGP), realised by the Internal Evaluation Group (IEG) in collaboration with the Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) of the Institution.

The quality assurance policy of the academic unit includes its commitment to implement quality procedures that will demonstrate: a) the adequacy of the structure and organisation of the curriculum, b) the pursuit of learning outcomes and qualifications in accordance with the European and National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education, c) the promotion of the quality and effectiveness of the teaching work, d) the adequacy of the qualifications of the teaching staff, e) the promotion of the quality and quantity of the research work of the members of the academic unit, f) the ways of linking teaching with research, g) the level of demand for graduates' qualifications in the labour market, h) the quality of support services, such as administration, libraries and student care, i) the implementation of an annual review and audit of the quality assurance system of the UGP through the cooperation of the Internal Evaluation Group (IEG) with the Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) of the Institution.

Relevant documentation

- Revised Quality Assurance Policy of the Institution
- Quality Assurance Policy of the academic unit
- Quality target setting of the Institution and the academic unit (utilising the S.M.A.R.T. methodology)

Study Programme Compliance

The EEAP members had the opportunity to verify compliance with the Quality Assurance Policy of the Institution and the Academic Unit. The Vice-Rector, the DECEC Head and members of MODIP and OMEA confirmed the implementation of their QA policy, which is available for all to see on the IHU's website.

In IHU's "Declaration of the Quality Policy" it states that IHU "seeks to become a pillar of excellence in education and research while emphasizing internationalization, innovative teaching and learning, advancement of research outcomes, developing entrepreneurship and linking the University to society."

The specific IHU QA Policy is also strategic and was developed and implemented through the collaboration of the key stakeholders such as MODIP, OMEA, DECEC faculty members, students and external community partners. The IHU underlines fundamental values that underpin its mission such as “academic freedom, free exchange of ideas, respect for academic and scientific ethical standards, commitment to scientific and socially responsible work.” The EEAP noted concrete plans to continue annual internal evaluations of the new ECEC.

The stated QA policy of the IHU and DECEC includes its commitment to implement quality procedures that, among other things, will result in a) a curriculum that subsumes high quality content, structured and organised to include clearly stated goals and measurable objectives, reflecting the European and National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education, reflecting as well current developments in the field of early childhood education and care, the promotion of high quality instruction including research-based pedagogy and practice, recruiting and retaining highly qualified faculty members, promotion of the research, linking teaching with research, assessing the level of demand for graduates' qualifications in the labour market, ensuring the quality of support services, such as administration, libraries and student care, and, importantly, planning annual internal evaluations of the quality assurance system of the ECEC through the cooperation of the MODIP, OMEA and School of Social Sciences.

The IHU QA goals are subsumed by the DECEC's annual quality goals structured by the OMEA to ensure the academic integrity and effective operation of the ECEC. QA procedures of the DECEC include but are not limited to two meetings per year of the OMEA and MODIP in order to monitor implementation of their policy objectives and related activities. MODIP oversees the work of the OMEA in the assessment measures undertaken, to evaluate the efficacy of the goals set for the Undergraduate Programme. Objectives of the DECEC's QA plan, in turn, reflect the IHU's QA mission and focus on the efficacy of the curriculum, course delivery, faculty support and research productivity, faculty-student engagement, student satisfaction, and adequacy of staffing and resources.

The completion of questionnaires by students and faculty members took place in previous years when the department belonged to ATEITH. However, due to the excessive difficulties and dysfunctions in the first years of universityisation, such as late institutional staffing of the new MODIP, change in the composition of the Governing Board, shortcomings in basic infrastructure, etc., combined with the effects of the COVID pandemic, no questionnaires were collected from students. These difficulties have now been addressed and revised questionnaires and other data collecting instruments have been developed in accordance with the QA plan to obtain a clear picture of any strengths and weaknesses related to the operation of the ECEC.

The EEAP verified that the OMEA, in its preparations of the internal evaluation review collaborated with the faculty members and other academic partners, along with integrating its knowledge of student needs and the needs of the external partners, e.g., political entities and

ECEC school internship sites. However, the students and external partners expressed a desire to become more involved in the Department’s quality assurance process and more specifically in the review of the curriculum content. Certain external stakeholders noted their interest in consulting with the Department regarding issues beyond their current offerings of cooperation, such as providing opportunities for continuing professional development either on campus or outside campus.

Panel Judgement

Principle 2: Quality assurance policy of the Institution and the academic unit	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

EEAP has found that IHU and DECEC have a well-developed quality assurance policy and dedicated teaching and administrative staff to implement it. The DECEC is struggling with a lack of available teaching spaces and facilities, an insufficient number of permanent teaching staff and high numbers of student admissions that place great demands on the existing teaching staff. The excessive workload imposed on the teaching staff will ultimately have a negative impact on the working environment and the quality of the offered education. Since the maintenance of high quality is largely due to the commitment of the staff and the positive dynamics that universityisation has brought about, the EEAP concludes that, in case the number of the faculty members are not increased and the teaching facilities are not added, the admission rate to the ECEC should be sharply reduced.

Principle 3: Design, Approval and Monitoring of the Quality of the New Undergraduate Programmes

Institutions should design the new 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.

*The Institutions develop their new undergraduate study programmes, following a well-defined procedure. The academic profile, the identity 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 European and **National Qualifications Framework** for Higher Education are described at this stage. An important new element in the structure of the programmes is the introduction of courses for the acquisition of digital skills. The above components should be taken into consideration and constitute the subject of the programme design, which, among other things, should include: elements of the Institution's strategy, labour market data and employment prospects of graduates, smooth progression of students throughout the stages of the programme, the anticipated student workload according to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), the option of providing work experience to the students, the linking of teaching and research, the international experience in study programmes of similar disciplines, the relevant regulatory framework, and the official procedure for the approval of the programme by the Institution.*

The procedure of approval or revision of the programmes provides for the verification of compliance with the basic requirements of the Standards by the Quality Assurance Unit (QAU).

Relevant documentation

- *Senate decision for the establishment of the UGP*
- *Curriculum structure: courses, course categories (including courses for the acquisition of digital skills), ECTS awarded, expected learning outcomes according to the EQF, internship, mobility opportunities.*
- *Labour market data regarding the employment of graduates, international experience in a related scientific field.*
- *Student Guide*
- *Course outlines*
- *Teaching staff (list of areas of specialisation, its relation to the courses taught, employment relationship)*
- *QAU minutes for the internal evaluation of the new study programme and its compliance with the Standards*

Study Programme Compliance

The EEAP verified that the ECEC was following the requirements concerning design, approval and monitoring of the quality of the programme. The orientation of the ECEC is based on the academic and research characteristics of the Department and is linked to the main axes, included in the Strategic Plan and the vision of the International Hellenic University, for providing and cultivating high-level studies with an international orientation. The design of the ECEC is governed by the basic principles of the Department's mission and is a continuation of the previous undergraduate programme. The student guide is complete, concise and appropriate, and the expected learning outcomes are in accordance with the EQF.

The procedure for the approval of the ECEC follows the provisions of the relevant legislation and includes verification of compliance with the requirements by MODIP. The ECEC was approved by the Senate, based on its resolution (no. 7/31/-07-2019) and was implemented for the first time in the first semester of the academic year 2019-20. The design of the ECEC was based on new research developments on early childhood and education, building on the experiences from the implementation of the previous program, evaluating discussions with students from the old undergraduate programme, and discussion and decisions by the Department Assembly.

The Department's mission is:

- a) to promote the creation, development and dissemination of knowledge in sciences of early childhood education and care of infants and preschool aged children through teaching and applied research, and
- b) to provide its students with adequate training in education and care of children in early childhood, ensuring them with conditions for a scientific and professional career.

Harmoniously combining theory with practice, the Department's curriculum covers the subject of education and care of infants and preschool aged children (from birth to the age of four), with a focus on contact and family support.

The organization of the courses of each type and by semester is presented in the Study Guide, which is complete, concise and appropriate. It describes the necessary scientific knowledge and skills that are an essential foundation for the students' scientific identity and professional development and career. The observance of all the obligations set out in the Study Guide is a basic obligation of every student. The Study Guide is updated every academic year and is posted on the Department's website (<https://www.ihu.gr/tmimata/agogis-frontidasproimi-paidiki-ilikia>). Program graduates are expected to be able to respond effectively to the needs of children, including their care and education, and to attend to the needs of their families. Learning outcomes also include ability to make decisions and undertake leadership positions in preschool education settings.

The ECEC includes a variety of courses that are central to early childhood teaching and child development: a) 26 Compulsory courses, b) 30 Elective-Compulsory courses, c) 2 Optional courses, d) Practical Training in early childhood care institutions, and e) a graduation thesis (compulsory for all ECEC students). The ECEC involves courses (2 Compulsory and 3 Optional Compulsory) that promote the use of ICT in early childhood education in order to enhance the students' learning process and acquisition of digital skills.

A course can be either Theoretical or Mixed-Content (that is, it can combine theory and laboratory work). Theoretical courses provide general information about a field of study along with related research questions. Laboratory work in mixed-content courses offers students the opportunity to practice the application of theoretical, professional or technological methods, to manage technical systems, to work in groups, to compose descriptive reports, etc. in small groups and under the supervision and guidance of the teaching staff so that students can develop the necessary skills.

The Programme is structured according to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). It includes courses that correspond to 240 credits. The duration of studies is eight (8) semesters including a semester of Practical Training/Internship. In every academic semester there are educational activities that correspond to 30 ECTS. The credits are proportionate to students' workload (1 credit corresponds to 25 hours of workload). Both the Compulsory and Optional Compulsory courses and the Optional courses correspond to 6 ECTS each, except for the Practical Training which offers 24 ECTS, Research Seminars which provide 12 ECTS and the Thesis which is credited with 18 ECTS.

The internship is carried out in private and public nursery/preschool centers in the 5th semester of their studies. The preparation of the final thesis allows students to deepen their knowledge in their field of studies by building upon the existing literature and research. Students can complete parts of their studies and their Practical Training/Internship in peer Educational Institutes and Nursery/Preschool Centres in the European Union through European Union-funded programmes.

The quality of the Internship in the profession is certified by the systematic supervision of the interns by supervisors, the completion of questionnaires by the students after the completion of the internship and the processing of the questionnaires by the Internship Committee.

This practical training is implemented in the fifth semester, for a period of 13 consecutive weeks. It is conducted in 4 days/week with a duration of 6 teaching hours/day. Participation in the practical training is not funded/paid. After the completion of the internship, the students submit an electronic file, which includes records of observation, planning, implementation and evaluation of actions, reflecting the convergence of theory and practice in each scientific field. The EEAP observed the high quality of the portfolios.

The Graduate Thesis of the students is compulsory. There are specific quality standards for its preparation, which are described in the Graduate Thesis Guide. The quality requirements and

the expected learning outcomes - of all constitutive elements of the programme - are of a high international standard. The EEAP was provided with examples of high-quality final thesis reports.

The ECEC is designed and updated on the basis of follow-up data from the Department's graduates, which records new needs and trends in the labour market. In addition, the participation of faculty members in national and international conferences, the operation of Research Workshops, as well as their involvement in research projects in Greece and internationally, are sources for the improvement of the programme. The programme is revised every year with the active involvement of the faculty members and students, their needs and suggestions and, as might be expected, the current research data, the developments in the field of Early Childhood Education and the evaluation of the current curriculum.

In its structure, content and orientation, the ECEC programme is comparable to similar programmes of prestigious higher education institutions in Greece and abroad and meets the criteria established by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAYEC) (see <https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/higher-ed/standards-summaries>). The graduates are largely absorbed by the Greek labour market and are competitive in corresponding workplaces abroad. In addition, the graduates are admitted to various Postgraduate and Doctoral Programmes both in Greece and abroad.

As already mentioned, the programme fulfils all the conditions to provide the childcare labour market with well-trained professionals. The teaching staff are well trained and research active and after the transition to the IHU have received recognition that has strengthened their academic confidence.

Panel Judgement

Principle 3: Design, approval and monitoring of the quality of the new undergraduate programmes	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

As previously noted, the DECEC is understaffed, and existing teaching staff are experiencing a heavy workload. Considering that the ECEC is in its first quadrennial, in the longer term and with the increasing number of students admitted, there are risks that the quality of education and the entire working environment may be negatively affected, due to limited funding and shortage of sufficient facilities adapted to the needs of a university programme.

Principle 4: Student-centred Approach in Learning, Teaching and Assessment of Students

The academic unit should ensure that the new 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.

In the implementation of student-centered learning and teaching, the academic unit:

- ✓ *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 application of 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*

Relevant documentation

- *Questionnaires for assessment by the students*
- *Regulation for dealing with students' complaints and appeals*
- *Regulation for the function of the academic advisor*
- *Reference to the planned teaching modes and assessment methods*

Study Programme Compliance

The diversity and the interdisciplinary nature of the cognitive subjects of the New Undergraduate Curriculum require the use of a variety of teaching methods. This is indicated in the departmental written accounts available to EEAP and confirmed in the discussions with teaching staff and students. The basic teaching approach is the combination of lectures with participatory interactive methods, encouraging the students to work together communicating through dialogue in a critical, scientific manner.

The students during interviews with the EEAP noted satisfaction with the quality of the support provided by the professors. They also stated that the course objectives are clear and the syllabus is well organized and relevant to the course objectives. However, despite all the efforts made to use a variety of methods, the lack of a suitable and adequate building infrastructure, combined with the large number of students, may obstruct a fuller implementation of the rich curriculum.

Teaching is supported by the online platform Moodle for synchronous and asynchronous learning management (free software), as well as the online conference platform zoom.

The assessment of students is done in many ways and is determined by the specific aspects of the individual courses. The form and criteria of assessment in the different courses are communicated to students at the beginning of the semester. When students are asking for feedback on a particular assessment, a justification is provided by the instructor and, in some cases, also examples of possible answers to examination questions. In the matter of examinations, the principle of 'transparency' is adopted, and the final result of the assessment is communicated to students within a period of time specified by the department's internal regulations.

The evaluation of teaching and the presence of Academic Advisors are essential components in the ECEC. The assessment of the courses by the students takes place every semester for all courses and is anonymous. Questionnaires with closed and open-ended questions are used and the results of the evaluation are made known to the instructors when the semester ends.

The DECEC's model of Academic Advisors is a well-organized student support system. The Department Assembly assigns advising duties to all faculty members for each newly admitted student, for any issues that the student may face during his/her studies. The Academic Advisor informs in writing the Departmental Assembly about the progress of the advisory process, mentioning any problems raised by the students, and proposing measures to address them.

The IHU also provides routines for the management of student complaints.

Apart from the shortcomings that have already been identified (understaffing, inadequate infrastructure, etc.), another issue raised by the students is the problematic accessibility to the campus due to insufficient transportation services from the City of Thessaloniki to the Campus in Sindos, located 17 kilometres away, which is often the reason for students' absence from classes. Accessibility to the campus can discourage students and negatively affect the learning process.

The EEAP found the methods, resources, academic advisement and assessment to be effective in assuring learning outcomes.

Panel Judgement

Principle 4: Student-centred approach in learning, teaching and assessment of students	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

Student participation in the learning process is encouraged but accessibility to the campus is often compromised. A student-centered approach cannot neglect this essential condition, which is mainly determined and regulated by external entities. Problematic accessibility to the campus may discourage many students from participating in the learning process, making the issue of transportation needs a critical challenge to overcome.

The absence of adequate classroom space also impedes a more flexible didactical design, and effective laboratory and experimental activities.

Student participation is voluntary and informal. EEAP recommends greater inclusion of student representatives on various committees within the DECEC.

Principle 5: Student Admission, Progression, Recognition of Academic Qualifications and Award of Degrees and Certificates of Competence of the New Study Programmes

Academic units should develop and apply published regulations addressing all aspects and phases of studies of the programme (admission, progression, recognition and degree award).

All the issues from the beginning to the end of studies should be governed by the internal regulations of the academic units. Indicatively:

- ✓ *the registration procedure of the admitted students and the necessary documents - according to the law - and the support of the newly admitted students*
- ✓ *student rights and obligations, and monitoring of student progression*
- ✓ *internship issues, granting of scholarships*
- ✓ *the procedures and terms for writing the thesis (diploma or degree)*
- ✓ *the procedure of award and recognition of degrees, the duration of studies, the conditions for progression and assurance of the progress of students in their studies*

as well as

- ✓ *the terms and conditions for enhancing student mobility*

Appropriate recognition procedures rely on relevant academic practice for recognition of credits among various European academic departments and Institutions in line with the principles of the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region. 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).

All the above must be made public within the context of the Student Guide.

Relevant documentation

- *Internal regulation for the operation of the new study programme*
- *Regulation of studies, internship, mobility and student assignments*
- *Printed Diploma Supplement*

Certificate from the President of the academic unit that the diploma supplement is awarded to all graduates without exception together with the degree or the certificate of completion of studies

Study Programme Compliance

The DECEC is committed to and complies to the Internal Regulations of the IHU, and also to the Rules of Study of the ECEC programme, approved by the IHU's Steering Committee.

Students are admitted to the Department of Early Childhood Education and Care (DECEC) in accordance the legislation provisions on admission to higher education. The registration of the admitted students at the Department is done electronically in accordance with the instructions

issued by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs every year. The necessary registration documents and all other information pertaining to registration are posted on the Department's website. Immediately after registration, the students receive codes for access to the DECEC's 1) webmail, 2) PYTHIA platform, where the students declare the courses, they will take each semester and be informed of their grades, and 3) Moodle platform, for online synchronous and asynchronous education.

All students have access to the VPN remote connection to utilize the services provided by the University Campus, such as, for example, electronic journals, books and articles from the library, and the services of the Ministry of Education regarding acquisition of academic ID card (φοιτητικό πάσο) and selection of course literature for the courses registered in each semester (EUDOXOS platform).

At the beginning of the academic year, the Department organizes a "Welcome event for first-year students", during which the teaching and administrative staff of the Department informs students about the curriculum, the use of the various websites and their content, the student mobility programmes (ERASMUS+), the operation of the Central Library, and the obligations and rights of students during their studies.

The Department's website contains all information regarding the academic calendar of the IHU, such as the start and end dates of the semesters, the examination periods, holidays and celebrations, etc. There is also announced the Assembly's decision about the courses to be assigned to temporary teaching staff.

The students' study progress and the support provided to them by the DECEC take place through specific procedures, namely: 1) through contacts with the teaching staff at predetermined times from the beginning of the semester, 2) through the institution of the Student Advisor (see <https://www.ihu.gr/symvoulos-spoudon>), 3) through the electronic platforms for processing services related to the smooth conduct of the studies, such as the procedure to be followed regarding the recognition of courses from previous studies.

The Thesis (18 ECTS) and the course "Practical Training - Applied Activities" (24 ECTS) are compulsory. Alongside the conduct of the practicum during the 5th semester, in early childhood education and care institutions selected by the Department, the students attend the course "Seminar of Applied Practical Activities". The aim of the course is, among others, to link theory with applied pedagogical practice (also see p. 12 in this report, under "*e. The structure of studies*").

Within the framework of the ERASMUS+ mobility programme, students receive funding to study at European universities, with which the Department/University has signed bilateral agreements for mutual mobility of students and teachers. The ECEC is structured on the basis of the European System Transfer Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and includes courses corresponding to 240 ECTS credits.

The EEAP verifies that the Department's ECEC operates in full compliance with higher education legislation, the Bologna process and the operating regulations of the IHU. The Department has developed an internal quality assurance system for the ECEC with established procedures for annual internal evaluations, to reassess, adjust and update the content of the programme and its overall operation. In the case of the ECEC, it should be noted that it is in its fourth year of operation and has not yet been externally evaluated.

Upon the completion of all requirements a diploma with the supplement is issued and awarded.

Panel Judgement

Principle 5: Student admission, progression, recognition of academic qualifications, and award of degrees and certificates of competence of the new study programmes	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

None.

Principle 6: Ensuring the Competence and High Quality of the Teaching Staff of the New Undergraduate Study Programmes

Institutions should assure themselves of the competence, the level of knowledge and skills of the teaching staff of the academic units, and apply fair and transparent processes for their recruitment, training and further development.

The Institution should attend to the adequacy of the teaching staff of the academic unit, the appropriate staff-student ratio, the suitable categories of staff, the appropriate subject areas and specialisations, the fair and objective recruitment process, the high research performance, the training – development, the staff development policy (including participation in mobility schemes, conferences and educational leaves- as mandated by law).

More specifically, 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 recognise 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.

Relevant documentation

- *Procedures and criteria for teaching staff recruitment*
- *Regulations or employment contracts, and obligations of the teaching staff*
- *Policy for staff recruitment, support and development*
- *Performance of the teaching staff in scientific-research and teaching work, also based on internationally recognised systems of scientific evaluation (e.g., Google Scholar, Scopus, etc.)*

Study Programme Compliance

The EEAP deems the competence of the teaching staff of the undergraduate study programme to be of high quality.

Specifically, the IHU supports the professionalism of the teaching staff, and its declared quality policy is to pursue excellence in research and research-based education. It aims to attract top researchers as well as talented students. The EEAP observed the DECEC's active endeavours to successfully attract highly qualified academic staff. At the level of the Department the quality policy regarding the development of the teaching staff focuses on the continuous adaptation to scientific developments and the improvement of their teaching and research skills, with the aim of optimising the overall effectiveness of their academic duties.

The faculty members are experts and qualified in the appropriate subject areas of the ECEC. They are active in developing projects and international cooperation programs and promote mobility of students and teachers. The members of the department participate as scientific

leaders in European competitive research projects, as external researchers in European competitive research projects, and as scientific leaders in institutional NSRF (ΕΣΠΑ) projects.

At the level of declarations, vision and noble goals, the EEAP notes that the IHU and the DECEC strive for the continuous improvement of its teaching staff in order to provide excellent teaching and research work. In practice, however, and due to external/structural factors, the Institution as a whole, and the Department in particular, are facing immense difficulties which, if not addressed, may degrade the quality of its services. In particular, a major challenge that the Department had to face was the universityisation process, with its numerous bureaucratic procedures, without adequate administrative and financial support by the state. The funding level is not consistent with the increased requirements of the Department in terms of staff to support the upgrading of its curricula at the undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral level. The remarkable work and achievements of the understaffed DECE's administrative and teaching staff from 2019/20 to date, and in the midst of the CBI pandemic, is commendable.

The understaffing is severe and, if not addressed immediately, is likely to undermine the potential for qualitative improvement of the ECEC, and the realisation of the intentions to support the career development of the staff.

It should be also stressed here that the permanent teaching staff of the Department is only 6 faculty members, while much of the academic work that is carried out relies on the temporary teaching staff of approximately 12-15 members. This fact entails several negative consequences, such as excessive workload, especially administrative, by the permanent staff including their involvement in many committees, affecting their opportunities for high level research activities and for academic planning of vital importance. Another structural problem that causes problems in the planning and implementation of teaching is due to the bureaucratic procedures of the IHU and the Ministry of Education as many of the contracted temporary staff are attending their duties long after the start of the academic year. Despite all the declarations of support by the IHU, it is noted during the EEAP's discussions with the staff that no incentives are provided at an organised institutional level. The faculty members research production and the improvement of teaching based on research data (research informed teaching) take place on a purely individual and collegial basis driven by a deep sense of academic professionalism.

The competence and level of knowledge and skills of the teaching staff of the ECEC department was evident. However, the workload is very heavy with implications on the effectiveness of the pedagogy and practice of the teaching staff. Again, under such circumstances, quality maintenance and program enhancement cannot be guaranteed in the long term without recruitment of new appropriate personnel and the presence of adequate resources.

Panel Judgement

Principle 6: Ensuring the competence and high quality of the teaching staff of the new undergraduate study programmes	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

The “universityisation“ process, the requirements of new research conditions and anticipated large number of new students for the two new master’s and doctoral programs pose challenges to the professional and personal development of the teaching staff.

The workload is very demanding and may exceed the legal framework; it cannot be supported in the long term without the IHU’s greater commitment to providing new, appropriate human resources that can enable the personal and professional development of the staff.

Principle 7: Learning Resources and Student Support of the New Undergraduate Programmes

Institutions should have adequate funding to meet the needs for the operation of the academic unit and the new study programme as well as the means to cover all their 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 resources, on a planned and long-term basis, to support learning and academic activity in general, in order to offer students the best possible level of studies. The above means include facilities such as, the necessary general and specific libraries and possibilities for access to electronic databases, study rooms, educational and scientific equipment, information and communication services, support and 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 students, students with disabilities), in addition to 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. Students should be informed about all available services. In delivering support services, the role of support and administration staff is crucial and therefore this segment of staff needs to be qualified and have opportunities to develop its competences.

Relevant documentation

- *Detailed description of the infrastructure and services made available by the Institution to the academic unit to support learning and academic activity (human resources, infrastructure, services, etc.) and the corresponding specific commitment of the Institution to financially cover these infrastructure-services from state or other resources*
- *Administrative support staff of the new undergraduate programme (job descriptions, qualifications and responsibilities)*
- *Informative / promotional material given to students with reference to the available services*

Study Programme Compliance

The EEAP gleaned relevant information from the documents provided and interviews regarding the effectiveness of the new department in serving the students.

As previously reported (see p. 12 of this report) the number of students in the new ECEC programme has increased since 2019 to currently include 535. If also the students from the previous programme are included, i.e., those enrolled to upgrade their education to the same level as the new one, the total number of students rises to 778. In addition, the Department participates in the Interdepartmental Postgraduate Programme "Digital and soft skills in education", in which 226 students were accepted in 2021. When this student volume is juxtaposed with the limited number of permanent faculty members (about 6), and only two

administrators, there is reason to question whether the ECEC has the resources to be sustainable in the longer term as a university programme of acceptable quality.

The Department disposes four (4) classrooms exclusively for teaching, with a capacity of 50 people, equipped with projector and internet access. The unit also affords six (6) multipurpose rooms/laboratories with a capacity varying from 20 to 40 persons, including a computer laboratory with 20 workstations (capacity of 20 people). All these spaces are equipped with a projector and internet access, although they are in need of refreshment and modernization.

Nevertheless, the provided facilities only marginally serve the teaching needs of the new undergraduate programme but seem not sufficient to ensure an attractive learning environment allowing and encouraging pedagogical creativity and innovation.

In many cases the size of the classrooms discourages attendance by all students in the seminars/lectures. Even though the design of the study program encourages flexibility with a diversity of working methods (seminars, lectures, laboratory experiences, field experiences, study & analysis of bibliography, artistic development, interactive teaching, educational visits, elaboration of a study project, writing assignments), the physical environment limits the full potential of these methods.

All facilities are located to the Alexandria Campus in Sindos, approximately 17 km from the center of Thessaloniki. Problems with limited transportation to and from the Sindos campus often impede accessibility for all and affect student attendance, something that the EEAP was informed is an issue that remains unresolved since the campus was built.

On the DECEC's website the information on student welfare issues is general and limited. On the Department's website, the information on student welfare issues offered by the University is very general and limited. The EEAP did not have time to visit all facilities and student services, but discussions revealed that there are shortcomings in the provision of quality services to students and staff (such as substandard student dormitories, non-existent places for fitness, cultural activities and social interaction, etc.) due to underfunding and understaffing. Investments by IHU in that kind of infrastructure, including security arrangements, signposting of the buildings, public lighting of locations, and improved accessibility to campus, is a matter of quality of life on the campus.

The EEAP agrees with the DECE's desire of setting up of a model nursery school operating on the IHU's premises.

In conclusion, the universatysation of the DECE process and attendant creation master's and doctoral degrees' diploma for the department has created the need for expanded learning resources including but not limited to library and reading room materials. The IHU will need to find ways to address the costs to achieve the expansion of learning resources and infrastructure needed to insure the effectiveness of all the new department's programs.

Panel Judgement

Principle 7: Learning resources and student support of the new undergraduate programmes	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	X
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

DECEC needs to significantly strengthen its administrative services and be provided by IHU with adequate funding to meet the high demands for the operation of the unit and the new study programme, as well as the means to cover all necessary teaching and learning needs.

Local authorities and organizations or companies should collaborate in order to improve/succeed the working and learning conditions and for a better academic image and attraction of the IHU in general and the DECEC in particular.

The limited capacity and availability of suitable rooms impedes teaching and other activities. The classrooms are small for the number of students using them, and immediate action should be taken to substantially reduce the ratio of lecturers to students, which currently far exceeds the European average. Issues related to the functionality and safety of the facilities on the Sindos campus should also be addressed with urgency.

The IHU should support the establishment of a model nursery school operating on the institution's premises.

Principle 8: Collection, Analysis and Use of Information for the Organisation and Operation of New Undergraduate Programmes

The Institutions and their academic units 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.

Effective procedures for collecting and analysing information on the operation of Institutions, academic units and study programmes feed data into the internal quality assurance system. The following data is of interest: key performance indicators for the student body profile, student progression, success and drop-out rates, student satisfaction with the programme, availability of learning resources and student support. The completion of the fields of National Information System for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (NISQA) should be correct and complete with the exception of the fields that concern graduates in which a null value is registered.

Relevant documentation

- *Report from the National Information System for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (NISQA) at the level of the Institution, the department and the new UGP*
- *Operation of an information management system for the collection of administrative data for the implementation of the programme (Students' Record)*
- *Other tools and procedures designed to collect data on the academic and administrative functions of the academic unit and the study programme*

Study Programme Compliance

The internal evaluation team OMEA collects information and data by communicating with the faculty members and academic associates of the Department, external affiliates, and all the stakeholders with which the Department collaborates. In particular, the OMEA works closely with the staff of the Department's Secretariat in the collection and analysis of relevant data.

All the above-mentioned are involved and contribute with comments and suggestions to the final internal evaluation report. In addition to the information obtained from the lecturers of the Department, used are evidently all the electronic data sources maintained by the institution for students and courses (e.g. the system PYTHIA, Moodle platform, etc.), as well as the data maintained by the student welfare department. Questionnaires are also used which are filled in from time to time by students and lecturers.

The monitoring procedures for the program's response to the changing demands of science, society and professional bodies, internally and externally, utilize the views of current students and alumni (from the old undergraduate programme, running before the transition to IHU), the sample surveys conducted by the Liaison Office and the views of the faculty members. Ultimately, on the basis of all this information, the Department Assembly discuss and take decisions to shape and update the Undergraduate Programme Curriculum.

The first entrants to the ECEC were admitted in 2019 and therefore there is no data yet on the graduation rate. For the same reason, there is currently no specific procedure in place to monitor graduates' professional career, ease of finding employment and the relationship

between the knowledge and skills acquired at undergraduate level and subsequent relevance. The only feedback at present comes from the undergraduate students' internship hosts. However, the DECEC Assembly established an Alumni Committee, with the task to contribute in the future to the process of monitoring the professional development of graduates.

The evaluation process of students is in the responsibility of the instructor to whom each course is assigned. The main assessment procedure is the written final course examination with either essay or multiple-choice questions. However, depending on the nature of the course, alternative forms of assessment, such as oral or project-based assessment, are also used. In special cases (e.g. students with specific learning difficulties) the possibility of an oral/alternative examination is given. The transparency of the student examination process is ensured by the invigilation of the students during the examinations, the access of the students to their graded text and the discussion of possible objections with the responsible teacher, the public announcement of the grades and the examination form. The assessment criteria are known to the students, and indicated in the course outlines on the asynchronous course platform Moodle used by the IHU.

The procedure for the preparation, completion and evaluation of the compulsory final thesis is also transparent, with specified requirements and quality standards, which are described in the Thesis Guide.

As mentioned earlier, the new undergraduate programme was designed and implemented in 2019-20, after the DECEC's universityization, and in the following two years operated into distance mode. Due to this transitional situation it was not possible to smoothly collect data as it was done during the period before universityisation for the old programme. Nor was it feasible since the programme has not yet completed its cycle.

However, the evaluation of the courses by the students continues as a regular process and is seen as means that contributes to the continuous improvement of the learning outcome. The course evaluation by students is organised every semester for all courses and is carried out after the 8th week of the course, so that students are able to form an opinion on the courses they are evaluating. Students are informed electronically about the activation of the system within a certain period of time, and are invited to fill in the relevant questionnaire for each course. The questionnaires are completed anonymously. However, the percentage of students completing the questionnaire is low.

Other ways of collecting data than then can be used for programme improvement is through the IHU's electronic data collecting and processing systems which are common to all Departments, such as the Electronic Student Register (Ηλεκτρονικό Φοιτητολόγιο) for students and lecturers.

The department disposes electronic access to information on quality indicators and other services provided by the MODIP, for applications, security issues, etc. These systems provide statistics on various matters which are collected and examined on a case-by-case basis.

The evaluation of the courses is submitted to and reviewed by the Chair of the Department, the DECEC's OMEA team and IHU's MODIP team.

Panel Judgement

Principle 8: Collection, analysis and use of information for the organisation and operation of new undergraduate programmes	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

The low percentage of students completing the course evaluation questionnaires should be of serious concern to the Department in order to find better ways of getting their feedback.

Principle 9: Public Information Concerning the New Undergraduate Programmes

Institutions and academic units should publish information about their teaching and academic activities in a direct and readily accessible way. The relevant information should be up-to-date, clear and objective.

Information on the Institutions' activities is useful for prospective and current students, graduates, other stakeholders and the public. Therefore, Institutions and their academic units must provide information about their activities, including the new undergraduate programmes they offer, the intended learning outcomes, the degrees awarded, the teaching, learning and assessment procedures used, the pass rates and the learning opportunities available to their students. Information is also provided, to the extent possible, on graduate employment perspectives.

Relevant documentation

- *Dedicated segment on the website of the department for the promotion of the new study programme*
- *Bilingual version of the website of the academic unit with complete, clear and objective information*
- *Provision for website maintenance and updating*

Study Programme Compliance

The EEAP determined that the IHU and the DECEC have put in place a comprehensive public information system. Through our review of the documents and our interviews with the Department Head, members of MODIP, OMEA, faculty, administrative staff and students, it was clear that the Department's website in Greek and English language is up-to-date and contains rich and useful information for prospective and current students, graduates, other stakeholders and the public. In particular, it contains information about its facilities, staff, undergraduate programs and student guides, announcements, events, and its policy of Quality Assurance. Moreover, the public can find information about the library, including the specialized library and the administration office (the secretaries) of the Department.

Information about management of the courses and the student's transcript is accessible through the website's PYTHIA-system. Notices about the annual reception for prospective students, as well as the activities of members of the academic community (conferences, distinctions, professional development sessions, full biographies) are also posted on the Department's website. It further contains useful links with information concerning the trends and directions in the field of early childhood education in Europe and worldwide.

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

Information days are held for students as well as high school students. Prospective students receive documents about the ECEC program?

During the meeting of the EEAP the graduates of the Department were very satisfied with the important communication role of the Department in clarifying their program. It should be noted that the website of the Department that is still under construction requires **security measures**.

Panel Judgement

Principle 9: Public information concerning the new undergraduate programmes	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	X
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

The institution's website is not fully developed and needs to be constantly monitored, maintained and kept up to date. The EEAP notes a digitized course schedule of the Department and e-Newsletter could further enhance the DECEC's internal and external communication and publicity. In this way, the current students and alumni of the Department could have direct information about important and timely educational, research and other cultural activities of the Department. A fully developed website will also enable greater interaction among students, faculty, prospective students and external partners. Of importance to underscore, in regard to maintenance of the website and the e-based communication strategy, is the consideration and addressing of security measures.

Principle 10: Periodic Internal Review of the New Study Programmes

Institutions and academic units should have in place an internal quality assurance system, for the audit and annual internal review of their new 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 the new study programmes aim at maintaining the level of educational provision and creating 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.

Relevant documentation

- *Procedure for the re-evaluation, redefinition and updating of the curriculum*
- *Procedure for mitigating weaknesses and upgrading the structure of the UGP and the learning process*
- *Feedback processes on strategy implementation and quality targeting of the new UGP and relevant decision-making processes (students, external stakeholders)*
- *Results of the annual internal evaluation of the study programme by the QAU and the relevant minutes*

Study Programme Compliance

The EEAP learned that due to the transition to a university from ATEITH process, the formation of MODIP did not take place for the academic year 2019-2020.

The completion of questionnaires by students and lecturers took place in previous years when the department still technically belonged to ATEITH.

The EEAP verified that the IHU and DECEC have formulated clear and cohesive plans for periodic monitoring, review and internal evaluations calculated to ensure the quality of the newly institutionalized UGP program.

Although the first internal review and evaluation occurred just two years ago at the inception of the undergraduate programme as a “university” program of study, a comprehensive plan for monitoring, review and revision of the DECEC UGP has been put into place.

The QA Policy operates within the DECEC to ensure the ongoing progress and refinement of the various aspects of quality associated with the ECEC. The QA plan elaborated in the earlier section of this EEAP Report includes strategies to ensure intensive and comprehensive review, monitoring and annual internal evaluation of the curriculum, coursework, learning outcomes, technology, support services and career mobility of the graduates. The DECEC faculty have notably established culture of collaboration that values research and educational assessment even as new faculty members assumed their posts during the past year. The current QA Strategic Plan, from the review of documents provided and interviews of the EEAP, ensures optimal assessment outcomes that can be translated into effective action plans.

The first internal evaluation of the UGP curriculum elucidates the critical role of ensuring the program’s learning outcomes, for example, by integrating into coursework and internship experiences the latest research in ECEC and the changing needs of Greek society. 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.

The Dean, DECEC Head, ADIP and OMEA members and faculty articulated their understanding and ability to identify and collect data from reliable sources and to utilize appropriate procedures to obtain a clear picture of any strengths and weaknesses related to the operation of the ECEC. The strategies included in developing the first Internal Evaluation of the undergraduate programme included, for example, sources such as the feedback of DECEC faculty members, data sources kept at the institution for the students and the courses (e.g., the PYTHIA system and the Moodle platform, already mentioned in other parts of this report), and institutional data related to student welfare.

The new undergraduate study programme is clear and complete and its structure rational and clearly articulated.

Panel Judgement

Principle 10: Periodic internal review of the new study programmes	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

The EEAP recommends implementation of its internal evaluation strategies to ensure the continuous improvement of DECEC as it heads towards completion of its first four-year cycle of operation. The internal review strategies in place also augur well for sustaining and strengthening ties with international, national, and local social or state collaborators.

Principle 11: Regular External Evaluation and Accreditation of the New Undergraduate Programmes

The new undergraduate study programmes should regularly undergo evaluation by panels of external experts set by HAHE, aiming at accreditation. The results of the external evaluation and accreditation are used for the continuous improvement of the Institutions, academic units and study programmes. 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 panel of independent experts. HAHE grants accreditation of programmes, based on the Reports submitted by the panels, 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 Standards, and as a catalyst for improvement, while opening new perspectives towards the international standing of the awarded degrees. Both academic units and institutions must consistently consider the conclusions and the recommendations submitted by the panels of experts for the continuous improvement of the programme.

Relevant documentation

- *Progress report on the results from the utilisation of the recommendations of the external evaluation of the Institution and of the IQAS Accreditation Report.*

Study Programme Compliance

The reviewed UGP of the DECEC is an evolution of the corresponding programme of ATEITH and was revised when it was incorporated into the IHU in 2019. Because of that it has not completed its first four-year cycle, nor has it been subjected to an external evaluation review. The Department has only carried out an internal evaluation, which highlights the benefits of a systematic approach to the concept of evaluation within the Department as a whole. However, due to the lack of sufficient data from students and lecturers a multifaceted and comprehensive assessment was not feasible.

As neither the IHU nor the DECEC has yet been evaluated externally, so there are no relevant external evaluation recommendations on which the Department can rely and present in a report progress. However, what exists is the IHU's Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS) which has relatively recently been evaluated. The recommendations from this evaluation concerning the quality assurance system are therefore also applicable at the level of department. The quality policy of the Department is in line with the quality policy of the IHU and is committed to achieving all the objectives and strategic goals to continuously improve the quality of the educational, research and administrative work needed, by defining the means, actions and ways of achieving them. For example, based on the recommendations of the internal evaluation, the OMEA and the faculty of the Department try to activate students towards increasing participation in the evaluation process and, concurrently, plan to organise

a workshop on the internal evaluation process. The Department's view is that such initiatives will lay the foundations of a culture of evaluation in the Department.

The EEAP recognizes and confirms the general problem of institutional nature regarding the implementation of any "commitments" and target setting for quality improvement, which unfortunately exceeds the control of the Department and the faculty members. In IHU, as in all Greek universities, there is no procedure for the autonomous implementation of objectives set by the Departments based on their own financial resources, without the support of the competent services of IHU, as there is no institutionalized departmental budget.

Worth noting is that the DECEC acknowledges and affirms the positive aspects of implementing recurrent evaluation procedures, aimed at promoting and improving the work provided, and welcomes and plans for external reviews.

The EEAP is confident that all members of the DECEC's staff are aware of the importance of external reviews and are committed to adhering to any possible recommendations for improvement.

Panel Judgement

Principle 11: Regular external evaluation and accreditation of the new undergraduate programmes	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	X
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

The Department is urged to institutionalise the convening of an annual workshop for discussion and consultation on the targeting and implementation of the quality assurance objectives of the programme, ensuring the participation of all stakeholders (MODIP, staff, students, external partners and stakeholders).

EEAP strongly recommend the DECEC to initiate the appropriate procedures to launch an external evaluation of the ECEC undergraduate programme, immediately after the completion of its first cycle the spring semester of 2023.

Principle 12: Monitoring the Transition from Previous Undergraduate Study Programmes to the New Ones

Institutions and academic units apply procedures for the transition from previously existing undergraduate study programmes to new ones, in order to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Standards.

Applies in cases where the department implements, in addition to the new UGPs, any pre-existing UGPs from departments of former Technological Educational Institutions (TEI) or from departments that were merged / renamed / abolished.

Institutions should implement procedures for the transition from former UGPs to new ones, in order to ensure their compliance with the requirements of the Standards. More specifically, the institution and the academic unit must have a) the necessary learning resources, b) appropriate teaching staff, c) structured curriculum (courses, ECTS, learning outcomes), d) study regulations, award of diploma and diploma supplement, and e) system of data collection and use, with particular reference to the data of the graduates of the pre-existing UGP. In this context, the Institutions and the academic units prepare a plan for the foreseen transition period of the existing UGP until its completion, the costs caused to the Institution by its operation as well as possible measures and proposals for its smooth delivery and termination. This planning includes data on the transition and subsequent progression of students in the respective new UGP of the academic unit, as well as the specific graduation forecast for students enrolled under the previous status.

Relevant documentation

- *The planning of the Institution for the foreseen transition period, the operating costs and the specific measures or proposals for the smooth implementation and completion of the programme*
- *The study regulations, template for the degree and the diploma supplement*
- *Name list of teaching staff, status, subject and the course they teach / examine*
- *Report of Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) on the progress of the transition and the degree of completion of the programme. In the case of UGP of a former Technological Educational Institution (TEI), the report must include a specific reference to how the internship was implemented*

Study Programme Compliance

The academic unit has made arrangements for the progression of students enrolled in the pre-existing undergraduate programme, who wish to continue their studies in the new one.

The transition procedures have been implemented effectively in order to position the ECEC as a new undergraduate program of the IHU. The transition phase involved following the pertinent regulations and planning to ensure that the highest standards of ECEC were maintained in the newly formed department program. The EEAP observed that the various committees such as MODIP, OMEA and faculty members collaborated effectively to ensure that necessary curriculum, courses, learning outcomes were updated and structured in alignment with the European Higher Education Area, the Bologna Process and ECTS, and the degree template and diploma supplement put into place. Notably, the practical experiences of

the ECEC were modified to reflect current regulations, and needs and issues, to the extent feasible.

The transition process also focused on transfer of student data from the former TEITH entity to the IHU and the DECEC. This process was well-organized and made the transition a smooth one for students, faculty, the IHU administration and external partners.

Faculty members have continued their productivity in terms of research, EU funded projects, publications and conferences. These initiatives have helped publicize distinctive features of the program and faculty work. The connections with many universities within Greece, Europe and the United States partners has also continued unabated during the transition and into the foreseeable future.

The research foci of the competitive EU projects have helped the department fulfill several QA goals as part of the transition. In addition to research based pedagogy and practice, the goal of maintaining student satisfaction in their studies and in their life, experience is enhanced by the incorporation of wellness and resilience themes in the curriculum. The pandemic has created a sense of unease and worry that educators need to be mindful of and to address. The DECEC has done exactly that in applying and testing these approaches for the classroom.

The establishment of 5 department committees outside of MODIP has helped the transition: OMEA, Alumni, Undergraduate, Graduate, Practical Training committees have helped guide the functioning of the program implementation of objectives.

It is admirable that the DECEC, without the allocation of any special funds and with essentially the same staff, local facilities and equipment, has been able to rise to the challenge of upgrading its environment to the requirements of a university-level standard. Much work remains to be done so that DECEC can confidently ensure the sustainability of the ECEC programme in the future and continue to provide high quality education and training. The staff is highly competent and doing their utmost.

Panel Judgement

Principle 12: Monitoring the transition from previous undergraduate study programmes to the new ones	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

The IHU needs to recognize and address the problem of insufficient resources to help create the right conditions for the DECEC to sustain high academic quality.

PART C: CONCLUSIONS

I. Features of Good Practice

- Collaboration and dedication (including volunteerism) of faculty members in seeking to actualize the DECEC's research-based learning outcomes
- Faculty expertise and experience is a strong point for effective delivery of instruction and high level of faculty-student engagement
- DECEC includes several research and assessment courses that mirror the department's valuing of the program's objectives and QA measures, research and mentoring, peer interaction and learning in small groups
- Current competitive multi-national collaborative research projects (involving several countries) that enrich the curriculum and bring academic distinction to the faculty involved, the DECEC and the IHU
- Student/faculty mobility potential (post Covid) through ERASMUS program is in place
- Existence of robust external partnerships
- Well-established QA operating principles and organizational committees

II. Areas of Weakness

- Students interviewed express a desire for more practical experiences during their program of study. Desired field experiences could be embedded as a requirement for certain otherwise theoretically driven courses. It is recognized that the high enrolment of students in the DECEC prevents some from completing desired laboratory courses.
- External stakeholders, while satisfied with the current collaboration, would like to see greater involvement in the Department's activities and programme design, as well as a greater range of in-service training opportunities for practising early childhood educators.

III. Recommendations for Follow-up Actions

- Resources are needed to continue the transition and progress of the DECEC. The inclusion of master's programs and a doctoral program (and enrolment of additional students), pose additional challenges for the current faculty and teaching/training space resources.

- Sustainability of the DECEC warrants adequate financing since the Department is facing increasing pressure of growing student enrolment and the increased academic demands of the new Graduate Program ECEC.
- Recruitment of qualified faculty members is urgently needed to cope with the inordinately high faculty-student ratio.
- Adequate classroom space is sorely lacking to make the course attendance available to ALL students.
- Issues related to the functionality and safety of the facilities on the Sindos campus should also be addressed with urgency.
- The campus is located quite far from the center of the town and the students come from distant localities. The students and staff express frustration with the inadequate transportation system. A solution is needed that perhaps would require the action of local, regional and governmental authorities, organizations and companies.
- The IHU should support the establishment of a model nursery school operating on the institution's premises.
- Provide a department-wide welcome and orientation day for incoming students
- Maintain specialized library resources, adequate hours of operation and space

IV. Summary & Overall Assessment

The Principles where full compliance has been achieved are: **1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, and 12.**

The Principles where substantial compliance has been achieved are: **7, 9 and 11.**

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

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

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

The members of the External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel

Name and Surname

Signature

- 1. Prof. Petros Gougoulakis**
Stockholms Universitet, Stockholm, Sweden (Chair)
- 2. Prof. John Spiridakis**
St John's University, New York City, New York, USA
- 3. Assoc. Prof. Helene Papadoudi-Ros**
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- 4. Ms. Ioulia Paidi, Student**
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