ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ
HELLENIC REPUBLIC

Accreditation Report
for the Undergraduate Study Programme of:

Special Education
Institution: University of Thessaly
Date: 11 December 2021

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

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PART A: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE REVIEW

I. The External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel

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

1. **Prof. Leonidas Kyriakides** (Chair)
   University of Cyprus, Cyprus

2. **Prof. Emerita Eleni Katsarou**
   University of Illinois Chicago, United States of America

3. **Assoc. Prof. Andreas Philaretou**
   European University Cyprus, Cyprus

II.   Review Procedure and Documentation

Due to travel restrictions and lockdowns, the accreditation of the Undergraduate Study Programme of Special Education of the University of Thessaly was conducted fully in a remote mode, using the Zoom teleconferencing tool. The Hellenic Authority for Higher Education (HAHE) provided the External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel (EEAP) members with a packet of materials ahead of the review process that included: the Department's Accreditation Proposal, a Quality Assurance Policy Document, Quality Assurance Goals, and Quality Data, as well as a wealth of supportive material and appendices. The Department further provided the EEAP with the accreditation file and appendices for easy access, as well as additional supportive material including videos, sample of student work, course assignments, Practicum assignments, student Theses, and faculty scholarship samples. The Panel was also provided with HAHE's accreditation guidelines and was invited to attend an orientation session before the accreditation visit. The EEAP met as a group before the accreditation teleconferences to plan ahead, coordinate division of work and process to be followed, and discuss issues that emerged from the preliminary study of the material at that point.

The virtual accreditation visit extended over three days, starting on December 6th, 2021. We first met with Prof. Ioannis Theodorakis, Vice-Rector and President of MODIP and with Prof. Georgia Andreou, Head of the Department, for a short overview of the Undergraduate Programme. We then met with OMEA and MODIP representatives to discuss the degree of compliance of the programme to the Quality Standards for Accreditation. This day was concluded with debriefing meetings with EEAP members only. On the second day of our visit (December 7th), we met with EEAP, teaching staff members, administrative staff members, current students at different points in their degrees and graduates. We were also given an on-line tour of the classrooms, lecture halls, libraries laboratories, and other facilities. This second day was again concluded with debriefing meetings with EEAP members only. On the third day of our visit (December 8th), we met with employers and social partners to discuss the relations of the Department with external stakeholders from the private and the public sector. A debriefing meeting with EEAP members only was then followed to discuss the outcomes of the on-line review and begin drafting the oral report. We also met with OMEA and MODIP representatives, the Vice-Rector/President of MODIP, and the Head of the Department.

From the very beginning, the Department welcomed us with warmth, collegiality and openness and they were all eager to answer our questions and address our concerns. Their presentations were informative, emphasizing the University's commitment to quality improvement in teaching, research and community outreach. A good number of faculty attended our meetings, a sign of involvement in departmental affairs. From our interactions and conversations with representatives of the department, leadership, faculty members and administrative staff, current students and alumni as well as community partners we recognized that the Department takes its commitment to quality assurance seriously and are constantly working towards more compliance to the HAHE quality standards.

In closing, the EEAP would like to note the challenges of conducting an accreditation virtually. Despite the flawless and truly exemplary organization of the virtual visit on the part of our hosts, we feel that an on-site visit would have given us a much better sense of the work that is taking place, would have done justice to the Department's achievements, and would have given the

committee more formal and informal opportunities to inquire about different aspects of the accreditation and the proposal.

III.   Study Programme Profile

The Pedagogical Department in Special Education (PTEA) was founded in the academic year of 1998-99 and has operated as part of the School of Humanities at University of Thessaly. It is currently the only Special Education undergraduate programme in the country. The Department was created with the goal of fostering and promoting the field of special education studies, educating teachers for pre-school and primary education for students with special needs and advancing research and development in special education.

 Four overarching aims inform the undergraduate curriculum: a) improvement of the quality of studies and teaching; b) rational division of coursework along the lines of workload and respective ECTS; c) meeting learning goals and acquiring knowledge and skills necessary for the development of a contemporary scholar and educator who can meet the needs and challenges of special education; and d) acquiring work experience through the Practicum (Practice Teaching). In addressing these aims, PTEA has designed and developed a curriculum that has curricular emphases in *Learning Disabilities, Autism, Cognitive Disabilities, Hearing Disabilities and Sight Disabilities*. The course of study extends to eight semesters (or four years) and is made up 240 ECTS and a minimum number of course for the degree, 60 courses. Of those 60 courses, students must take 31 Compulsory courses, and choose 29 Elective courses of the 75 total that are offered. Areas of Concentration of both Compulsory and Elective courses are in *Special Education, Psychology/Language, Pedagogical and STEM Fields,* and *Foreign Languages*. In addition, students are required to take two Practicum courses in General Education starting in the fifth semester/ year 3, and two Practicum courses in Special Education settings, both in *inclusion* and *special/ non-integrative schools*, in year 4. Students can do a *Thesis* in the final semester and amounts to two Elective courses. Students must remain enrolled in 30 ECTS per semester.

PTEA also houses nine Laboratories on many areas of specialization, including, *Bilingual Education, Learning Disabilities and Linguistic and Communication Concerns, Psychology and Applications in Education, Neuropsychology, Numeracy in Typical and Atypical Settings*, to name a few. Additionally, students with learning and mobility disabilities are provides with assistance.

The Department employs twenty faculty members, three EDIP members; two ETEP members; three administrators, one full-time and two half-time administrative staff members, and five members in the Office of Foreign Languages. Currently there are 746 students enrolled, with approximately 180 new incoming students enrolling every year, with a reported 80% of incoming students placing PTEA as their first IHE choice. As figured by the data available, the student/faculty ratio is 30:1 on the total number of active students. The average cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA) is 7.9 (based on data from the last three years).

The Department's facilities, including faculty and staff offices, meeting rooms, amphitheatres, laboratories and the library, are very well equipped, and include a computer facility as well as available Braille technology and printer. These facilities are mostly housed in the central Education Building in Volos and shared with the other departments.

The PTEA Programme aims at providing a high level of teacher education for students who aim to teach pupil populations with special needs, with an emphasis on student-centred learning, and improvement of the programme of studies through institutionalized procedures by strengthening the role of the internal evaluation team and the student evaluations and feedback.

The EEAP has found that all these intentions behind this aim and the work that has already been done, have allowed the structure of PTEA to be adhering to national and international similar programmes. It is commendable that the programme faculty have remained vigilant in ensuring high quality instruction and innovative approaches to teaching and learning, as well as having started to include Practice Teaching opportunities in the third year of the students' course of study.

The programme is very well articulated and there is a definite identity of the programme as to what constitutes a good beginning teaching practitioner and future scholar/researcher in Special Education. The promotion of "research" is central and a very important identity of what the programme faculty aspire for their graduates, and it appears to be a false dichotomy (which is quite common), that of research versus practice, or a researcher versus a practitioner. It is our understanding that the notion of teacher as researcher or more specifically, the practice of *teacher inquiry* might become a wonderful addition/adaptation to the identity of PTEA's graduates. Of significant concern is the Practicum/ Practice Teaching opportunities, as these are not as deep and involved as they could be, given the numerous areas of specialization in both General and Special Education, and the provision of time in educational settings is simply too limited. These concerns will be addressed separately in another section.

The curriculum is monitored and evaluated very methodically both within the department and programme faculty, as well as within the MODIP and OMEA committees.

PART B: COMPLIANCE WITH THE PRINCIPLES

Principle 1: Academic Unit Policy for Quality Assurance

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD APPLY A QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY AS PART OF THEIR STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT. THIS POLICY SHOULD EXPAND AND BE AIMED (WITH THE COLLABORATION OF EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS) AT ALL INSTITUTION'S AREAS OF ACTIVITY, AND PARTICULARLY AT THE FULFILMENT OF QUALITY REQUIREMENTS OF UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES. THIS POLICY SHOULD BE PUBLISHED AND IMPLEMENTED BY ALL STAKEHOLDERS.

The quality assurance policy of the academic unit is in line with the Institutional policy on quality, and is included in a published statement that is implemented by all stakeholders. It focuses on the achievement of special objectives related to the quality assurance of study programmes offered by the academic unit.

The quality policy statement of the academic unit includes its commitment to implement a quality policy that will promote the academic profile and orientation of the programme, its purpose and field of study; it will realise the programme's strategic goals and it will determine the means and ways for attaining them; it will implement the appropriate quality procedures, aiming at the programme's continuous improvement.

In particular, in order to carry out this policy, the academic unit commits itself to put into practice quality procedures that will demonstrate:

a) *the suitability of the structure and organization of the curriculum;*
b) *the pursuit of learning outcomes and qualifications in accordance with the European and the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education;*
c) *the promotion of the quality and effectiveness of teaching;*
d) *the appropriateness of the qualifications of the teaching staff;*
e) *the enhancement of the quality and quantity of the research output among faculty members of the academic unit;*
f) *ways for linking teaching and research;*
g) *the level of demand for qualifications acquired by graduates, in the labour market;*
h) *the quality of support services such as the administrative services, the Library, and the student welfare office;*
i) *the conduct of an annual review and an internal audit of the quality assurance system of the undergraduate programme(s) offered, as well as the collaboration of the Internal Evaluation Group (IEG) with the Institution's Quality Assurance Unit (QAU).*

Study Programme Compliance

The programme's quality assurance procedures are monitored by the University's Quality Assurance Unit (MODIP). In general, the Quality Assurance Policy aims to support the academic content and scientific orientation of the undergraduate programme, in accordance with international academic standards and the current national legislation. To that extent, there is a

policy in place for improving the educational experience of undergraduate students, the quality and quantity of the overall research output of the department, as well as the introduction of innovative teaching and practical training approaches and strategies. Furthermore, such policy extends to the continual monitoring and improvement of human resources, curricula, outreach, mobility, and programme visibility.

PTEA has set five key aspects as to the quality and goals that can be summarized as follows: i) provision of academic development and a state of the art curriculum that educates students in the field of education for people with special learning needs and disabilities; ii) advocacy and dedication to research and innovation so that knowledge is relayed to students in technically and scientifically accessible ways; iii) insisting on the absolute satisfaction of the students' needs as well as the people they will serve as professionals; iv) the social imperative of improving the quality of the work in society at large; v) ensuring freedom of expression for all concerned and associated with the department so that all pertinent ideas are explored and included.

As presented in the Department's Accreditation Proposal, the main dimensions of the Department's quality assurance policy revolve around:

- The design, development and implementation of curricula through a transparent and inclusive process that engenders and promotes quality and meets scientific and educational demands.
- The effectiveness of learning experience; exploring pedagogical approaches and teaching strategies that best meet the needs of the students; fostering self-reflection and self-evaluation of the programme faculty; considering methodically bi-annual student evaluations.
- The recruitment and retention of highly qualified faculty and evaluate their work yearly; support and encourage the production of research work by members of the department that meets high academic standards; both the quality and quantity of faculty research/scholarly output; encourage and support faculty in attending scholarly activities such as conferences, research networks and grant projects.
- Connection between teaching and research and development of initiatives that disseminate research findings at all levels of special education settings; enhance and support the Practicum/Practice Teaching sites by promoting innovative teaching approaches, seeking feedback from the practicing teachers so as to understand the how student/graduates fare in their teaching and professional skills.
- Ongoing evaluation and improvement by revisiting the Quality Assurance system in place building on the fruitful collaboration between OMEA and MODIP.

Overall, the EEAP finds the quality assurance action plan of the department satisfactory. It is evident that the quality assurance processes are coordinated and supervised by OMEA in collaboration with the MODIP of the institution, and feedback is being obtained on a continual basis from the programme's relevant committees, the department meetings, and the analysis of student evaluation reports.

For the process to be commendable, it may be advisable to engage other important stakeholders to ensure that the quality of the action plan is more relevant, robust, and far-reaching. Current students may need to have representation both in the MODIP and the OMEA meetings, as well provide feedback on their course of study and readiness for the Practice

Teaching opportunities and overall abilities and skills. Programme alumni and special education teachers and administrators, especially those in the special education public-school domain, have certainly voiced a need for greater collaboration and support for their work. These added perspectives appear to be largely missing based on the interviews this committee has conducted.

Panel Judgement

Principle 1: Academic Unit Policy for Quality Assurance	
Fully compliant	x
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

The EEAP recommends that the Department, in addition to the OMEA and MODIP, be intentional and transparent (both in terms of policies and their implementation) in engaging alumni, practicing teachers/mentors and involving them in meaningful ways in curricular design. It is unclear whether PTEA engages these two significant groups in tangible ways.

Principle 2: Design and Approval of Programmes

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD DEVELOP THEIR UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES FOLLOWING A DEFINED WRITTEN PROCESS WHICH WILL INVOLVE THE PARTICIPANTS, INFORMATION SOURCES AND THE APPROVAL COMMITTEES FOR THE PROGRAMME. THE OBJECTIVES, THE EXPECTED LEARNING OUTCOMES, THE INTENDED PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS AND THE WAYS TO ACHIEVE THEM ARE SET OUT IN THE PROGRAMME DESIGN. THE ABOVE DETAILS AS WELL AS INFORMATION ON THE PROGRAMME'S STRUCTURE ARE PUBLISHED IN THE STUDENT GUIDE.

Academic units develop their programmes following a well-defined procedure. The academic profile and orientation of the programme, the objectives, the subject areas, the structure and organisation, the expected learning outcomes and the intended professional qualifications according to the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education are described at this stage. The approval or revision process for programmes includes a check of compliance with the basic requirements described in the Standards, on behalf of the Institution's Quality Assurance Unit (QAU).

Furthermore, the programme design should take into consideration the following:

- *the Institutional strategy*
- *the active participation of students*
- *the experience of external stakeholders from the labour market*
- *the smooth progression of students throughout the stages of the programme*
- *the anticipated student workload according to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*
- *the option to provide work experience to the students*
- *the linking of teaching and research*
- *the relevant regulatory framework and the official procedure for the approval of the programme by the Institution*

Study Programme Compliance

The undergraduate programme of the PTEA, at the University of Thessaly was founded in the academic year of 1998-99 and has operated as part of the School of Humanities at University of Thessaly. It is currently the only Special Education undergraduate programme in the country. The Department was created with the goal of fostering and promoting the field of special education studies, educating teachers for pre-school and primary education for students with special needs and advancing research and development in special education.

It has been designed in accordance with the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education. The programme of study was formally revised in 2015 in response to the external evaluation.

As specified in the documentation reviewed by the EEAP, the design of the existing programme is based on the following considerations: a) improvement of the quality of studies and teaching; b) rational division of coursework along the lines of workload and respective ECTS; c) meeting learning goals and acquiring knowledge and skills necessary for the development of a contemporary scholar and educator who can meet the needs and challenges of special

education; and d) acquiring work experience through the Practicum (Practice Teaching). In addressing these aims, PTEA has designed and developed a curriculum that has curricular emphases in *Learning Disabilities, Autism, Cognitive Disabilities, Hearing Disabilities and Sight Disabilities*. The course of study extends to eight semesters (or four years) and is made up 240 ECTS and a minimum number of course for the degree, 60 courses. Of those 60 courses, students must take 31 Compulsory courses, and choose 29 Elective courses of the 75 total that are offered.   Areas of Concentration of both Compulsory and Elective courses are in *Special Education, Psychology/Language, Pedagogical and STEM Fields,* and *Foreign Languages*. In addition, students are required to take two Practicum courses in General Education starting in the fifth semester/ year 3, and two Practicum courses in Special Education settings, both in *inclusion* and *special/ non-integrative schools*, in year 4. Students can do a *Thesis* in the final semester and amounts to two Elective courses. Students must remain enrolled in 30 ECTS per semester.

Students attend classes at the university and according to documents reviewed, conduct their fieldwork and Practice Teaching experiences for a total of many hours of observation and planning/teaching lessons in both General Education (Kindergarten or Elementary) settings and Special Education sites. The required Practicum/Practice Teaching is outlined in the Course Guide (Odigos Spoudon) as follows: Level I-- students that seek a specialization in early childhood, conduct 7 observations in kindergarten while they take 3-5 course at the university; they make use of "observation guides" and become points of reflection. For Elementary Education concentration students, they go into schools once a week (Wednesdays) for the entirety of the school day (8-2 PM), but it is unclear if that is so for the entire semester. Level II—kindergarten students conduct fifteen lessons, the first five of which are in groups of two students, and ten are conducted individually. In elementary school settings, students conduct one lesson, one day per week for two weeks, for a total of ten days in one setting.

During our meetings, students and alumni/graduates voiced their overall satisfaction with the programme and especially about the closeness and accessibility of all the teaching faculty. However, the EEAP was troubled by the current students' accounts of the Practice Teaching opportunities and their sense of feeling inadequately prepared for the field of special education and its numerous demands. We were struck by the term used to describe this as "insecurity" (anasfaleia) referencing the lack of time spent planning and executing lessons with children and youth, and the special feedback from the mentoring/practicing teachers in the classrooms. Even with the severe limitations of the pandemic and the students' accessibility to practice teaching opportunities, the EEAP found the number of days and hours that students are afforded is simply insufficient. For a deeper and more sustained time in planning and executing lessons and units of study this aspect of the programme needs rethinking. This is especially true when comparing the PTEA practicum approach to special education programmes abroad and *best practices*. It is the opinion of this committee that practice teaching opportunities might be best when they are coupled with a selected number of major subject areas. These would be ideally done in the first three years of study. Equally critical may be the fourth year re-conceptualized and longer practicum that would allow students a sustained and deeper sense of the work in classrooms

and other contexts. In both redesign approaches, observation protocols could be most helpful for all—students, practicing teachers that host the students in their classrooms, and university observers.

As this is a small, public university special education programme that also serves multilingual and multicultural students and families, i.e., Roma concerns came up from outside partners in our interviews, the EEAP encourages the Department to consider *three* central ideas that are, indeed ambitious themes in the mission of any urban programme: *Multilingual/Multicultural Education, Critical Pedagogy, and Language Learning,* including notions of translanguaging, language development and biliteracy. These could a) be weaved across disciplines and courses in the later semesters and in designed field experiences and b) have stand-alone courses in the early semesters to prepare student-teachers to teach the increasingly diverse population in Greek public schools. Additionally, re-engaging with the smaller, rural/village special education classrooms may be a great opportunity for both the students and the student/family populations of those communities.

Conclusions:

Given the socio-political realities of the country and the world, it would be advisable a) to further strengthen the curriculum in the direction of preparing students/future educators to enter multilingual/multicultural special education classrooms and to be able to address their students' linguistic, academic and sociocultural needs as well as their major special needs, and b) to the extent possible, have students observe and engage with seasoned practitioners that teach in critical ways, as well as co-plan and co-teach cross-disciplinary units of study.

It may be prudent to establish a *locally determined evaluation instrument/tool/protocol* that could also be shared across the Practicum/fieldwork semesters and across sites (i.e., both at the university and the Practicum schools).

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

▪ Practice Teaching opportunities might be best when they are coupled with a selected number of major subject areas. These would be ideally done in the first three years of study. Equally critical may be the fourth year re-conceptualized and longer practicum that would allow students a sustained and deeper sense of the work in general education as well as inclusion/special school classrooms and other contexts. In both redesign approaches, observation protocols could be most helpful for all—students, practicing teachers that host the students in their classrooms, and university observers.

- Mentoring/Practicing teachers that host PTEA students in their classrooms do not have special training on the ways in which they mentor provide students with written feedback. On the days students conduct their lessons/activities, a standardized protocol must be filled out and communicated with the students and the university faculty.

- It is very clear that many classroom/school challenges remain, even after many years of the programme's existence, but two are significant and are, therefore, recommended here: a) the identification, training, and engagement in sustained relationships, with qualified mentor teachers in public pre-K school classrooms that espouse and practice the central tenets and values of a rigorous and culturally responsive programme; b) the observations and assessment in *significant* (i.e., the number of times per semester and qualified supervisors) and in *transparent* ways (i.e., the records of observations or protocols kept by faculty, students and mentor teachers). It may be prudent to establish a *locally determined evaluation instrument/tool/protocol* that could also be shared across the Practicum/fieldwork semesters and across sites (i.e., both at the university and the Practicum schools).

Principle 3: Student- centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment

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

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

The student-centred learning and teaching process

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

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

Study Programme Compliance

The structure of the programme encourages student-centred teaching, learning, and assessment. Specifically, the teaching staff of the Department uses a variety of teaching methods that are student centred by taking into consideration modern theories and principles of teaching as well as learning methods that actively involve the learner in the teaching process. New technologies as well as the use of digital courses and of the asynchronous distance learning platform of the University of Thessaly, play an important role in the teaching-learning process. Laboratory courses are also offered in a more individualized manner and in-depth learning is offered due to the smaller number of students.

Individualized and cooperative learning (which is a necessary condition of a student-centred class organization), facilitates differentiation of teaching and learning. Meetings and work in the laboratories can provide further support to all students and individualized support to those who need it more. Moreover, students are given feedback and advice on their work, and they have the opportunity to interact with their tutors. In addition, all students have an advisor who is regularly available and who has the responsibility to guide students through the programme requirements.

Although the follow-up of teaching in small groups in the laboratories is an effective practice, lessons in the amphitheatres with big audiences should be avoided as they do not comply with student-centred learning. At this point it should be pointed out that there is a high student/faculty ratio which may undermine student-centred learning opportunities for all students.

Furthermore, in many courses, the assessment of students is done with various additional methods aside from traditional written examinations. For example, the progress of each student is monitored and evaluated though small assessments during the semester and a written examination is followed at the end of each semester. There is also a percentage for active participation in the course, the elaboration and presentation of assignments, the "sample" teaching lessons by students either in the Department or during their school internship. Through the application of such methods, an effort is made to respect the diversity and the different needs of the students, enhance teacher-student communication, as well as more frequent and systematic evaluation of the student.

Student evaluation criteria and the evaluation method are announced at the beginning of each semester. Each teaching staff member also informs the students with printed and/or digital material, about the purpose, the content, and the bibliography of each course. This information is constantly updated and is available in the corresponding digital space of the course in the asynchronous distance learning platform (e-class) of the University of Thessaly, as well as through the "Access (Prosvasi)" service for students with special educational needs and disabilities. At this point, it should be emphasized that this service provides enhanced and differentiated support to students with special needs and disabilities (see http://prosvasi.uth.gr/). This service is a central structure at the University of Thessaly and its scientific responsibility is held by a faculty member of the Department. There is also a coordinating committee comprising faculty members from other Departments as well, specializing in Special Education or related subjects. More specifically, this service aims to support students with special educational needs and/or disabilities during their learning process, as well as providing social care to them. The actions implemented by this service are: a) recording the needs of such students regarding their access to the University, b) providing support by faculty members and students of the University who take on the role of assistants, c) use of technological aids to support students, and d) implementation of adaptations in the premises of the University of Thessaly.

Students were thankful for the supportive and encouraging learning environment of the department, the opportunities for personal support as well as the opportunities offered to them for participating in rewarding extra-curricular activities. The staff members care about the quality and effectiveness of their teaching, and they seriously take into account the results of the students' evaluation through student surveys which are regularly analysed and discussed.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

- Classes in the amphitheatres with very big audiences should be avoided as they do not comply with student-centred learning practices.
- The EEAP encourages the Department to complement course evaluations based on student ratings with other evaluation tools (e.g., mid-semester surveys, and focus group interviews).

Principle 4: Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD DEVELOP AND APPLY PUBLISHED REGULATIONS COVERING ALL ASPECTS AND PHASES OF STUDIES (ADMISSION, PROGRESSION, RECOGNITION AND CERTIFICATION).

Institutions and academic units need to put in place both processes and tools to collect, manage and act on information regarding student progression.

Procedures concerning the award and recognition of higher education degrees, the duration of studies, rules ensuring students progression, terms and conditions for student mobility should be based on the institutional study regulations. Appropriate recognition procedures rely on institutional practice for recognition of credits among various European academic departments and Institutions, in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

Graduation represents the culmination of the students´ study period. Students need to receive documentation explaining the qualification gained, including achieved learning outcomes and the context, level, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed (Diploma Supplement).

Study Programme Compliance

The Undergraduate Study Programme of Special Education of the University of Thessaly is governed by clear regulations related to student admission, duration of studies, student progression, and student mobility. It is noted that admission to Higher Education Institutions in Greece, is granted on the basis of scores achieved on the National Entrance Examination.

The PTEA of the University of Thessaly grants a single degree which enables the holder to be appointed as a special educator in pre-primary and primary schools or to provide pedagogical services in special education outside the school. It is pointed out that the Department is the only public university department in Greece fully specialized in Special Education. PTEA programme of studies offers specialization in the education of the following categories of people with special needs:

- students with learning disabilities
- hard of hearing and deaf students
- students with visual impairments
- students with intellectual disability
- students with autism spectrum disorders

PTEA offers a 4-years undergraduate curriculum (the minimum number of semesters required to obtain the degree is eight), with courses on 4 main categories:

- Special Education
- Pedagogy & Sociology
- Psychology & Language
- Sciences

There is a list of compulsory and elective courses that are offered in each year, covering all the important aspects of the above main four categories. PTEA applies the ECTS system across the

curriculum, which allows easy transfer among European universities. Further, PTEA offers to the students the Diploma Supplement.

The students and graduates of PTEA expressed very flattering comments about the excellent climate of cooperation with the academic staff of the department as well as about their curriculum regarding the wide variety of courses offered and the graduate thesis. It is also acknowledged that PTEA is one of the most popular Pedagogical Departments in Greece, since the percentage of successful candidates who declare it in the 1st or 2nd place of selection is well above 55% during the last five years and it is ranked in the 4th place from the 21 Pedagogical Departments in Greece in 2020. This is due to the fact that almost all its graduates work as teachers in public education, freelancers, special educators in early intervention structures (i.e., providing services to infants and toddlers and their families) and teachers in hospital schools for children with chronic diseases.

Special emphasis is also given to the school internship which lasts for 4 semesters. Students encounter the educational reality in which they will later be invited to work and have the opportunity to teach children with disabilities and/or special educational needs, in integration classes and in special schools. More specifically, students are invited to choose between the following three practicums in different educational contexts: (1) Pre-primary schools (Kindergartens), (2) Primary Schools of General Education and (3) School Units of Special Education.

Student mobility is encouraged via the Erasmus project. More specifically, the Department has developed partnerships with the University Örebro (Sweden), Arcadia University (USA), the University of the Philippines Baguio (Philippines), University Paul Valery- Montpellier III, Institut Universitaire de Formation des Maitres (IUFM) – Académie de Montpellier, Université Paris-Est, Créteil- Val de Marne, Ecole Supérieure du Professorat et de l' Education, and the Department of Psychology of the University of Cyprus.

The department's undergraduate programme works sufficiently well, and indeed produces a relatively large body of excellent students. This fact is reflected by successful careers of the Alumni in a wide range of professions; for example, the acceptance of students to top graduate schools all over the world for PhD studies.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

- Students should be encouraged to participate in the Erasmus Project. The Department could offer extra support (including financial) to students who would like to participate.

Principle 5: Teaching Staff

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

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

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

Study Programme Compliance

The PTEA of the University of Thessaly comprises 20 DEP members, 3 EDIP members and 2 ETEP members. There are also 5 members comprising the office of Foreign Languages, 2 secretaries and 3 permanent administrative staff members. PTEA has a disciplined and transparent approach for recruitment and promotion. Faculty members are recruited and promoted based on meritocratic methods of evaluation. Apart from the minimum criteria required for promotion and/or recruitment (i.e., quality of undergraduate and graduate studies, quantity and quality of research work and teaching experience), the candidates are also ranked based on their scientific expertise and relevance to the subject area of the announced position. Because of these recruitment practices, the research interests and qualifications of the faculty are related to the objectives of the programme.

The faculty members bring diverse expertise and research interests to the programme and its curriculum. All faculty members have numerous publications in international scientific journals, and participation in national and international conferences. They also have very good relations with one another and have established collaborations amongst them. Moreover, during the last decade a total of 63 national and European research programmes have been implemented or are being implemented by staff members of the department. However, while all staff members are encouraged to participate in international conferences, there is a lack of adequate financial support for their participation. Despite the lack of available funding, it is commendable that faculty members put forth personal funds to participate in various conferences every year.

The staff have excellent relations with one another and have established collaborations amongst them. Moreover, EDIP members reported very positive experiences with senior faculty, both in

terms of support and department climate. However, the Department does not have a formal mentoring process. It would be beneficial to start working on a specific mentoring system that will increase the effectiveness and academic development of EDIP members.

Some professional development is encouraged by the Department, especially through cooperation agreements with foreign universities and research programmes within the framework of the ERASMUS+ Mobility Programme. However, more cooperation agreements with more universities in additional countries are needed.

Panel Judgement

Principle 5: Teaching Staff	
Fully compliant	**x**
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

- It would be beneficial for the Department to develop mentoring and monitoring mechanisms of the EDIP members.

Principle 6: Learning Resources and Student Support

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

Institutions and their academic units must have sufficient funding and means to support learning and academic activity in general, so that they can offer to students the best possible level of studies. The above means could include facilities such as libraries, study rooms, educational and scientific equipment, information and communications services, support or counselling services.

When allocating the available resources, the needs of all students must be taken into consideration (e.g. whether they are full-time or part-time students, employed or international students, students with disabilities) and the shift towards student-centred learning and the adoption of flexible modes of learning and teaching. Support activities and facilities may be organised in various ways, depending on the institutional context. However, the internal quality assurance ensures that all resources are appropriate, adequate, and accessible, and that students are informed about the services available to them.

In delivering support services the role of support and administrative staff is crucial and therefore they need to be qualified and have opportunities to develop their competences.

Study Programme Compliance

Although the External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel was not able to inspect in person the facilities due to the pandemic, a video tour was given of the building, nine Laboratories, lecture and conference halls, library, and administrative offices.

The campus is housed in a building that contains offices, classrooms, laboratories and library services. The teaching areas are equipped with wireless internet connection and technological equipment, for example computers, projectors, screens, microphones etc. The availability of these resources optimizes teaching and learning. Additionally, as of the academic year of 2010-11, the department has placed into effect new systems of electronic communication and services, that is, "StudentsWeb" for the students, and "ClassWeb" for the faculty. Both sites appear to be very useful that make programme information, including announcements, grading procedures, uploading notes and critical teaching aids, easily accessible.

There is a range of support services available to students such as electronic assistance in their programme choices, electronic and telephone advising with faculty advisors and secretarial staff. There is ample support for the students' Practice Teaching concerns and planning/teaching approaches, as well the option to engage in an expanded form of practice teaching (DPA) that appears to be popular among students and social/educational partners that the department has established.

At the beginning of each academic year, first year students are asked to participate in a group programme counselling session that seems to be most useful in terms of planning and supporting new students for the entirety of their academic and postgraduation careers. All

faculty members are assigned new students as their advisees, with whom they remain in contact during the entirety of their studies.

Additional supports include a structure (Prosvasi) designated for students with learning, mobility, and other disabilities, that aims to engage faculty and fellow students in support of their students/classmates.

There seems to be adequate student support both in terms of assistance and access, and in terms of career orientation.

A strength of the programme is the use of a variety of learning/teaching laboratories on many areas of specialization, including, *Bilingual Education, Learning Disabilities and Linguistic and Communication Concerns, Psychology and Applications in Education, Neuropsychology, Numeracy in Typical and Atypical Settings*, to name a few. Optional projects are offered to students to undertake with a goal to enhance their learning and understanding of scholarly. Research opportunities.

Students describe the faculty as hard working, interested and motivated to teach and be responsive to students' needs. In addition, students find the teaching environment at the Department friendly and deeply respectful. Students reported learning a significant amount by just participating and attending the classes, and indeed alumni felt very well prepared for the rigors of postgraduate studies and work within the country and in top tier universities abroad.

During our interviews with students and alumni, it became clear that students would be interested in the following adjustments to advising and networking: More deliberate across-the-years in the programme advising/sharing sessions, so that students can communicate and receive advice and information from older and more experienced students. The same applied to the student's desire to have access and the possibility to network with alumni that work locally and internationally.

Students past and present, reported that the Department's administrative/secretarial staff were not as forthcoming or attentive to student needs, especially in meeting critical deadlines of submission. The EEAP understands that this is most likely due to the very heavy workload placed on them.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

Given the singular programme focus of PTEA on special education in the country, it may be advisable to establish a *Career Office* that assists students, connects students across years in the programme, and alumni in their academic direction. This office staff may also be responsible for picking up any advising and academic advocacy for students that may be currently missing.

Principle 7: Information Management

INSTITUTIONS BEAR FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR COLLECTING, ANALYSING AND USING INFORMATION, AIMED AT THE EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT OF UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES OF STUDY AND RELATED ACTIVITIES, IN AN INTEGRATED, EFFECTIVE AND EASILY ACCESSIBLE WAY.

Institutions are expected to establish and operate an information system for the management and monitoring of data concerning students, teaching staff, course structure and organisation, teaching and provision of services to students as well as to the academic community.

Reliable data is essential for accurate information and for decision making, as well as for identifying areas of smooth operation and areas for improvement. Effective procedures for collecting and analysing information on study programmes and other activities feed data into the internal system of quality assurance.

The information gathered depends, to some extent, on the type and mission of the Institution. The following are of interest:

- *key performance indicators*
- *student population profile*
- *student progression, success and drop-out rates*
- *student satisfaction with their programme(s)*
- *availability of learning resources and student support*
- *career paths of graduates*

A number of methods may be used for collecting information. It is important that students and staff are involved in providing and analyzing information and planning follow-up activities.

Study Programme Compliance

The Department is in the habit of collecting information that leads to the creation of various indicators having to do with its general student body, such as the progression of its undergraduate students through the programme and their future employability. Data is also collected on graduates' employability and career path. The Department has been making attempts to establish contact with alumni graduates to strengthen ties among its undergraduate population and its employed graduates, which can potentially lead to the creation of strong collaborative bonds that can synergistically work together to improve the existing undergraduate academic programme of study, as well as the practical training students receive on site at the various schools they attend. To this end, the Department, overall, is putting an adequate effort to collect data and extract valuable information. However, such information needs to be systematically collected from the various alumni graduates through the creation of an electronic newsletter.

The Department has a thorough and accessible informational system in place, via their published website, where students can easily navigate through it and obtain all the necessary

information to satisfy their academic and personal needs, especially for first time undergraduate students who are in dire need of such easily accessible, effective, and efficient information.

Students complete evaluations of the courses and coursework via electronic means, the response rates of which have been somewhat low but not unusual, however, with most universities in Greece. In particular, the culture of student's involvement in the academic affairs of the university seems to be lacking in general in all universities in Greece.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

- Alumni information needs to be systematically collected from the whole spectrum of the Department's graduates through the creation of an electronic newsletter. This would serve to enact a useful feedback mechanism between the faculty of the Department and such graduates that would inevitably lead to the improvement of the existing programme of study and the practical training modules.
- The Department also offers academic advice to students on a continual basis and tries to involve them in its academic affairs albeit the low interest on behalf of the students. Perhaps, the Department can intensify its efforts to push for more student-centered learning by coming up with more innovative methods for student involvement.

Principle 8: Public Information

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD PUBLISH INFORMATION ABOUT THEIR TEACHING AND ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES WHICH IS CLEAR, ACCURATE, OBJECTIVE, UP-TO-DATE AND READILY ACCESSIBLE.

Information on Institution's activities is useful for prospective and current students, graduates, other stakeholders and the public.

Therefore, institutions and their academic units provide information about their activities, including the programmes they offer, the intended learning outcomes, the qualifications awarded, the teaching, learning and assessment procedures used, the pass rates and the learning opportunities available to their students, as well as graduate employment information.

Study Programme Compliance

The Department has a user-friendly website that displays necessary information for their various programmes, and its operations, including but not limited to teaching, administrative staff, committees, and facilities. Information on its rules/regulations, evaluative procedures and learning opportunities is also published and readily available. Moreover, the website provides valuable information about the content of the various courses. The information of the faculty members listed on the website about their research/ educational background and CVs is also presented in an accessible, concise, and easy to understand manner.

Concerning the English version of the Department's website, even though it does exist, the material presented is not fully translated. Translating all material of the Greek version to the English language is of utmost importance given that the English version is accessible to the global community. Finally, there appears to be adequate links of the Department's website with the social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

All material of the Greek version of the Department's website needs to be fully translated to the English language so as to increase its accessibility and promote the indeed invaluable work it produces to the outside global community.

Principle 9: On-going Monitoring and Periodic Internal Review of Programmes

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD HAVE IN PLACE AN INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM FOR THE AUDIT AND ANNUAL INTERNAL REVIEW OF THEIR PROGRAMMES, SO AS TO ACHIEVE THE OBJECTIVES SET FOR THEM, THROUGH MONITORING AND AMENDMENTS, WITH A VIEW TO CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT. ANY ACTIONS TAKEN IN THE ABOVE CONTEXT SHOULD BE COMMUNICATED TO ALL PARTIES CONCERNED.

Regular monitoring, review and revision of study programmes aim to maintain the level of educational provision and to create a supportive and effective learning environment for students.

The above comprise the evaluation of:

- *the content of the programme in the light of the latest research in the given discipline, thus ensuring that the programme is up to date;*
- *the changing needs of society;*
- *the students' workload, progression and completion;*
- *the effectiveness of the procedures for the assessment of students;*
- *the students' expectations, needs and satisfaction in relation to the programme;*
- *the learning environment, support services and their fitness for purpose for the programme*

Programmes are reviewed and revised regularly involving students and other stakeholders. The information collected is analysed and the programme is adapted to ensure that it is up-to-date. Revised programme specifications are published.

Study Programme Compliance

The Department is regularly reviewed and revised with the participation of students, faculty members and other stakeholders. During the virtual meetings with the faculty of the Department, it was apparent that they seem to take both the results of their internal evaluation report and those of the 2013 external evaluation quite seriously as evidenced not only by the changes they have been incorporating in their programme of study, stemming from such results, but also by their considerable enthusiasm in tacking the whole matter of internal/external assessment.

Even though the participation of students in OMEA/MODIP is very limited, the information collected is nonetheless analysed and the programme is modified according to the new data. The Department has been collecting data from relevant stakeholders for the last decade. Particularly, from the years 2008 onwards, the Department has been systematically analysing data, in regard to the teaching and research of its faculty members.

The programme revises its curriculum based on several criteria that includes: changing societal circumstances, such as the Covid-19 student pandemic, as well as students' evolving expectations, satisfaction and needs. The committee for internal evaluation (MODIP) has been playing a central role in the evaluation and monitoring process of the overall performance of the programme, the reports of which are easily available on the Department's website.

Finally, the quality of education for part-timers and post-graduates is assured though various funding projects and seminars organized by the full-time staff. The full-time personnel do a great job co-sponsoring seminars with the local communities. They seem to display a considerable amount of energy to participate in university and non-university related activities.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

None

Principle 10: Regular External Evaluation of Undergraduate Programmes

PROGRAMMES SHOULD REGULARLY UNDERGO EVALUATION BY COMMITTEES OF EXTERNAL EXPERTS SET BY HAHE, AIMING AT ACCREDITATION. THE TERM OF VALIDITY OF THE ACCREDITATION IS DETERMINED BY HAHE.

HAHE is responsible for administrating the programme accreditation process which is realised as an external evaluation procedure, and implemented by a committee of independent experts. HAHE grants accreditation of programmes, with a specific term of validity, following to which revision is required. The accreditation of the quality of the programmes acts as a means of verification of the compliance of the programme with the template's requirements, and as a catalyst for improvement, while opening new perspectives towards the international standing of the awarded degrees.

Both academic units and institutions participate in the regular external quality assurance process, while respecting the requirements of the legislative framework in which they operate.

The quality assurance, in this case the accreditation, is an on-going process that does not end with the external feedback, or report or its follow-up process within the Institution. Therefore, Institutions and their academic units ensure that the progress made since the last external quality assurance activity is taken into consideration when preparing for the next one.

Study Programme Compliance

The Department participated in an external evaluation for the first time in 2013. That evaluation committee identified the Department's strengths and made recommendations especially in relation to the course content of the undergraduate programme offered at that time. The report of this committee can be found on the Department's web page. The committee's recommendations were seriously taken into account in revamping the current programme of study by:

- Assigning full-time faculty members as academic advisors to guide students in choosing their courses of study as well as clarifying the requirements of such courses.
- Providing a clearer and more concise version of the teaching curriculum so that the courses that have prerequisites are easy to understand.
- Upgrading the doctoral programme of study, by putting online all relevant materials of the doctoral study guide, code of ethics, progress reports, etc., as well as that of the School of Doctoral Candidates that takes place on an annual basis and for which attendance is mandatory.
- Incorporating student evaluations in the undergraduate programme study guide through various discussions among the full-time faculty at the meetings of the Department.
- Stressing the fact that the full-time faculty members are utilizing student-centred teaching methods by involving students is practical exercises, laboratory work, as well as group projects, in essence, teaching them how to become lifelong learners.
- Providing training to all full-time faculty members in new internet technologies for both pedagogical and didactic purposes, such as familiarizing faculty with the use of the interactive board, creating new online courses, uploading class notes and PowerPoint

lectures on the University of Thessaly's e-class platform, a newly created online platform by the university which also considerable improves the students' online learning experience.

- Maintaining and strengthening the various connections between the Department and the doctoral graduates of the programme by creating an email platform whereby such former graduates are introduced to various European funded research projects, conferences, and local events.
- Enriching the current undergraduate study programme with new courses having to do with the arts in general, such as, pedagogical theatre, culture and disability, accessibility, and pedagogical applications, etc.
- Hiring more full-time faculty members to cover the increasing teaching areas of specialization that have aroused over the years due to the Department's all-encompassing approach to the area of special needs and disability in general.
- Upgrading the English version of the Department's internet site, by putting the full-time faculty's CVs in English online, even though more Greek material needs to be translated in English.
- Activating two of the three of the Department's concentrations, Special Education and Introductory Application and Learning Difficulties, that is, one more from the time the 2013 external evaluation was conducted.
- Applying for an external evaluation in the areas of Counselling Psychology and Counselling in Special Education, Education, and Health.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

None

PART C: CONCLUSIONS

I. Features of Good Practice

1) The existence of "Access (Prosvasi)" service for students with special educational needs and disabilities. This service provides enhanced and differentiated support to students (see http://prosvasi.uth.gr/) who can actively participate in the development of the university's policy.

2) The Special Education Department of the University of Thessaly is the only public university department in Greece fully specialized in Special Education. Therefore, it is one of the most popular Pedagogical Departments in Greece.

3) Almost all graduates can find work as teachers in public education, freelancers, special educators in early intervention structures (i.e., providing services to infants and toddlers and their families) and teachers in hospital schools for children with chronic diseases.

4) Faculty members have numerous publications in international scientific journals, and participation in national and international conferences. They also participate in numerous national and European research programmes.

II. Areas of Weakness

1) It is very clear that many classroom/school challenges remain, even after many years of the programme's existence, but two are significant and are, therefore, recommended here: a) the identification, training, and engagement in sustained relationships, with qualified mentor teachers in public pre-K school classrooms that espouse and practice the central tenets and values of a rigorous and culturally responsive programme; b) the observations and assessment in *significant* (i.e., the number of times per semester and qualified supervisors) and in *transparent* ways (i.e., the records of observations or protocols kept by faculty, students and mentor teachers). It may be prudent to establish a *locally determined evaluation instrument/tool/protocol* that could also be shared across the Practicum/fieldwork semesters and across sites (i.e., both at the university and the Practicum schools).

2) Current students feel inadequately prepared for the field of special education and its numerous demands. This is due to the lack of time spent planning and executing lessons with children and youth, and the special feedback from the mentoring/practicing teachers in the classrooms. Even with the severe limitations of the pandemic and the students' accessibility to practice teaching opportunities, the EEAP found that the number of days and hours that students are afforded, insufficient.

III. Recommendations for Follow-up Actions

1) Given the socio-political realities of the country and the world, it would be advisable to further strengthen the curriculum in the direction of preparing students/future educators to enter multilingual/multicultural classrooms and to be able to address their students' linguistic, academic and sociocultural needs.

2) For a deeper and more sustained time in planning and executing lessons and units of the study the duration of the school internship needs rethinking. It is the opinion of this

committee that practice teaching opportunities might be best when they are coupled with a selected number of major subject areas. These would be ideally done in the first three years of study. Equally critical may be the fourth year re-conceptualized and longer practicum that would allow students a sustained and deeper sense of the work in classrooms and other contexts. In both redesign approaches, observation protocols could be most helpful for all—students, practicing teachers that host the students in their classrooms, and university observers.

3) Given the singular programme focus of PTEA on special education in the country, it may be advisable to establish a *Career Office* that assists students, connects students across years in the programme, and alumni in their academic direction.

4) Alumni information needs to be systematically collected from the whole spectrum of the Department's graduates through the creation of an electronic newsletter. This would serve to enact a useful feedback mechanism between the faculty of the Department and such graduates that would inevitably lead to the improvement of the existing programme of study and the practical training modules.

5) It would be beneficial for the Department to develop mentoring and monitoring mechanisms of the EDIP members.

6) All material of the Greek version of the Department's website needs to be fully translated to the English language so as to increase its accessibility and promote the indeed invaluable work it produces to the outside global community.

IV.   Summary & Overall Assessment

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

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

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

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

Overall Judgement	
Fully compliant	**x**
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

The members of the External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel

Name and Surname   **Signature**

1. **Prof. Leonidas Kyriakides** (Chair)
   University of Cyprus, Cyprus

2. **Prof. Emerita Eleni Katsarou**
   University of Illinois Chicago, United States of America

3. **Assoc. Prof. Andreas Philaretou**
   European University Cyprus, Cyprus