

Doc. 300.1.2

Date: 31/01/22

Higher Education Institution's Response

- **Higher Education Institution:** Neapolis University Pafos
- **Collaborative Institution(s):** University of the Peloponnese (Greece)

- **Town:** Paphos(Cyprus) and multiple cities in the Peloponnesse

- **Programme of study**
Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)

In Greek:

Διδακτορικό Πρόγραμμα με συνεπίβλεψη

In English:

PhD Programme with Co-Supervision

- **Language(s) of instruction:** Greek
- **Programme's status:** Currently Operating
- **Concentrations (if any):**

In Greek: Concentrations

In English: Concentrations



The present document has been prepared within the framework of the authority and competencies of the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education, according to the provisions of the “Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education and the Establishment and Operation of an Agency on Related Matters Laws” of 2015 to 2021 [\[L.136\(I\)/2015 – L.132\(I\)/2021\]](#).

A. Guidelines on content and structure of the report

- *The Higher Education Institution (HEI) based on the External Evaluation Committee's (EEC's) evaluation report (Doc.300.1.1 or 300.1.1/2 or 300.1.1/3 or 300.1.1/4) must justify whether actions have been taken in improving the quality of the programme of study in each assessment area.*
- *In particular, under each assessment area, the HEI must respond on, without changing the format of the report:*
 - *the findings, strengths, areas of improvement and recommendations of the EEC*
 - *the conclusions and final remarks noted by the EEC*
- *The HEI's response must follow below the EEC's comments, which must be copied from the external evaluation report (Doc.300.1.1 or 300.1.1/2 or 300.1.1/3 or 300.1.1/4).*
- *In case of annexes, those should be attached and sent on a separate document.*

Dear EEC,

We would like to express our sincere gratitude for the positive reaction and comments we have received, among others that the program is overall either fully compliant or partially compliant to the stated criteria and standards. We hereby state our response to all the comments regarding areas of improvement and recommendations.

1. Study programme and study programme's design and development

(ESG 1.1, 1.2, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9)

- 1. The programme could have an international call and attract students from other countries than Greece and Cyprus. Currently no international student (outside Greece or Cyprus) is enrolled in the program. This goes against the goal of internationalisation that both partner universities subscribe to.**

Our comments:

Back in 2013 when the programme was first initiated, attracting international students was one of the objectives but not the most significant. Internationalisation is an objective that is currently being eloquently developed and thus both partner Universities have developed a series of initiatives in order to achieve this aim. The main objective of this programme was internal capacity and institutional building, especially for doctoral students, which has greatly been achieved.

- 2. A core quality indicator for doctoral programs is the placement of their graduates in academic or research posts, as the training received during the doctoral program emphasises research. As such, a factor that the universities should consider adding as admission criterion in the future (especially if there are international calls), is the ambition to follow an academic career, or a career in research more broadly.**

Our comments:

No future calls for prospective students will be realised.

- 3. Doctoral supervision does not count explicitly towards faculty promotion. Given the responsibilities that such supervision carries, the EEC recommends that doctoral supervision should receive explicit, quantified, credit. It should also count for promotion.**

Our comments:

Research which include supervision is already one of the criteria for staff promotion (see attached *Appendix 1_Promotion of Academic Staff policy*).

- 4. Additional attention should be given to research outcomes; to give an example the publishing outcome of graduates is not balanced, some graduates have a much higher number of publications compared to others. There is a need to monitor the quality of publications along international standards.**

Our comments:

The requirement to publish is a prerequisite for the successful completion of the programme. High-ranked journals and higher quality outlets are always the target but in some cases, the long-standing duration for having a paper accepted exceeds the PhD programme's duration. Thus, some, at least, minimum requirements have already been set, including publications in peer-reviewed journals or scientific conferences with an impact factor.

5. **It is not clear how the PhD candidate appraisal form and the QA forms from students are done. If, for example, a faculty member has one PhD candidate, some features of these forms that are supposed to ensure high quality are not followed, e.g. anonymity. It is more based on personal relationships, which is also desirable as well. It is not clear to the EEC if research training activities are appraised by students.**

Our comments:

PhD candidates follow quality assurance procedures integrated within the University's processes. Research training activities are appraised by students (see attached *Appendix 2_ Quality Assurance Mechanisms*).

6. **A PhD student is not obliged to offer assistant work to the supervisor and the university in general. This is something that could enhance the interaction of PhD students with University life. This is part of the student's research training, and is a standard component of a doctoral program according to high international standards.**

Our comments:

PhD students are already working with the supervisors in order to achieve at least a minimum publication standard for the purposes of obtaining their PhD thesis. Thus, joint research work is fulfilled and achieved.

7. **It is not clear if this was part of the design of this program, or some artifact of the fact that this is a paying program with yearly fees, but all enrolled students interviewed by the EEC in this program had a full-time job during their studies. Automatically this places this program (which is formally a full-time program) in the position of some sort of part-time or on the side educational activity. It is not clear if the weekly workload of students, in terms of hours spent in each of the activities involved in the program, has been adjusted to this situation, or whether students have been left to find their own way of coping with this. In terms of educational standards, any program should have a breakdown of expected workload, translated to hours spent per week per activity, and this should be pre-defined and made public to the students prior to their enrollment.**

Our comments:

The duration of studies is three years minimum, up to five years maximum, with a sixth year added on justified extenuating circumstances. Thus, although students may have a full-time



job, they nevertheless are aware of the conditions pertaining the programme and this is clear to the students prior to their enrolment.

2. Student – centred learning, teaching and assessment (ESG 1.3)

1. The academic output of the PhD students was found to be very diverse in terms of both quality and quantity. Explicit efforts should be made to monitor this and to ensure that the minimum academic output is consistent across the programme, in line with international standards, and exceeds a single international peer-reviewer publication at minimum.

Our comments:

See our response in point 1.4.

2. Another advice on the level of practical training would be to use the manifold contacts with SMEs or relevant stakeholders in Cyprus to connect to societal issues relevant to such actors, which may lead to new sources of funding research where PhD students can work on high level with the companies or organisations in the specialties of the students and supervisors.

Our comments:

There is already a number of students who receive funding from private and public institutions in order to cover their fees and research activities. Indicatively, these institutions include: The National Bank of Greece, Leptos Group of Companies, Levendis Foundation, Ministry of Energy, Commerce and Industry, Neapolis University Pafos. Further tightening of the programme with SMEs or relevant stakeholders in Cyprus is welcome and well noted.

3. Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

1. Overall, there is a good fit between the supervisory team's qualifications and expertise with the course units they deliver, with the exception of one case, where appropriate action was taken and the PhD student was transferred to another international university with local expertise. This nevertheless begs the question of why this student was allowed to begin a programme where the topic of investigation was not among the expertise of the local faculty.

Our comments:

We understand the situation at this point is to be clarified. The supervisor perfectly fits with the requirements and the topic of investigation. The student, who also managed to obtain a scholarship from the Ministry of Energy, Commerce and Industry, decided himself to be transferred. NUP administration gave their consent and the student was finally transferred to the University of Edinburgh's Department of Political Science. It is worth noting that the recipient University fully recognised the duration of studies already realised at NUP. Thus, it is a success story of the programme.

2. Both partner universities provide some central procedures to support staff career development. However there is no compulsory training activity menu that leads to accreditation of supervisory skills and that is compulsory for all staff. On the positive side, the EEC found that the university is supporting its staff to undertake research and disseminate their research findings through the appropriate channels.

Our comments:

Done. With the Senate's decision on 12/01/22 the accreditation of supervisory skills has become compulsory through a specific training activity.

3. Supervisory outcomes are monitored although the substance of these assessments is not entirely clear in terms of the action taken. Specifically, the outcomes of these questionnaires are anonymously aggregated and returned back to the whole student body, as an overall assessment of the whole programme. It is not however clear how the points raised in this consultation are actioned. This is a digression from high international standards.

Our comments:

See our response at point 1.5.

4. The participation of external members to the committee is too low according to international high standards, where the ratio of external members must form the clear majority. It is also a deviation from international high standards to allow the supervisor of the PhD student to have an equal role in the defence committee as the remaining members: according to international high standards, the supervisor may have a sitting role, or secondary role in the committee, but may not have an equal say in the assessment, to avoid issues of favouritism, bias, and to ensure the necessary level of independence and integrity in the evaluation.



Our comments:

The programme fully satisfies University of Cyprus related conditions

(https://www.ucy.ac.cy/graduateschool/documents/Kanones/RULES_METAPTIXIAKIS_FOI_TISIS_GREEK.pdf, p.26, 10.3.7)

4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification (ESG 1.4)

1. The scholarships can be expanded by taking into consideration not only economical criteria but also based on other criteria regarding research innovation. This would help both universities to attract international students and will also ensure a high quality level of their students' products (e.g. scientific papers). The criteria for the award of scholarships and/or financial support ought to be clearer and publicly available. Applications for financial support should be available both prior and after entry to the programme.

Our comments:

Applications for financial support are available both prior and after entry to the programme. See also our response in point 2.2.

2. There is some concern that anonymity is compromised during the evaluation process. The programme should take action to introduce greater distance between students and the supervisory staff being evaluated.

Our comments:

See our response in point 1.5.

3. The Universities can grow an alumni network for their graduates in order to continue this link with their universities after PhD viva.

Our comments:

Well noted. NUP Alumni already exists.

4. There was little evidence that students were aware of international research standards applicable to the programme. There is a danger that student expectations in this regard are kept artificially low (in terms of what constitutes high quality international publications, or blind peer-review processes, or participation in top-tier conferences, for instance).

Our comments:

See our response in point 1.4.

5. After the first and second year, there should be an exit strategy for students not wishing or not able to pursue the remainder of the programme.

Our comments:

No exit strategy exists in Cyprus.

5. Learning resources and student support

(ESG 1.6)

1. **7 out of the total of 46 students enrolled in this programme have asked for suspension of their studies for one year (5) or have withdrawn (2). The reason provided by NUP and UoP for this is: health issues or extra work load. This ratio of 7 out of 46 ought to be investigated and the reasons behind the students' impression of extra work load should be analysed, so that the work load can be adjusted and revised. It is a failure of the programme to allow students to commence studies on this programme (and invest in terms of their time, monetary funds, personal commitment, and so on) and then fail to complete it, at such high percentage.**

Our comments:

Only two students out of the 46 have withdrawn (4.3%). The students who have suspended their studies for one year have done so as per the programme's regulations and continue until the programme's completion. Thus, it is not a failure since 4.3% is within the international standards.

2. **The EEC noted that over the 10-years life of the University of Neapolis, there has been substantial progress in facilities, physical and human capital resources. Any additional development on the requirements for the technology used for e-learning, databases, and premises, would contribute not only to this under-review programme but also to a range of physical/distance learning programs and on attracting more international students in the future.**

Our comments:

Well noted.

6. Additional for doctoral programmes

(ALL ESG)

1. **The programme ought to attract a more diverse student intake, in terms of their research aspirations and also more international students (outside Greece or Cyprus).**

Our comments:

Back in 2013 when the programme was first published in the Official Gazette, and in 2015 when the programme was first initiated in Cyprus, internationalisation was not among the first priorities. Rather, institutional and capacity building for both universities in realising joint programmes was one of the main objectives and this has been greatly achieved.

2. **Consideration might be given to the development of substitute pathways. In particular the development of a Professional Doctorate focusing specifically on educational professionals seeking to enhance their knowledge, skills and competences but who are not interested in research or academic careers.**

Our comments:

Well noted.

3. **Senior management should find ways to make the criteria for research evaluation more transparent and quantifiable. The career destinations of PhD students should be monitored and made public (anonymised statistics, for example) so that prospective applicants to the programme can get a clearer set of expectations as to whether the programme has a stronger vocational dimension than a purely academic one.**

Our comments:

There are no prospective applicants for the programme.

4. **It is recommended that better use is made of contacts with SMEs or relevant societal stakeholders in Cyprus and Greece.**

Our comments:

Well noted. See also our response at point 2.2.

5. **The programme should be built on stronger research externalities both in terms of staff publication and research funding record, and in terms of student exposure to peer interaction, nationally and internationally.**

Our comments:

See our response in point 1 above.

6. The EEC notes that current requirements with regards to the doctoral defence committee are divergent from international standards in that external members are in a minority, compared to internally appointed examiners. This should be rectified.

Our comments:

See our response in point 3.4.

7. Eligibility (Joint programme)

(ALL ESG)

1. **It is not clear to what extent the international exposure of students beyond the two participating institutes meets minimum standards that are comparable to international standards. It is not clear to what degree students are offered a truly international (beyond Cyprus and Greece), expanded and innovative arena for learning.**

Our comments:

See our response in point 6.1.

2. **The majority of current students or alumni have remained employed in the same type of job and employment rank as before or during their studies. In this sense, it is not clear to what extent this programme increases the candidates' employability and motivation for mobility in a global labour market. Out of all the students and alumni interviewed, only one seems to have proceeded on to the global labour market: the student who had to quit the programme and get a transfer to another university in the UK.**

Our comments:

Again, we clarify that the student did not have to quit. The student was transferred to the University of Edinburgh and the years of study in the joint programme were fully recognised. The case is a success story for the programme. In terms of alumni, currently four out of 10 are already employed in the academia, in both public universities in Greece and public and private universities in Cyprus.

3. **There is no evidence that this programme has made an effort or has managed to increase non-European students' interest in the educational programme.**

Our comments:

See our response in point 6.1.



B. Conclusions and final remarks

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C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Professor Pantelis Sklias	Rector	

Date: 31/01/22

