

Doc. 300.1.2

Date: 24/1/2025

Higher Education Institution's Response

- **Higher Education Institution:**
University of Cyprus
- **Town:** Lefkosia
- **Programme of study**
Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)

In Greek:

Μάστερ στη Μάθηση στις Φυσικές Επιστήμες και το Περιβάλλον (1.5 χρόνια, 90 ECTS, Μάστερ, MA)

In English:

Masters in Learning in Natural Sciences and the Environment (1,5 years, 90 ECTS, Master, MA)

- **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 300.1.1/1 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. The answers' documentation should be brief and accurate and supported by the relevant documentation. Referral to annexes should be made only when necessary.*
- *In particular, under each assessment area and by using the 2nd column of each table, the HEI must respond on the following:*
 - *the areas of improvement and recommendations of the EEC*
 - *the conclusions and final remarks noted by the EEC*
- *The institution should respond to the EEC comments, in the designated area next each comment. The comments of the EEC should be copied from the EEC report **without any interference** in the content.*
- *In case of annexes, those should be attached and sent on separate document(s). Each document should be in *.pdf format and named as annex1, annex2, etc.*

1. Study programme and study programme's design and development (ESG 1.1, 1.2, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9)

Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
<p>There are several major omissions from the Programme documentation and the Panel assumes, content:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There was no information in any of the material submitted on issues pertaining to equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) 2. UN Sustainable Development Goals were missing from the programme documentation. Current and new programmes and courses should clearly and explicitly align with identified specific SDGs. 3. The Panel was not convinced that students were exposed to contemporary international discussions on the content and definitional issues in ESD 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. UCY has central regulations/policies on these issues, which are followed by all programs of study. Please see www.ucy.ac.cy/diversity/ 2. The students in the program have many opportunities to engage with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) during their studies. They dedicate many studying hours, especially during the courses 655 and 656 to explore the content and philosophy of the SDGs. Moreover, they have the opportunity to critically analyzing them through discussions of academic works such as Kopnina, H. (2020). Education for the future? Critical evaluation of education for sustainable development goals. The Journal of Environmental Education, 51(4), 280–291, or chapters from the book edited by Van Poeck, K., Östman, L., & Öhman, J. (2019): Sustainable Development Teaching: Ethical and Political Challenges (1st ed.). Routledge. In addition, students examine and discuss various toolkits developed by UNESCO, which propose methodologies, tools, and pedagogies for implementing the SDGs, especially during the courses 656 and 657. 	

	<p>However, after a thorough review of the program's description and course offerings, we recognize the EEC's valid observation that this important aspect of the program is not adequately reflected in the documentation. We are already taking steps to address this and are making the necessary revisions</p> <p>3. We respectfully disagree with this comment. The course 655: Foundations of Environmental and Sustainability Education is specifically dedicated to the analysis and critical evaluation of the content and definitional issues of Environmental Education (EE) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). The inclusion of the recent book by E. Lange, Transformative Sustainability Education (2023), has proven to be a valuable resource for this purpose. Furthermore, as previously noted, the program incorporates the examination of UNESCO toolkits, which reflect current international methodologies and pedagogical trends for implementing the SDGs. These activities provide students with exposure to contemporary approaches and challenges in aligning education with sustainable development frameworks. Beyond the formal curriculum, students are actively encouraged to engage with ongoing global</p>	
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	<p>discussions by participating in international seminars, webinars, and conferences such as ECER. These opportunities further connect students with the evolving landscape of ESD and contemporary debates within the field. While we remain committed to the continuous enhancement of the program, we firmly believe that its current structure already ensures substantial exposure to contemporary international discussions in ESD</p>	
<p>Large number of postgraduate programmes (ca. 60) is at odds with the low numbers of students. This may appear to be an advantage for the students, but can lead to fragmentation, overlap, lack of integration of conceptual material across the programme and heavy resource demands (teaching); a resource rebalancing is therefore recommended.</p>	<p>We strongly believe that the low number of students is an advantage to them, since they receive more personalized learning and better adaptation to their needs. We have not located any problems concerning fragmentation, overlap, lack of integration of conceptual material across the program etc. The mandatory student feedback received at the end of each of our courses supports our argument.</p>	
<p>The choices of compulsory and optional courses may be rigorously reviewed; for example:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. EDU 660 is a core elective, which refers specifically to “science education” but this seems less relevant to the ESE pathway. EDU 641 could easily be a replacement because gender is a highly significant cross-cutting issue 2. EDU 655 which is entitled Fundamentals of Environmental and Sustainability Education, and EDU 651 Nature of Science and Science Teaching, should surely be compulsory, within the relevant pathways 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The emphasis of EDU660 is on the development and the evaluation of the curricula and not on the subject domain. The ESE students use the environment and sustainability as the context of their assignments. 2. We are considering moving EDU655 in the list of the compulsory courses for the ESE students. 3. We are not planning to make EDU651 a mandatory course. In the Learning in Natural Sciences (LNS) direction, we aimed at allowing as much flexibility as possible to the LNS 	

	students when creating their program of studies.	
If the intention is to further internationalise, some consideration should be given to developing/ensuring English language competencies, which would facilitate student access to the international literature most of which is in English.	We agree. The university offers English courses and we support our students that are struggling with their English to take these courses. However, most of our students have a very good level of reading, speaking, writing and understanding of the English language.	
The Faculty does not provide information or analysis of potential career paths for its graduates, which could help guide them in making informed choices.	This information is provided through seminars and workshops that our program organizes every year. There is also information on this issue on our website.	
<p><i>List of strengths,</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The programme's purpose and objectives, as outlined in the documentation, appeared to be well designed and appropriate to achieve the specified outcomes for graduates. · 2. The range of inputs from industry and stakeholders provided additional context that made it more relevant to the students. 3. Access to lab facilities provides students with useful hands-on experience. 4. Academic staff seemed engaged in the process of continuous improvement and open to suggestions. 5. Several members of staff made time to provide extended learning opportunities in local contexts, including at weekends and during the summer break; these were highly valued by the students. 		

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

Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
Strengthening partnerships with industry and research institutions could provide more internship and practical training opportunities for students.	We agree. It is one of our top priorities. Some of the practices we already applied or planning to apply involve: Industry Relevance (e.g., Establishment of Industry partnerships, Mentorship and Guidance by Industry professionals), Increased Internship Opportunities (e.g., Direct Connections, Shared Projects), Enhanced Practical Skills Development (e.g., Access to Resources, On-the-Job Training), Improved Career Prospects (e.g., Networking Opportunities, Increased Employability), Research and Innovation (e.g., Collaborative Research, Knowledge Transfer).	
Whilst the Masters students (3) the Panel met were engaged by the idea of doing a research dissertation, clearly this is unlikely to be the case for all. The Panel would like to suggest staff consider the option of an Applied Project, which allows students to develop an educational resource to support theory-driven professional practice. For example the excellent initiative of the summer school in the city park would be an ideal opportunity for students to develop such resources, use and evaluate them, and get academic credit for doing so.	We thank the EEC for the recommendation. We have already applied this idea. Although, it's not so popular among students. We will try to promote it from the current academic year.	

<p>Whilst students receive ongoing feedback re their assignments, no feedback is given in the case of examinations, except when specifically requested by the individual students. Such feedback could consist of a general evaluation and comments by the examiner of how the students fared in the exam and how they might improve their work.</p>	<p>There are faculty members that offer written feedback to each student for their final examinations. It should be noted that none of our faculty members uses only final exams, which by the way are obligatory according to the rules of the university, for a student's assessment. For more details on our methods of assessment, please see above for more details.</p>	
<p>The differentiation between the compulsory qualitative and quantitative research methods options is understandable and pragmatic. However, it does limit student experience of these approaches and the Panel would encourage an internal review of the value combining these courses.</p>	<p>Our students have the option to take both courses, without paying more fees. Of course, only one of the two is required for graduating. But in the case they decide to take both, both will appear on their transcript.</p>	
<p>At present, all lectures are delivered in person, with no possibility of running in hybrid mode or recording of the lecture for subsequent offline access. Whilst this is understandable, given the value of modelling pedagogical practice, it disadvantages some students (especially EDI related); lack of an opportunity to review (lecture material) limits students' reflection and learning.</p>	<p>These issues are regulated by the central university. We will make the suggestion to the Senate (as noted by the evaluators).</p>	
<p>Although the majority of the course descriptors specify content and learning outcomes well, in certain</p>	<p>The course descriptors vary in accordance to the nature of the course. We believe that the more detailed, the better.</p>	

<p>cases, course descriptors were widely inconsistent. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o the number of learning outcomes specified ranges from 3 to 20 o one descriptor substituted learning outcomes with course description o bibliographies ranged from a reasonable number of texts to up to 6 pages in length. 	<p>The suggested bibliography is not obligatory. The idea is to provide students with a list of readings, in the case they want to read over and above the mandatory readings. We will request from all of our faculty members to highlight the obligatory readings to avoid any confusion.</p>	
<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The program emphasizes active learning strategies, encouraging students to engage deeply with the material through discussions, projects, and hands-on activities. 2. Faculty members provide personalized support and mentorship, helping students tailor their learning experiences to their individual interests and career goals. 3. The program employs innovative teaching methodologies, including problem-based learning and collaborative projects, to foster critical thinking and problem-solving skills. It offers extensive fieldwork opportunities, allowing students to gain practical experience in natural settings and apply their knowledge in real-world contexts. 4. Classes are designed to be interactive, with a focus on student participation and real-world applications of theoretical concepts. Students have access to well-equipped laboratories where they can conduct experiments and research under the guidance of experienced faculty. 		

3. Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
Staff CLPL is recommended for critically important understanding and implementation of principles of EDI	We agree. This process is already being implemented through KEDIMA, the center responsible for in-service training at the University of Cyprus	
Nomenclature such as “Special Teaching Staff” should be aligned with current international terminology such as “Teaching Fellows”. This is particularly to avoid confusion with special education needs (SEN) support.	This terminology is used by the University of Cyprus for all personnel in this category. We have already discussed the issue with the Vice Chair of Academic Affairs, and we expect this term to change soon.	
Whilst some staff seem familiar with the possibilities and hazards of student use of generative artificial intelligence (gen-AI), these issues are complex and changing rapidly and the Panel would advise further staff development in this area as a priority	The University of Cyprus is actively addressing this issue by developing policies and ethical guidelines for the use of generative AI in research, teaching, and learning ENG-Recommendations-for-the-use-of-Artificial-Intelligence-in-teaching-processes-at-UCY-starting-Fall-Semeter-2023-2024-.pdf . Additionally, the university is organizing seminars for staff and students to raise awareness about best practices and potential pitfalls in the use of generative AI.	
<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> As a result of the rigorous recruitment processes, the teaching personnel were recognized by the Panel as highly qualified with outstanding academic credentials. They are clearly highly committed to teaching and pedagogy. Department-level collaboration of the teaching staff seem to be active and productive. The overall appearance is that teaching staff are acting and collaborating very effectively at the departmental, national and international level, not only in research but in developing teaching and learning in general. The Panel were particularly impressed by the evidence of close collaboration in national educational developments, as reported by the 3 external members of the MoE. The University of Cyprus offers a good range of career long professional learning (CLPL) opportunities. There appears to be a healthy student-to-staff ratio, which should provide excellent opportunities for personalized learning and engagement. Staff commitment is evident in a number of ways such as providing opportunities for students through broader informal and non-formal curricula, which extend beyond normal contact hours. 		

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

Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
Are the admission requirements for the study programme appropriate? How is the students' prior preparation/education assessed (including the level of international students, for example)?	The program adheres to the admission requirements of the University for both domestic and international candidates: <i>"...Applicants must have a University degree awarded by an accredited institution in the country where it operates, or a degree evaluated as equivalent to a University degree by the Cyprus Council for the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications (KY.S.A.T.S). Individuals who will be awarded a University degree or Graduation certificate fulfilling the necessary criteria by the end of the week that precedes registration week, are also eligible to submit an application..."</i> For more details please see: Admission Requirements - Graduate School	Choose level of compliance:
How is the procedure of recognition for prior learning and work experience ensured, including recognition of study results acquired at foreign higher education institutions?	The Cyprus Council for the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications (KY.S.A.T.S) is responsible for evaluating academic qualifications and experience obtained from foreign institutions.	Choose level of compliance:
Is the certification of the HEI accompanied by a diploma supplement, which is in line with European and international standards?	Yes: All the students of the University of Cyprus upon graduation on undergraduate and postgraduate level (Master's degree) receive a copy of a Diploma Supplement automatically and free of charge. The Diploma Supplement-DS is a document attached to a higher education diploma aiming at improving international transparency and facilitating the academic and professional recognition of qualifications. The DS provides a standardised description of the nature, level, context, content	

	and status of the studies completed by its holder. For more information, please see: Diploma Supplement - Graduate School	
Specific foreign language certification and minimum entry level requirements are missing from the website	This is because the program adheres to the University of Cyprus regulations for foreign language certification and minimum level requirements, as outlined on the School of Postgraduate Studies' website under Admission Requirements Admission Requirements - Graduate School	
Whilst support Staff are a great strength of the Department the institutional memory (and wisdom) of all such procedures and practices resides with three members of staff, one of whom is soon to retire. The Panel strongly suggests that pre-emptive appointment processes are put in place to ensure that the work-load of each of the remaining two staff does not increase (albeit relatively briefly) by half.	Indeed, proactive appointment processes have already been established, ensuring that positions are filled efficiently to meet institutional needs (please see: ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ ΚΥΠΡΟΥ).	
<u>Strengths</u> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The processes for admission and criteria for acceptance on the degree programme, are clearly specified and publicly available via the Department website, with the exception of the first improvement point made below. 2. Programme provides a supportive environment for student progression, including academic advising and mentoring. 3. The Administrative Staff (e.g. IT-support, planning support, student progress monitoring) are clearly very competent and highly experienced; the Panel saw this part of the Department as the “backbone” of the Programme. 4. Regular monitoring of grades and student progress is conducted by the Administrative staff, who are easily accessible to the students. 		

5. Learning resources and student support (ESG 1.6)

Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
The Department as a whole, including Programme Administrative Staff and other support services, should be co-located on the main campus.	The request for the Department, including Programme Administrative Staff and other support services, to be co-located on the main campus has been a longstanding and consistent priority for the department. We fully acknowledge the benefits this relocation would bring, including improved coordination, accessibility for students, and enhanced collaboration across all units. We are pleased to note that recent developments in the university's strategic and developmental plans have made significant progress toward addressing this request. Based on these advancements, we are optimistic that the relocation will be realized within the next two years. The department remains committed to supporting this transition and looks forward to the opportunities it will create for staff, students, and the program as a whole.	
IT services should be available for the duration of the University opening hours, if any technical issues occur	the university has implemented a 24/7 emergency IT support line , ensuring that critical technical issues can be addressed at any time, even outside standard operating hours. This service reflects the university's commitment to minimizing disruptions and maintaining a reliable technological infrastructure for learning, teaching, and administrative functions.	
Implementing more sustainability initiatives, within the physical resources, could align the facilities with the programme's focus on the environment, adopt a whole Institution approach and help develop and make evident the commitment to a sustainable learning environment.	The suggestion to implement more sustainability initiatives within the physical resources is both timely and aligns perfectly with the program's focus on the environment and sustainability and the broader goals of fostering	

	<p>a sustainable learning environment.</p> <p>We are pleased to highlight several ongoing efforts in this regard: a) Participation in University Governance:</p> <p>One of the coordinators of the program actively participates in the university's Senate Committee "Sustainable University." This committee is dedicated to advancing sustainability across all aspects of the institution, ensuring that the program's values and expertise contribute to the university's strategic initiatives.</p> <p>b) Collaboration with the Ecological Students Club:</p> <p>The program maintains a strong partnership with the university's ecological students' club, which actively engages in environmental advocacy, awareness campaigns, and sustainability projects. This collaboration strengthens the program's practical commitment to sustainability.</p> <p>c) University-Wide Commitment to SDGs:</p> <p>The university is continuously improving its infrastructure to align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Recent developments include green building initiatives, energy-efficient facilities, and sustainable waste management systems, all of which reflect the</p>	
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	<p>institution's dedication to sustainability.</p> <p>These efforts underscore the program's and the university's shared commitment to embedding sustainability into all levels of operations and fostering a learning environment that exemplifies environmental responsibility. We will continue to explore and implement initiatives that enhance this alignment and make our dedication to sustainability even more evident.</p>	
Establishing peer mentoring programmes could provide additional support, learning opportunities and foster a sense of community amongst students	<p>The suggestion to establish peer mentoring programs is greatly appreciated and aligns with our commitment to providing a supportive and inclusive learning environment. Peer mentoring can indeed offer valuable benefits, including additional academic support, opportunities for collaborative learning, and fostering a strong sense of community among students. We are already exploring options to integrate a formal peer mentoring initiative into the program. This effort could be closely linked with existing structures, such as student clubs or academic societies, to leverage their expertise and existing relationships. By implementing a peer mentoring program, we aim to further enrich the student experience and enhance the program's community-oriented values.</p>	
Not all graduates will become academics and not all will chose to work in schools. As there are presumably a wide range of career options including environmental centres, museums, government departments, nongovernmental organisations and charities. It may be helpful in recruitment and progression to highlight this, and ensure that as wide a range of learning opportunities	<p>We agree. We actively promote the diverse opportunities, offered by our program, through various platforms and opportunities, including the program's official webpage. Here, we emphasize the program's value and versatility by stating:</p> <p>"Whether you are a beginning or experienced environmental educator—including classroom</p>	

to promote these career pathways is made evident	teachers, non-formal educators, environmental or park managers, or educators working in zoos or botanical gardens—this program equips you with the essential skills needed to excel in your field. Participants will gain expertise in basic and applied research, the design and development of innovative curricula, evaluation and reform of educational policies, and the ability to critically analyze recent trends and findings in environmental and sustainability education"	
<p>Strengths</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The University of Cyprus owns one of the country's largest and most comprehensive libraries, housed in a unique building that is accessible and highly conducive to student study. 2. The Faculty has well equipped laboratories, lecture halls and study spaces. 3. The Programme is supported by a competent team of Administrative staff and a dedicated team of Faculty members who are experts in the fields. 4. The University offers a range of support services, including IT, academic advising, mental health counselling, career services. 		

6. Additional for doctoral programmes (ALL ESG)

Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
N/A		

7. Eligibility (Joint programme) (ALL ESG)

Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
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d) Conclusions and final remarks

Conclusions and final remarks by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
<p>Despite the evident and considerable success of the Department, there may be benefit in drawing up a five-year strategic plan to consider the above recommendations, and specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> An overview of the current wide range of courses to ensure an integrated approach to course provision <input type="checkbox"/> Review of priority compulsory courses and assessments to ensure students have an overview of their field <input type="checkbox"/> In light of this, are there courses which are not a priority, and/or could be combined to provide a more holistic program? <p>Such a plan could discuss how the Department wants to be seen internationally, particularly in program provision which naturally would be linked with research and knowledge exchange.</p>	<p>There is already a plan for the future of our program, which includes the creation of a STEM+ oriented Master's program, in collaboration with the Mathematics Education, Educational Technology and Language Education programs. The idea is to integrate our existing Master's program into a STEM+ oriented Master's program. Higher education today offers a diverse landscape of courses, reflecting the evolving needs of students and the complexities of the modern world. To ensure an integrated approach into this new Master's program, first, we will focus on breaking down silos. In so doing, the courses of such a program will transcend the traditional disciplinary boundaries, encouraging students to connect knowledge and skills from various fields. For example, a course on "Sustainability" could draw from environmental science, natural sciences, economics, sociology, and engineering. Second, in this STEM+ oriented Master's program we will focus on bridging the program with real-world. The idea is to reflect the complexities of real-world problems and prepare students for careers that require interdisciplinary skills. Third, we will include Experiential Learning, in which hands-on learning experiences such as internships, fieldwork, simulations, and community engagement projects will take place. Fourth, we will incorporate Technology-Enhanced Learning, which will involve online and blended learning and interactive technologies (e.g., simulations, virtual reality, and gamification). Fifth, we will focus on</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>

	<p>the 21st-Century Skills (e.g., critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, collaboration). Finally, we will focus on Student-Centered Learning (e.g., Active Learning, Personalized Learning). In order to ensure an integrated approach, we are planning to use curriculum mapping to identify connections and overlaps between courses, ensuring a coherent and integrated learning experience for students. Moreover, we will foster collaboration among our faculty members across disciplines and implement continuous assessment and improvement. For the latter, we will regularly assess the effectiveness of our courses, gather student feedback, and make adjustments based on data and insights.</p>	
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e) Higher Education Institution academic representatives

Name	Position	Signature
Professor Zacharias Zacharia	Professor, Chair of the Department	
Ass. Professor Constantinos Korfiatis	Associate Professor, Programme's Coordinator	
Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	
Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	
Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	
Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	

Date: 24/1/2025

