

Doc. 300.1.2

Higher Education Institution's Response

Date: 30/06/2020

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

In Greek:

**Μάστερ στην Κοινωνική και Αναπτυξιακή
Ψυχολογία**

In English:

Masters in Social and Developmental Psychology

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



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 2019” [N. 136 (I)/2015 to N. 35(I)/2019].

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) 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 deficiencies noted under the quality indicators (criteria)*
 - *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).*
- *In case of annexes, those should be attached and sent on a separate document.*

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

Comments by the Evaluation Committee

The web pages contain some but not all relevant information, e.g., details of assessments and learning outcomes are not included for any course. There is no year-by-year explication of the various degree structures.

The knowledge and skills gained in all of the programs seem to be of the appropriate level to which the program of study corresponds, according to the EQF. As far as the committee could evaluate based on the samples provided, assignments and exams are of appropriate level. Based on the course descriptions provided, it is unclear whether the content of the courses reflect the latest achievements and developments (e.g., suggested reading list often show dated literature, although we acknowledge that finding up to date translated readings might be an issue). In spite of this strong research orientation in the programs at all levels, it is surprising that students can obtain a master's degree without having written a thesis. The committee is of the view that having a thesis as compulsory part of the master's program is indispensable to meet international standards. Current (and former) students informed us that they all intend to undertake (or undertook) a master's thesis, so there are indications of the high value and level of interest in this element of the program. We recommend that the program team reviews this as a matter of urgency. We note that there is also an opportunity to consider in the future whether the bachelor's thesis should become compulsory.

Insofar as the language of instruction is Greek, the students' command of the language of instruction is appropriate. Understanding/reading and speaking/writing English, however, appears to be a challenge for some students, most clearly at bachelor's level but to a lesser extent also at master's (and PhD) level.

Course materials do not consistently document learning outcomes, which makes it difficult to evaluate the extent to which learning outcomes are consistent with the content of the courses. The ECTS is applied. Courses are weighted differently according to the expected work load (5 ECTS, 6 ECTS, 7.5 ECTS) but neither the course documents nor the conversations with staff made clear which factors determined allocation of ECTS.

Response by the Department

The major issue identified by the evaluation committee (and the only point across all dimensions that was evaluated with a (2) was the one relating to “the skills (cognitive and practical) obtained are of the appropriate level to which the programme of study corresponds to, according to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)”. As further explained by the evaluators they consider the compulsory engagement of students with a Master Thesis necessary. We thank the reviewers for their suggestion. Although most (if not all) of the students in every cohort do take up a Master thesis we do agree that this should become compulsory for all students and the council of our Department has already taken the decision to make it compulsory in its meeting of 23rd of June 2020. We also acted on another relevant point made by the evaluators which was the need to offer updated Bibliography and textbooks in some of our courses.

Two other points were pointed out by the evaluators. First the need to offer year-by-year explication of the various degree structure which we now offer in a Table 1.2 in our revised programme. Secondly, there was a suggestion that we need to increase the English



language competencies of our students. For this reason, a decision was taken to offer one of the first year required courses in English (PSY 637) with the prospect of offering the whole of the course in English in the future.

Regarding the practical skills gained by the students in our programme the evaluators' comments led us to reflect on this point and realise that whereas the department does have the resources to engage students in more practical application of their theoretical knowledge these have not been fully implemented yet. Towards this direction we decided to introduce two new courses (both required) that will offer plenty of opportunities for them to apply theory to practice in either their work environment (for those who work) or engage themselves working in a structure (NGO, Corporation, Social Entrepreneurship initiatives). The new syllabus has already been prepared and approved by the departmental council of the 23rd of June 2020. (Please see Appendix for new Revised programme).

2. Teaching, learning and student assessment (ESG 1.3)

Comments by the evaluation committee

Compared to the current international standards and/or practices, the actual/expected number of students in each class is low. In the bachelor's program, the larger group is split into subgroups (e.g., n=160 is split up in two groups of n=80) although even without splitting the size of the group would still be in line with international standards and/or practices.

Given that learning outcomes are not described in much detail, it is difficult to evaluate to which extent the teaching/learning process and the methodologies used in the course are adequate and effective for achieving these outcomes.

Teaching staff and students seem to have different opinions concerning formative assessment.

Although students claim that written feedback is often lacking, staff presented anecdotal evidence that students don't always take advantage of available feedback.

There is no evidence that grades are determined by more than one person, e.g., there is no formal moderation system in place.

The department highly values teaching in small groups and interactive discussions with students, which is likely to encourage active participation of students in the learning process.

Students routinely participate in research activities at all levels of their curriculum and learn important research skills there. However, the department faces considerable challenges because its laboratories are at a considerable distance from the staff offices. This limits the opportunities for spontaneous interaction between students and their teachers/supervisors.

Response by the Department

On the valid points raised by the evaluators regarding the need for formative evaluation and grading of students' decisions have been taken to make relevant changes that will be described at the departmental report, across all programmes of the Department.

Regarding the Master in specific, the evaluation committee noted that Students need to be adequately trained in the research process. A new course with the title PSY 644 is now introduced which aims to engage students in practicing all phases of an international Social Survey that the Master Coordinator directs at the National level (European Social Survey) at the University Centre for Field Studies. The new syllabus has already been prepared and approved by the departmental council of the 23rd of June 2020 (Please see in Appendix new revised programme).

The evaluators also noted that attention was needed to assessment processes and quality assurance across courses. Towards this direction a number of syllabi have been revised.

3. Teaching Staff

(ESG 1.5)

Comments by the Evaluation Committee

Considered at the level of programs and student numbers, the available full-time teaching staff appears to be sufficient, although slightly on the low side by international standards. However, as a consequence of the large number of optional courses and the belief that small student numbers are preferable, staff appears to be overstretched and there is a heavy reliance on special scientists to ensure that the courses run.

Response by the Department

There was no major criticism here. The evaluators rightly identified that there is a need for more teaching staff and we are indeed hoping that the next round of hires will alleviate this issue of overstressing the existing teaching faculty. In the spirit of the comment above we increased the number of compulsory courses by 2 and decreased the electives accordingly.

4. Students

(ESG 1.4, 1.6, 1.7)

Comments by the Evaluation Committee

In terms of the level of the students aimed at, the admission criteria for all programs compare favourably to international practices. For the master's program, the fact that the admission criteria do not require specific undergraduate training can cause problems of student heterogeneity, which are acknowledged but not fully addressed. Channels of student feedback are well articulated but the way in which feedback informs teaching decisions is less clear.

Students' participation rates in exchange programs are adequate and the number of outgoing students equal that of incoming students. Due to the predominant use of Greek as language of instruction at all levels, however, incoming student mobility is largely limited to exchanges with universities in Greek-speaking countries. Insofar as the language of instruction is Greek, the students' command of the language of instruction is appropriate. Understanding/reading and speaking/writing English, however, appears to be a challenge for some students, most clearly at bachelor's level but to a lesser extent also at master's (and PhD) level. There is an opportunity to consider whether English should be preselected for the 10 ECTS of foreign language instruction in the bachelor's program.

Response by the Department

In terms of the Master in Social and Developmental Psychology the comment was that the students come from a heterogeneous background. Starting from this year we tried to accept only students with a first degree in social sciences. An exception was made for students with a very high GPA that gave the evaluation committee confidence that they have the skills to work hard to cover gaps in their knowledge. Regarding the level of English Language, we introduced a required first year course in English that will also be taken by Erasmus students with the prospect in the future of offering all the programme in English.



5. Resources

(ESG 1.6)

Comments by the Evaluation Committee

Students have access to an up to date library, with more than 20000 psychology sources (including electronic and printed publications), most important psychology data bases and important psychology journals. State of the art labs and laboratory equipment adequately support both the research programs and the study programs of the faculty.

Response by the Department

We thank the committee for the positive evaluation here



6. Additional for distance learning programmes (ALL ESG)

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7. Additional for doctoral programmes (ALL ESG)

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8. Additional for joint programmes (ALL ESG)

Comments by the Evaluation Committee

There is great deal of strength across the department's programs. Our comments and suggestions should be taken in the spirit of opportunities for further enhancement. In general, these opportunities fall into three categories. First, attention is needed to the formalization and documentation of processes. Second, there are opportunities for rationalization of the current degree programs in terms of the variety of options offered and (specifically in the case of the PhD program) milestones which may in fact hinder student progress. Third, some specific changes are needed: For example, the research thesis should become compulsory in the master's program. Taken together, what is needed is high-level strategic and operational oversight of the programs audited. These seem to outsiders to have grown very successfully, but organically and without much planning, since the foundation of the department. A more top-down approach will allow consolidation and growth in line with the department's stated objectives of excellence and internationalization.

Response by the Department

As far as the Master in Social and Developmental Psychology is concerned the main criticism of making the master thesis compulsory has been now addressed. Two additional courses have now been introduced that will offer more practical skills both in research design at the higher quality standards possible (European Social Survey) and a stronger emphasis on applied social and developmental psychology. Finally, to improve student's English language skills one course (PSY 637 which is required in first year of studies) will be offered in English. A revised programme and structure with cleared routes is also now offered.



B. Conclusions and final remarks

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C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

| <i>Name</i> | <i>Position</i> | <i>Signature</i> |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------|
| George Spanoudis | Associate Professor, Chairman | |
| Charis Psaltis | Associate Professor, Vice- Chair | |
| Click to enter Name | Click to enter Position | |
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