



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:**

Πτυχίο Ψυχολογίας

**In English:**

Psychology BA

- **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)

*EEC comments for each ESG are in italics and followed by Response.*

*1.2. The web pages contain some but not all relevant information. There is no year-by-year explication of the various degree structures.*

**Response by the Department:** A decision has been made by the UCY for all the websites of the departments to contain all the relevant information for the study programmes. The decision stipulates that all relevant information will be posted by the end of this year. Before the start of the autumn semester, the Department of Psychology will have implemented this decision.

*1.4. We note that there is also an opportunity to consider in the future whether the bachelor's thesis should become compulsory.*

**Response by the Department:** A long-standing dilemma of the Department, also flagged by the EEC, is whether to make the dissertation project compulsory for all undergraduate students. While there would be educational value in this, to ensure adequate quality numbers of tenure-track academic staff would be required, to divide amongst them the responsibility for supervision of all dissertations. Specifically, the Council of the Department of Psychology at the meeting of 5/2020 decided to make a *bachelor's thesis* compulsory after the Department hires three additional tenure-track academic staff.

*1.7. Understanding/reading and speaking/writing English 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.*

**Response by the Department:** A long-standing concern of the Department, also flagged by the EEC, is the competence in the use of the English language for academic purposes, shown by our undergraduate students. Speaking English is a systemic challenge for a significant proportion of the students entering the University via the PanCyprian exams and the Greek-speaking state school system, and also given that the main language of instruction at the University of Cyprus, as mandated by law, is Greek. To mitigate this problem, the Department has been taking measures and will continue to do so (a) offering more elective courses in English, especially for students in the 2nd, 3rd, or 4th year of their studies, and (b) including activities within existing courses that will increase students' opportunities to be exposed to academic English, for instance, reading and then critically reviewing scholarly papers that were written in English.

*1.8. and 1.9. Based on the course descriptions provided, it is unclear whether the content of the courses reflect the latest achievements and developments. 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. Courses are weighted differently according to the expected work load but neither the course documents nor the conversations with staff made clear which factors determined allocation of ECTS.*

**Response by the Department:** The external evaluation committee expressed concerns that the reading lists or required textbooks in some of the subjects do not reflect the current trends in the field. Such cases are currently being reviewed by the responsible academic staff in close collaboration with the Undergraduate Studies Committee. The Department fully endorses the EEC's recommendation for updating course material as appropriate. Following the EEC visit in February 2020, all Department faculty were asked to update their course descriptions. Further, they were asked to connect more clearly the learning outcomes with the content of their courses, and specify better how the course workload justifies the allocation of the relevant ECTS (Please see Appendix for the courses' revised syllabi).

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

*EEC comments for each ESG are in italics and followed by Response.*

*2.1. and 2.3. Given that learning outcomes are not described in much detail, it is difficult to evaluate to which extent the teaching/learning processes and methodologies used in the courses are adequate and effective for achieving these outcomes.*

*Response by the Department: The BA Psychology programme already provides basic knowledge and competencies in all key areas of psychology, while providing opportunities for specialization through elective courses in diverse sub-fields, ranging from cognitive neuroscience to social psychology, clinical psychology, educational psychology, and other areas. No major concerns were raised by the external evaluation committee regarding the overall programme structure. However, the following specific issues, discussed by the EEC, will be further addressed:*

*a. The large number of elective courses, which are being offered to provide specialization choices to our under-graduates and exposure to basic psychological principles for students from other departments, come at the cost of stretching academic staff and relying on leased special scientists. To mitigate this problem, the Undergraduate Studies Committee will conduct a strategic review of the elective courses that are usually offered to ensure a balance between providing specialization pathways while conserving teaching resources.*

*b. The EEC expressed concerns that in several of the courses, there was not sufficient linkage between learning objectives, course content, formative assessment, and summative assessment. All courses are currently being reviewed to ensure that these linkages are strengthened, with the support of teaching assistants and in close collaboration with the Undergraduate Studies Committee.*

*2.5. Attention is needed to assessment processes and quality assurance across courses.*

*Response by the Department: Regarding the formal student feedback system, all academic staff have reassured the Undergraduate Studies Committee that they regularly utilize student feedback to improve their course content as well as the teaching and learning process. There is, however, room to improve the quantitative and qualitative analysis conducted on the student feedback forms, to provide aggregate insight into frequently reported problems and deficits, as well as to provide an early warning system in case the quality of any specific course begins to deteriorate. The Undergraduate Studies Committee intends to build up systems and protocols for such analysis of student feedback forms, within the coming academic year, in close collaboration with the Academic Affairs and Student Welfare Service of the University.*

*2.10. and 2.11. The Department faces considerable challenges because its laboratories are at a considerable distance from the staff offices.*

*Response by the Department: A large number of students in the BA Psychology programme are already opting to participate as research assistants in the research activities of the academic staff. As a result, on a few occasions, BA Psychology students graduate with their names already listed as co-authors in scholarly, peer-reviewed published papers. This academic culture, which encourages and values scholarly research is an integral part of the programme. Students are encouraged to register, for example, for structured courses, such as the PSY390 “Independent Study” and PSY 350 or PSY 450 “Research Experience I and II”, respectively, which are available within the curriculum.*

### 3. Teaching Staff (ESG 1.5)

*EEC comments for each ESG are in italics and followed by Response.*

*3.4. The external evaluation committee raised a concern that a significant proportion of teaching staff are leased special scientists, and that this might impact on the quality of courses.*

**Response by the Department:** While it is acknowledged that a significant proportion of courses in the undergraduate programme (up to 30%) are taught by special scientists, every effort is being made to ensure that adjunct staff provides high-quality teaching and learning opportunities to students, under the constant support and supervision by a member of the academic staff. Furthermore, student feedback forms and the evaluation of supervisors both play a role in the decision to re-hire special scientists as teaching staff. The Undergraduate Studies Committee will continue to monitor – and when appropriate optimize - processes for selecting, orientating, supervising, and evaluating special scientists who serve as teaching staff, to ensure that their participation in the teaching of the BA Psychology programme brings new perspectives and strengthens diversity, without negatively impacting the quality of teaching and learning.

In the long term, the recruitment of additional tenure-track academic staff is expected to slightly reduce the need to be leasing special scientists to serve as teaching staff. Meanwhile, as explained above, the Undergraduate Studies Committee will continue to ensure that special scientists serving as teaching staff are properly recruited and supervised, so that their presence, as subject experts, has an additive value to the programme.

#### 4. Students

(ESG 1.4, 1.6, 1.7)

*EEC comments for each ESG are in italics and followed by Response.*

*4.2. Student feedback is well articulated but the way in which feedback informs teaching decisions is less clear.*

**Response by the Department:** In the context of formalizing quality assurance procedures (as discussed above), more consistent ways of receiving feedback by students and dealing with complaints are being compiled and have been decided by the Council. Procedures regarding grievances are already in place, involving at the first step the academic advisor, and at the follow-up steps the program committee and the chair or even the department council, if deemed necessary. This procedure will become explicit and communicated to students from the time of their entry into the department.

*4.6. 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:** We thank EEC for this recommendation. As mentioned above, the competence of our students in the use of the English language for academic purposes is a systemic challenge, and there are also measures that we have considered to offer systematic opportunities for our students to be exposed to academic English. This approach, of course, ought also to respect students' preferences regarding foreign language learning, as the University of Cyprus offers courses in other official EU languages as well, adhering to the EU multilingualism policy (European Commission, 2005).

## 5. Resources

(ESG 1.6)

**Response by the Department:** As reflected in the external evaluation report, our undergraduate students are already benefiting from access to a world-class library, as well as university subscriptions that provide access to the most relevant peer-reviewed journals. One challenge in terms of resources also reflected in the external evaluation report, is that, due to lack of space, most of the department's research labs are situated at the old university campus, a few km away from the new campus, leading to a somewhat disjointed experience for students who would wish to engage in research activities. This problem shall be resolved with the construction of the School's new building in the New Campus, planned for this decade, depending, of course, on the availability of funds.



## 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)

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## **B. Conclusions and final remarks**

The Department of Psychology of the University of Cyprus wishes to express its deep appreciation to the External Evaluation Committee for their evaluation of the Department.

The Department, its faculty and students, are grateful for the excellent cooperation and constructive contacts with the EEC and the CYQAA and the opportunity to present the Department, its organizational structure and working environment, our teaching and research practices, study programmes, contribution to the society, as well as our vision and prospects for future growth.

The Department is sincerely thankful to the EEC for the detailed and positive Evaluation Report, the recognition and appreciation of our efforts, and the very useful and constructive suggestions.

As described in this document, the Department has accepted and endorsed all recommendations of the EEC. It has already taken the necessary initiatives and steps towards their implementation.

We look forward to continuing the excellent and fruitful cooperation with the CYQAA and the EEC and remain at their disposal for any clarifications.

In addition to the comments made above addressing all suggestions and recommendations of the EEC, the Department fully endorses the recommendation for high-level strategic and operational oversight of their study programmes. To implement a top-down approach in the consolidation and growth of the Department, we decided once every year to confer with local and European scientific and professional associations, like EFPA or EFPSA, considering about objective of excellence and internationalization.



### C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

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

**Date:** 30/06/2020

