

Doc. 300.1.2

Higher Education Institution's Response

Date: *Date.*

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

In Greek:

Αναλυτικά Προγράμματα, Διδασκαλία και Συγκριτική Παιδαγωγική (6-16 εξάμηνα, 273 ECTS, διδακτορικό, 3^{ος} κύκλος)

In English:

Curriculum Studies, Teaching and Comparative Education (6-16 semesters / 273 ECTS, PhD, 3rd cycle)

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



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].

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.*



Introductory remarks

We would like to begin by expressing our thanks to the members of the External Evaluation Committee for the time and effort invested in this evaluation process which we found constructive and useful. We also thank the members of the Committee for their positive feedback as well as for their identifying areas for improvement. In what follows in the rest of this document we respond to each of their recommendations in detail per section as well as overall.

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

External Evaluation Committee's "Areas of improvement and recommendations"

1. The number of ECTS seems to be very high (273), especially if there are students coming from two years master' degrees (120 ECTS). Systems of flexibility could be studied depending on previous experience.
2. Although the capacity of the programme is limited by the number of scholars working in these areas, the quality of the programme suggests the possibility of taking more PhD students per year. An invitation to national or international scholars to supervise students could make this possible (even by means of participating in a European Joint Doctoral Degree).

Coordinators' Response (each point below follows the numbering of the recommendations above)

1. The number of ECTS is common across the Department and in line with the regulations of the Graduate School, so it cannot vary per programme; however, we understand the need for flexibility, which has been rightly pointed out and assure that flexibility occurs as we adapt the courses taken by each student depending on each one's background; therefore having graduated from the same master's programme (now being evaluated as a 90 ECTS rather than 120 workload) will be considered so that the student is exempted from some courses (there is a ceiling for this by the Graduate School) or takes those not already taken during their masters.
2. Doctoral 3-member advisory committees can already include national and international experts external to the University of Cyprus and this is actually a pre-requisite for the doctoral 5-member evaluation committees (see http://www.ucy.ac.cy/graduateschool/documents/Phd/POLITIKI_3MELIS_5MELIS_ENGLISH.pdf). This is decided on a student-by-student basis, depending on the topic of their doctoral work as well as the language in which they select to write their thesis (the majority of theses are written in Greek, and a small number in English). The European Joint Doctoral Degree is a possibility that will be considered after consultation with the Graduate School

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

External Evaluation Committee's "Areas of improvement and recommendations"

1. For the compulsory courses, its flexibility can be further improved with more use of blended teaching approaches, allowing, for example, a flipped classroom in which students attend lectures and review literature online prior to class leaving space to discuss, debate and collaborate physically in class. In this way, more time can be spent on student-centered learning with student input in class.
2. The course programme, and the research and dissertation stages in particular, are mostly individual work. Groups meetings are limited and connected to the supervisor. Students indicate a need to interact more with PhDs from other supervisors and to participate in meetings with PhDs from the Graduate School to have more interdisciplinary interaction and to form a research community with other PhDs. This interaction with other PhD in the Graduate School would be much easier if the department is located at or near the main campus.
3. Student can choose a research methodology course, which could mean that they are prepared for the methods to be used in their dissertation, but not as an educational research with a broad methodological expertise per se. A recommendation is to ensure that graduates have at least a basic understanding of both quantitative and qualitative research methods and some additional specific knowledge and skills in the research methodology that is used on the dissertation.

Coordinators' Response (each point below follows the numbering of the recommendations above)

1. The flexibility of the courses can indeed be improved through the provision of blended learning approaches, however these will have to be approved at a university level before they can be adopted. Such approaches however are already included in the design of the courses, since readings, notes, videos and other materials are assigned for each week of the semester to be read by students before the meetings; the meetings (scheduled centrally by the university as 3-hour sessions) are thus organized to include discussions, debates and student presentations around this material (samples of such course outlines are attached for courses EDU 693 and EDU 603 for Fall Semester 2020).
2. We agree that PhD students would greatly benefit from interaction with their peers, especially in inter-disciplinary settings and that such interaction would be facilitated by a relocation of the Department to the main campus; this will occur permanently when the building housing the School of Social Sciences and Sciences of Education is completed as planned. In the short-term, we are aware that the Dean of the School is working with the Rectorship to find a suitable building for rent close to the main campus.
3. We agree that doctoral graduates need to have a broad range of methodological expertise beyond the specific methodology employed in their own dissertation; this is why there is a great variety of research courses in the design of the doctoral programme when compared to the master's programme; depending on the research course they conducted during their master's



programme, a different one is selected for their doctoral studies so that, overall, they cover a broad range of educational research methodological expertise. Students can choose in agreement with supervisors one of the following courses: EDU 520 Discourse Analysis; EDU 682 Qualitative Research in Education; EDU 683 Educational Statistics with Statistical Packages Applications; EDU 780 Using Basic and Advanced Multilevel Modelling in Educational Research; and EDU 788 Advanced Research Methods (see p. 3 in this link: [http://www.ucy.ac.cy/edu/documents/edu/Postgraduate/Curriculum_studies_Teaching_and Comparative Education PhD.pdf](http://www.ucy.ac.cy/edu/documents/edu/Postgraduate/Curriculum_studies_Teaching_and_Comparative_Education_PhD.pdf))

3. Teaching Staff (ESG 1.5)

External Evaluation Committee's "Areas of improvement and recommendations"

1. Put a process into place to review and update reading lists so that when students are viewing these, they see that the courses are completely up to date.
2. Engage in formative and summative assessment of the courses. This might be done through a mid-semester meeting with the coordinators to ensure that areas of improvement or concerns can be dealt with and be effective for the current cohort.
3. Make teacher development, and teacher development programmes within the University more explicit, and the expectation with regard to staff and their development.

Coordinators' Response (each point below follows the numbering of the recommendations above)

1. Each semester students receive a course outline for each of the courses they enroll in during the first week of the semester; these course outlines are updated each semester to include recent scholarship as well as to reflect the design of the course by each specific member of academic staff; samples of such course outlines are attached for courses EDU 693 and EDU 603 (Fall Semester 2020) and these are submitted to the Department secretariat at the beginning of each semester. They are thus more detailed and updated when compared to the brief description of each course included in the evaluation application or the prospectus. The reading lists students have access to are therefore the updated ones given to them at the beginning of each semester.
2. A formal pre-semester meeting is organized each July and January for the Fall and Spring semesters respectively with masters and doctoral students together; during these meetings we give guidelines to students about course selection according to the design of the programme and their own interests. Moreover, we collect feedback about their experiences from the previous semester and expectations for the following one. Mid-semester meetings occur within each course with the coordinators who ensure they address any concerns of the particular cohort with the particular course as well as during office hour meetings.
3. The University of Cyprus has established the Centre for Teaching and Learning and signed a Charter on Teaching 2017-2020 (updated every 3 years). The Centre has been very active in providing seminars for new and current staff on a number of topics. It has recently agreed on a Policy for Quality Assurance in Teaching (http://www.ucy.ac.cy/ctl/documents/KEDIMA/QAssurance/ENGLISH_QualityofTeachingPolicy Document.pdf). There are frequent emails by the Centre to the whole of the university community on its activities, including those of teacher development. This was particularly necessary during the last two semesters when courses needed to move online, when the Centre provided a number of seminars addressed to staff on different platforms and online tools. Such activities can be found here: <http://www.ucy.ac.cy/ctl/en/activities/for-instructors/workshops-seminars>



In addition, staff development is covered through the 311 research activities grant. This is an annual grant given centrally to all members of staff for participation in international conferences and research collaboration with foreign universities.

4. Students

(ESG 1.4, 1.6, 1.7)

External Evaluation Committee's "Areas of improvement and recommendations"

1. Indications of 'good level of English' could be better specified in the public facing paperwork (e.g. IGCSE IELTS certificates) and the thresholds needed.
2. Systems of monitoring and follow-up are positive, but they could be improved by evaluating the progress of each student on an annual or bi-annual basis

Coordinators' Response (each point below follows the numbering of the recommendations above)

1. English language requirements for student admission are publicly indicated and specified by/ in the website of the Graduate School under the entry "Admissions" first and then "Admission Requirements". <http://www.ucy.ac.cy/graduateschool/en/admissions/admission-requirements>
The same information is also accessible via the Department of Education's website: <https://www.ucy.ac.cy/edu/en/admission/postgraduate>

In particular, proficiency in English can be demonstrated through the following certificates:

- G.C.E. O-Level English with a minimum grade "C".
 - I.G.C.S.E. English with a minimum grade "C".
 - I.E.L.T.S. minimum average score 6.5.
 - T.O.E.F.L. with a minimum score of 550 (Paper-based) or T.O.E.F.L. with a minimum score 213 (Computer-based) or T.O.E.F.L. (Internet based) with a minimum score 92.
 - Cambridge English First (FCE), with a minimum score 176.
 - Cambridge English Advanced (CAE), with a minimum score 176.
 - Cambridge English Proficiency (CPE), with a minimum score 176.
 - Certificate of Proficiency in English (ECPE), with a minimum score 650.
 - Anglia Examinations – Proficiency (C1).
 - IB diploma (International Baccalaureate).
 - Certificate of success in the exams conducted by the Ministry of Education and Culture.
 - Certificate of success in year 6th final exams, of the Cyprus State Institutes of Further Education.
 - Any other equivalent exam that will prove proficiency in English language.
 - Candidates who hold a degree from a recognized university programme taught in English are considered to have proficiency in English.
2. Monitoring and evaluating students' progress is very important indeed and this is why the University implements a very specific and elaborated system of monitoring and evaluation which all doctoral programmes across departments and schools follow. Students' progress is followed-up at every semester, that is, at least twice a year, not only through the compulsory courses, the comprehensive examination, the submission of research proposal (three chapters) and the defense of the thesis, but additionally through the various research and thesis writing up stages of their doctoral studies. These specific stages are credited with ECTS (students cannot exceed the 40 ECTS per semester) and evaluated with a Pass or Fail grade per semester. Therefore, students' progress during these stages is evaluated by the thesis supervisor at the end of a

semester given that the student has fulfilled the work tasks they jointly set and agreed upon at the beginning of the semester. In other words, the system of monitoring is embedded in the structure of the PhD programme, which is as follows:

- 5 Compulsory Courses (60 ECTS)
- Comprehensive Examination (33 ECTS)
- Research Stage I: A and B (30 ECTS)
Research Stage II: A and B (30 ECTS)
Research Stage III: A and B (30 ECTS)
Research Stage IV: A and B (30 ECTS)
- Dissertation I: A and B (30 ECTS)
Dissertation II: A and B (30 ECTS)

This info is publicly available in the Prospectus of the Programme of Study which can be obtained from here:

http://ucy.ac.cy/edu/documents/edu/Postgraduate/Curriculum_studies_Teaching_and_Comparative_Education_PhD.pdf

5. Resources (ESG 1.6)

External Evaluation Committee's "Areas of improvement and recommendations"

1. Online accessibility of the resources might be improved. Students indicated a wish to have access to teaching and learning materials from a distance.

Coordinators' Response (each point below follows the numbering of the recommendations above)

1. Access to teaching and learning material from a distance is possible and is offered:
 - by the Library, especially via VPN (Virtual Private Network) Service, which allows all students to have access, regardless of their IP address, to all Library's information sources and services provided through the Web as if they connect within the University network. See here: <http://library.ucy.ac.cy/el/services/technical-support/vpn>
 - by each course's instructor weekly through Blackboard and the uploading of teaching and learning material (<http://ucy.ac.cy/el/ypiresies-diadiktyou>)



6. Additional for distance learning programmes (ALL ESG)

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7. Additional for doctoral programmes (ALL ESG)

External Evaluation Committee's "Areas of improvement and recommendations"

1. Review minimum word limit for the thesis and bring this into line with practice and international practice.
2. A new step has more recently been added which is the submission of three chapters (no credits). Several students noted that this was confusing. Given that chapter writing does not always begins with the first three (Chapter 1 can often come at the end), it might be useful for the Department to monitor what this step offers and what the added value of more examining offers. (This second issue is raised within the findings section of the Committee's evaluation report).

Coordinators' Response (each point below follows the numbering of the recommendations above)

1. The minimum limit of 10,000 words is a general rule of the Graduate School and refers not simply to theses in social sciences but also to a great variety of other dissertation types including those from engineering, natural, medical, pure and applied sciences (see in this link for more details: http://www.ucy.ac.cy/graduateschool/documents/Anakoinwseis/ANAKOINOSIS_SMS/PhD_diat_rives-genikes_odigies-greek-revised_June_2017.pdf). Changing this regulation is the responsibility of the Graduate School and any attempt to change this may be seen as collapsing the rich epistemological diversity of the University. Within the Department of Education, the usual practice and unwritten rule is for theses of 80,000 and 120,000 words excluding appendixes.
2. This is a recent step indeed and has been introduced to help students have an early evaluation of (a) the theoretical framework and (b) research methodology of their thesis, as well as (c) its overall problematique; to receive feedback on their early thinking about these 'three chapters'. We believe that the 'confusion' is not with the step itself, which students find it very useful, but with how this is labelled/named. It is possible for some students to confuse this step (EDU 750 Submission of Research Proposal x 0 ECTS) with the submission of a short research proposal of no more than 20-25 pages to the Council of the Department of Education for the purpose of setting up the 3-member supervising committee. The former is a formal research stage and requires official registration by the students, while the latter is conducted at the request of the would-be supervisor to the student.

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8. Additional for joint programmes (ALL ESG)

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Conclusions and final remarks

External Evaluation Committee's "Areas of improvement and recommendations"

The review of the programme has identified a number of aspects that could improve the programme. These have to be understood as recommendations to enhance what is already an excellent programme.

1. The premises of the Department of Education, situated outside of the university campus, does not help to construct a sense of community and engagement with the rest of the university. It would be important to address this problem to optimise the learning experience of students and the engagement of the Faculty in the wider activity of the university.
2. The number of ECTS seems to be very high (273), especially if there are students coming from two years master' degrees (120 ECTS). Systems of flexibility could be studied depending on previous experience.
3. The course programme, and the research and dissertation stages in particular, are mostly individual work. Groups meetings are limited and connected to the supervisor. Students indicate a need to interact more with PhDs from other supervisors and to participate in meetings with PhDs from the Graduate School to have more interdisciplinary interaction and to form a research community with other PhDs. This interaction with other PhD in the Graduate School would also be much easier if the department is located at or near the main campus.
4. Enable PhD students to access the Independent Studies option.
5. Engage in formative and summative assessment of the courses. This might be done through a mid-semester meeting with the coordinators to ensure that areas of improvement or concerns can be dealt with and be effective for the current cohort.
6. Systems of monitoring and follow-up are positive, but they could be improved by evaluating the progress of each student on an annual or bi-annual basis.
7. Online accessibility of the resources might be improved. Students indicated a wish to have access to teaching and learning materials from a distance.
8. Review minimum word limit for the thesis and bring this into line with practice and international practice

Coordinators' Response (each point below follows the numbering of the recommendations above)

1. We agree that community development for students would be facilitated by a relocation of the Department to the main campus; this will occur permanently when the building housing the School of Social Sciences and Sciences of Education is completed as planned. In the short-term, we are aware that the Dean of the School is working with the Rectorship to find a suitable building for rent close to the main campus.

2. The number of ECTS is common across the Department and in line with the regulations of the Graduate School, so it cannot vary per programme; however, we understand the need for flexibility, which has been rightly pointed out and assure that flexibility occurs as we adapt the courses taken by each student depending on each one's background; therefore having graduated from the same master's programme (now being evaluated as a 90 ECTS rather than 120 workload) will be considered so that the student is exempted from some courses (there is a ceiling for this by the Graduate School) or takes those not already taken during their masters.
3. We agree that PhD students would greatly benefit from interaction with their peers, especially in inter-disciplinary settings and that such interaction would be facilitated by a relocation of the Department to the main campus; this will occur permanently when the building housing the School of Social Sciences and Sciences of Education is completed as planned. In the short-term, we are aware that the Dean of the School is working with the Rectorship to find a suitable building for rent close to the main campus.
4. We fully agree so EDU 689 Independent Studies now forms part of the programme. See here: http://www.ucy.ac.cy/edu/documents/edu/Postgraduate/%CE%91%CE%BD%CE%B1%CE%BB%CF%85%CF%84%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%AC_%CE%A0%CF%81%CE%BF%CE%B3%CF%81%CE%AC%CE%BC%CE%BC%CE%B1%CF%84%CE%B1_%CE%94%CE%B9%CE%B4%CE%B1%CF%83%CE%BA%CE%B1%CE%BB%CE%AF%CE%B1_%CE%BA%CE%B1%CE%B9_%CE%A3%CF%85%CE%B3%CE%BA%CF%81%CE%B9%CF%84%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%AE_%CE%A0%CE%B1%CE%B9%CE%B4%CE%B1%CE%B3%CF%89%CE%B3%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%AE_Ph.d.pdf
5. A formal pre-semester meeting is organized each July and January for the Fall and Spring semesters respectively with masters and doctoral students together; during these meetings we give guidelines to students about course selection according to the design of the programme and their own interests. Moreover, we collect feedback about their experiences from the previous semester and expectations for the following one. Mid-semester meetings occur within each course with the coordinators who ensure they address any concerns of the particular cohort with the particular course as well as during office hour meetings.
6. Monitoring and evaluating students' progress is very important indeed and this is why the University implements a very specific and elaborated system of monitoring and evaluation which all doctoral programmes across departments and schools follow. Students' progress is followed-up at every semester, that is, at least twice a year, not only through the compulsory courses, the comprehensive examination, the submission of research proposal (three chapters) and the defense of the thesis, but additionally through the various research and thesis writing up stages of their doctoral studies. These specific stages are credited with ECTS (students cannot exceed the 40 ECTS per semester) and evaluated with a Pass or Fail grade per semester. Therefore, students' progress during these stages is evaluated by the thesis supervisor at the end of a semester given that the student has fulfilled the work tasks they jointly set and agreed upon at the beginning of the semester. In other words, the system of monitoring is embedded in the structure of the PhD programme, which is as follows:
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http://ucy.ac.cy/edu/documents/edu/Postgraduate/Curriculum_studies_Teaching_and_Comparative_Education_PhD.pdf

7. Access to teaching and learning material from a distance, accentuated during the Covid -19 pandemic, is possible and is offered:
 - by the Library, especially via VPN (Virtual Private Network) Service, which allows all students to have access, regardless of their IP address, to all Library's information sources and services provided through the Web as if they connect within the University network. See here: <http://library.ucy.ac.cy/el/services/technical-support/vpn>
 - by each course's instructor weekly through Blackboard and the uploading of teaching and learning material (<http://ucy.ac.cy/el/ypiresies-diadiktyou>) or, additionally since the online shift in teaching and learning due to the pandemic, via Teams or Zoom.
8. The minimum limit of 10,000 words is a general rule of the Graduate School and refers not simply to theses in social sciences but also to a great variety of other dissertation types including those from engineering, natural, medical, pure and applied sciences (see in this link for more details: http://www.ucy.ac.cy/graduateschool/documents/Anakoinwseis/ANAKOINOSIS_SMS/PhD_diatrives-genikes_odigies-greek-revised_June_2017.pdf).
Changing this regulation is the responsibility of the Graduate School and any attempt to change this may be seen as collapsing the rich epistemological diversity of the University. Within the Department of Education, the usual practice and unwritten rule is for theses of 80,000 and 120,000 words excluding appendixes.



Higher Education Institution academic representatives

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Signature</i>
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Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	
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Date: 7 January 2021

