Doc. 300.1.2

Date: 16.04.2021

Higher Education Institution's Response

- **Higher Education Institution: University of Cyprus**

- **Town: Nicosia**

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

  In Greek:

  Μεταπτυχιακό στη Γλώσσα, Γραμματισμό και Εκπαίδευση

  In English:

    Master in Language, Literacy, and Education

- **Language(s) of instruction: Greek**

- **Programme's status:** Currently Operating

- **Concentrations (if any):**

  In Greek: Concentrations
  In English: Concentrations

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ΚΥΠΡΙΑΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ
REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS

1. 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, <u>without changing the format of the report</u>:*

  - *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.*

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

Findings

The programme is well positioned to compete with similar international endeavours and demonstrates specific strengths in sociolinguistics. There is a need to develop explicitly a backbone of research methods and embed this within the programme content reflecting learning and development. These aspects need to be monitored through an explicit QA framework.

Strengths

- An inspiring research informed degree
- A strong and distinctive sociolinguistic emphasis
- Engagement with literacy in and beyond the classroom
- Taught within a strong and internationally oriented research programme

Areas of improvement and recommendations

1. Development of explicit quality assurance mechanisms which are monitored within a regular cycle
2. Inclusion of core topics such as linguistic key concepts in Module EDU 521, language development, literacy *learning* in the Objectives and Outcomes at Programme and Course level
3. The development of a coherent and structured progression in the Research Methods courses covering both compulsory and optional aspects of qualitative and quantitative research.

RESPONSE

The following actions have been taken in order to improve the quality of the program in this area:

1. The UCY framework includes various provisions for the programs' external and internal recurring evaluation and quality assurance. Departmental councils have been responsible for ensuring the regular monitoring of the quality, as well as for allocating responsibilities for the design and implementation of distinct programs of study, with many – the Department of Education, included—utilizing external evaluations towards these ends. Specific guidelines, procedures and regulations, specifications, and quality assurance on issues relating to postgraduate studies are publicly available through the website of the Graduate School (https://ucy.ac.cy/graduateschool/en/phd-students/rules-regulations) and accessible through the Department of Education website (https://www.ucy.ac.cy/edu/en/admission/postgraduate). The University has further codified into a comprehensive policy document all existing sets of criteria for program quality assurance, mechanisms of control, and framing policies and procedures. The document includes specific tools for internal evaluation and specifies terms of recurrence (e.g., program evaluation by graduating students at a yearly basis). It is expected to be approved and implemented in the Fall 2021 semester.

2. We appreciated the committee's recommendations, to expand or make more visible the scope of the program and of particular courses by including topics relating to language development, literacy development, and literacy learning. Towards this end, these areas

   2.1. were incorporated in the program purpose and learning outcomes (see Annex A),

   2.2. were added or marked in more visible manner in the description and content of the two core courses (EDU 521 & EDU 522 – see Annex B)

   2.3. will, at times, be approached through the topical seminar EDU 696 Seminar: Language, Literacy, and Education, offered as a compulsory course in the Masters' program.

3. A quantitative research methods course was added to the structure of the program, so that MA candidates are now expected to choose between a quantitative or qualitative research methods course (EDU 682 Qualitative Research in Education or EDU 683 Educational Statistics with Statistical Packages Applications) to supplement and expand their knowledge from previous stages of study (see Annex C). Both courses deal with core issues and concepts in research and explain in detail the different stages when conducting research, so that students gain a holistic and structured understanding of different types or research methodologies and research epistemologies.

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

Findings

The programme is supported by engaged and proactive staff who utilise a range of innovative methods of teaching and assessment. There is concern that it is possible to complete a masters without a compulsory dissertation component. There was little evidence of moderation of assessments.

Strengths

- Dedicated and engaged teaching staff who are clearly committed to and respected by their students.
- Varied delivery of course materials and assessments, and sensitivity to needs of students with varied academic backgrounds.
- Some substantial pieces of independent research conducted for coursework assessments.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

1. Provide additional opportunities for students to practice presentations in English.
2. Consider whether 3 hour blocks of teaching are optimal for staff or students.
3. Consider providing an external route by which students can raise concerns/complaints (i.e. without routing through staff members in the department).
4. Consider introducing light-touch methods for moderating marks on assessed work to ensure consistency and equity.
5. Consider making a dissertation compulsory for MA students.
6. If possible, reinstate budget for visiting speaker programmes.
7. If possible, address the issue of accommodation on the main campus for staff and students associated with this programme.

RESPONSE

The following actions have been and will be taken, as the recommendations of the EEC:

1. We consider crucial the provision of opportunities for all post-graduate students, including ones in our Master's program, to present their work in English. Advanced Master's students have been and will continue to be supported – academically and financially – to participate in and present their work at international conferences organized in Cyprus and abroad. Funds from departmental and program budget (item 311) have been and will be utilized toward that end. Additional funding will be sought for the organization of consortia and or summer schools from across departments and universities, to advance collaboration with non-Greek speaking peers.

2. We understand that the 3-hour block of teaching might appear cumbersome for students' learning, and will regularly seek students' feedback to ensure that the issue is considered, if and when it arises. Up to the present, we have found the 3-hour block to work sufficiently given that learning relies much on students' active engagement through workshop-like activities, student presentation of allocated course content, discussions, and group work rather than lecturing and delivery. Instructors and program coordinators regularly exchange ideas on particular teaching practices to secure this type of learning, while this is communicated to students in information sessions that are organized yearly for incoming

students as well as in opening course sessions each semester. Relevant information, including the UCY's policy for quality assurance in teaching, is publicly available in the website of the Department of Education (https://www.ucy.ac.cy/edu/en/admission/postgraduate).

3. The University has developed a formal policy that describes specific steps and stages to be followed in the case of student concerns and complaints, including procedures for submitting oral and written reports initially to department chairs and or directors of university services, and then to the office of the Vice-Rector of Academic Affairs. The policy was submitted for approval to the next meeting of the Senate in May.

4. The two coordinators of the program have been meeting throughout the semester to exchange ideas and monitor student progression and assessment. Joint and separate meetings were also held with students to discuss their progress in the program of study, while student evaluation in each course relied on a multiplicity of methods and resources. Broader issues of student evaluation and assessment have also been and is planned to be discussed in focused departmental meetings.

5. The program offers to the students two paths, the first is a full teaching path, the second is research oriented with the students undertaking a dissertation. We consider this flexible structure to be more suitable for the needs and profile of our students, since some of them seek specialization through the teaching modules, and others – usually those who follow further postgraduate studies – opt for the dissertation.

6. As program coordinators, we value the presence of visiting scholars in our program, both for students' learning and for our own professional development. We will continue to apply for funding to host visiting scholars to teach full courses (long visits) or to lead an EDU 696 Seminar in Language, Literacy, and Education (short visits). With the relaxation of measures, we will also reinstate participation in the Erasmus+ Exchange Program for Academics, which has been utilized at large in the past (hosting 1-2 scholars/year) and has been discontinued due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

7. We agree that the accommodation of the Department on the main campus is critical for students' and staff's access to available resources and development of a sense of community. It is expected that this will occur upon the completion of the building to house the School of Social Sciences and Sciences of Education according to the institutional planning. To present, our Department (via an ad hoc committee) in collaboration with the Dean of the School, have worked with the Rectorship to find a suitable building for rent closer to the main campus.

3. Teaching staff
(ESG 1.5)

Findings

Staff demonstrated a positive, creative and engaged approach to teaching and research. This is particularly laudable for the two course coordinators, who carry significant teaching responsibilities. The staff on the current programme teach and research in their respective areas of expertise. This is done to a high standard with professionalism. However, this limits the breadth of the curriculum.

Staff who support the programme have a strong grounding in education studies, sociolinguists, ethnography approaches to education, literacy and languages. Research methods are mainly qualitative again reflecting staff expertise.

Students benefit from the synergies between teaching and research.

Strengths

- Staff provide excellent role models for students at this level demonstrating critical engagement in research and practice.
- There is active engagement by students with staff research topics in developing their own knowledge and expertise.
- Student activities are embedded in the local community with a focus on action research.

Areas of improvement and recommendations
1. Extending staff to reflect a breadth and depth of the curriculum to include for example psycholinguistics, psychological approaches to language and literacy or critiques of evidence based practice.
2. Collaboration with other sectors within the university e.g. psychology to improve multi/interdisciplinarity
3. Reinstating visiting scholars. The latter would provide the added advantage of providing department wide CPD and research expertise.

RESPONSE
1. The program coordinators will take any future opportunity to request additional tenure-track positions upon budgetary allowance and as per the needs and priorities of the Department.

2. Collaboration with other departments will be sought through the co-organization of events and consortia, as well as by encouraging students to take or audit courses outside the program and department as per their research interests and needs.

3. The program coordinators will continue to apply for funding to host visiting scholars to teach full courses (long-term visits) or lead an EDU 696 Seminar in Language, Literacy, and Education (short-term visits). With the relaxation of measures, they will also reinstate participation in the Erasmus+ Exchange Program for Academics, with has been utilized at large in the past (hosting 1-2 scholars/year) and has been discontinued due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

ΔΙΠΑΕ
CYQAA

ΦΟΡΕΑΣ ΔΙΑΣΦΑΛΙΣΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΠΙΣΤΟΠΟΙΗΣΗΣ ΤΗΣ ΠΟΙΟΤΗΤΑΣ ΤΗΣ ΑΝΩΤΕΡΗΣ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗΣ
CYPRUS AGENCY OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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

Findings

The Programme follows the Cyprus council of Higher Education Qualifications. Student progression is monitored and students were unanimously positive about the course, support provided and the tutors.

Strengths

1. Appropriate processes of admission are in operation.

2. Prospective students receive full and clear information about admission criteria and procedures.

3. Students are extremely satisfied with the support they receive from programme staff.

4. Academic qualifications held by candidates are appropriately recognised by the Cyprus NARIC authority.

5. Student certification is appropriately organized and implemented.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

1. The knowledge of English does not appear to be formally set to a CEFR level. We would recommend that it is set to a minimum of B2.

2. To ensure that there are sufficient numbers of students admitted in each study cycle to maintain viability of the programme.

3. To establish a better promotion strategy for the programme in order to attract larger number of students (e.g. by improving information content and presentation on departmental site or by organizing special recruitment events)

RESPONSE

1. In accordance with CYQAA recommendations, the University specifies required levels of English proficiency for candidates in postgraduate programs, including the following:

University of Cambridge Exams	IELTS	TOEFL(IBT)	Common European Framework
CPE Certificate of Proficiency in English	8.5 – 9	88-120	C2
CAE Certificate in Advanced English	7 – 8	70-88	C1
FCE First Certificate in English	5.5 – 6.5	50-70	B2
PET Preliminary English Test	4.0-5.0	10-50	B1

These are publicly available in the website of the Graduate School (Admission Requirements (ucy.ac.cy)) and accessible through the website of the Department of Education (https://www.ucy.ac.cy/edu/en/admission/postgraduate).

2. Although over the last years the vast majority of the postgraduate degrees at the university have experienced a fall in the student numbers, the numbers for the current program remain viable and there seems to be consistent interest both from undergraduate students of the department of education and from other departments and other institutions.

3. The program coordinators have been organizing individual or small group meetings with prospective students and they try to promote the program through the various seminars and workshops they organize, trying to create outreach and publicity for the current program, its content and its prospects. With the new academic year, the coordinators are planning electronic events mostly in social media for the promotion of the program.

5. Learning resources and student support
(ESG 1.6)

Findings

Appropriate teaching and learning resources with some excellent opportunities for knowledge and skill development. World class facilities on the main campus.

Strengths
- An excellent combination of theoretical materials with practical data analysis, fostering a critical and investigative orientation
- State of the art facilities including library and learning centre
- A dedicated administrative and academic staff who provide support for students
- Access to the resources of the university for student support

Areas of improvement and recommendations
- Distance from main campus may hinder access to resources on the main campus

RESPONSE

We agree that the accommodation of the Department on the main campus is critical for students' and staff's access to available resources and development of a sense of community. It is expected that this will occur upon the completion of the building to house the School of Social Sciences and Sciences of Education according to the institutional planning. Up to the present, our Department (via an ad hoc committee) in collaboration with the Dean of the School, have worked with the Rectorship to find a suitable building for rent closer to the main campus.

6. Additional for doctoral programmes
(ALL ESG)

7. Eligibility (Joint programme)
(ALL ESG)

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4. Conclusions and final remarks

The evaluation panel were impressed by the professional and dynamic approach of the two course coordinators. Their efforts in combination with the other members of the course team have resulted in an exciting course that is well positioned in Cyprus and well received by the students. Research was embedded within teaching and practice. Students clearly benefitted from the range of opportunities provided. Staff were aware of the strengths of the programme but also avenues for development. Potential developments have been outlined in the report but it is clear there is scope to supplement the core team with expertise in learning/cognition/psycholinguistics and quantitative research.

We would like to thank the members of the External Evaluation Committee for the time and effort invested in the evaluation of our program. We found their positive feedback and recommendations particularly useful for the improvement and further advancement of the evaluated program of study.

5. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

Name	*Position*	*Signature*
Elena Ioannidou	Associate Professor	
Stavroula Kontovourki	Assistant Professor	
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: 27 April 2021