

07.14.318.033

Doc. 300.1.2

Higher Education Institution's Response

Conventional-face-to-face programme of study

Date:

- **Higher Education Institution:** Frederick University
- **Campus:** Nicosia and Limassol
- **School:** Education and Social Sciences
- **Department :** Education
- **Programme(s) of study under evaluation**
Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)

Programme

In Greek:

Προδημοτική Εκπαίδευση (4 ακαδημαϊκά έτη, 240 ECTS, Πτυχίο (BEd))

In English:

Pre-Primary Education (4 academic years, 240 ECTS, Bachelor (BEd))

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.300.3.1) must justify whether actions have been taken in improving the quality of the department 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. 300.3.1).*
- *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, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9)

Areas of improvement and recommendations

1.a *The committee notes that this review appears to be the first the programme has had under the auspices of the CYQAA. We recommend that the Department integrate this review into its cycle of programmatic reviews. Integration of this process would support a focus upon continuous improvement rather than perhaps feeling like an additional impost.*

If not present already (we were unable to detect it), we recommend that the evaluation cycle and opportunities to programme evaluation are made publicly available on the university's website.

As per the University's rules and regulations (**Annex 1 – Rules for Programme review**), all programmes of study are reviewed in various time intervals in order to reflect the latest content in the required specializations and the latest trends in educational methodologies. The review procedure takes into consideration and has participation of members of the academic community, student bodies as well as teachers' association bodies.

According to the CYQAA regulations, all programmes of study are evaluated by external committees every five (5) years and the results of the external evaluations are made public through the CYQAA website ([link](#)).

1.b *The course design should be reviewed in line with international benchmarks such as the European Quality Framework (Council Recommendation on high quality early childhood education and care systems, adopted by the European Commission in 2018).*

The range of subjects in the programme has the potential to offer students a rich and varied experience in many areas, but the ECEC core research content does not appear to be embedded throughout. We suggest that all the staff teaching on the programme come together to review the course in line with such benchmarks and key contemporary evidence grounded in early childhood research. In this review the team should jointly consider: 1) the key knowledge and skills required for an early

childhood teacher, in the light of contemporary research literature; and 2) how this is – or could be – reflected in the programme, an in each subject.

It is important that reading lists include seminal texts (regardless of age) and also references to more recent early childhood education and care research and/ or theory. This is especially important in a field such as early childhood education, in which research is continuously emerging that challenges / and or extends our understanding of young children and the way in which they and their families can be best supported through early childhood education. If it is not possible for such readings to be included in reference lists because they cannot be sourced in Greek, this should be reflected in the seminars delivered by teaching staff.

In general, based on the university's rules the revision of the curricula of the Department follows the procedure provided for by the relevant rules of the University (Rules for the Review of Study Programs). Changes in the Curricula are decided by the Board of the Department upon a suggestion from the Program Committee. For the review of Study Programs, (a) the findings, remarks and recommendations mentioned in the Program's Self-Assessment Report, including the contributions of students, teachers and focus groups (students, graduates and employers), are taken into account (b) developments in the scientific field of the Program; and (c) suggestions from the Internal Quality Committee.

Within the abovementioned context, the Pre-Primary Program was recently internally reviewed in line with international benchmarks, namely the European Quality Framework (Council Recommendation on high quality early childhood education and care systems, adopted by the European Commission in 2018). Additionally, changes were made based on our experiences as members of the scientific community on the specific issues. For example we have to highlight that members of the academic staff of our department had taken part at the scientific committee for the development of the school curriculum (starting from the age of pre-primary education) during the educational reform in Cyprus in 2011 and 2015 (e.g. Rita Panaoura in Mathematics Education, Nikleia Eteokleous in Educational Technology, Katerina Karatasou in Greek Literature).

Recently (in June), we have discussed and decided, at the Departmental Council level, to implement the committee's suggestion to review the course in line with the key contemporary evidence grounded in early childhood research. To achieve this, the program Coordinators

are currently in charge of a faculty committee that was recently established, in order to jointly consider: 1) the key knowledge and skills required for an early childhood teacher, in the light of contemporary research literature; and 2) how this is – or could be – reflected in the programme, and in each subject. The preliminary results of this internal review process have shown that the Pre-Primary Program courses structure corresponds to a great extent to the international benchmarks, specifically the European Quality Framework. According to this Framework European Countries are recommended to:

“Support the professionalisation of early childhood education and care staff. Depending on the existing level of professional qualification and working conditions, successful efforts can include:

- raising the status of the early childhood education and care profession by creating professional standards, aligning qualification requirements, professional status and career prospects of early childhood education and care educators with those of primary school teachers and creating professionalisation pathways for staff with low or no qualification and specific pathways to qualify assistants;
- improving initial education and continuous professional development to take full account of the well-being, learning and developmental needs of children, relevant societal developments, and full understanding of child rights” (page 11, Council of the European Union Recommendations)

Additionally, the framework emphasizes “fostering empathy, compassion and awareness in relation to equality and diversity in early years curricula” (page 12, Council of the European Union Recommendations), and this exact recommendation is already being implemented through the Program’s courses. The members of the Evaluation Committee specifically commented this, as part of the strengths of our Program. Quoting the committee’s comment here:

“The relational aspects of pedagogy, including the importance of empathy, were emphasized by key staff, and appear to be modelled by staff in the way the programme is taught, as well as aspects of programme content.

The emphasis on intercultural early childhood education is highly appropriate to Cyprus’ context and relevant to contemporary issues facing children and families”.

We attest that the Pre-Primary Program Courses Structure is aligned with the European Quality Framework recommendations to a great extent, as shown from the courses that comprise the program. Nevertheless, these preliminary results of this internal review process are further being discussed and shared with each faculty member teaching in the Pre-Primary Education Program, and are now evident in courses syllabi. This exact enrichment of the courses contents ensure that we follow even further the European Quality Framework (Council Recommendation on high quality early childhood education and care systems, adopted by the European Commission in 2018), in order to improve initial education and continuous professional development of Early Childhood Educators in Cyprus, taking full account of the well-being, learning and developmental needs of children, relevant societal developments, and full understanding of child rights, as the Framework recommends.

Along the same lines, and following the External Evaluation Committee's suggestion, all the staff teaching in this program reviewed their courses' reading lists to include seminal texts (regardless of age) and also references to more recent early childhood education and care research and/or theory in English. All the revised CIPs are presented as part of **Annex 2**.

1.c *We recommend the introduction of a Masters in Early Childhood Education and Care. This would provide a natural progression route for students from their undergraduate study and build on the grounding provided by the research methods subject and the dissertation.*

In regards to the recommendation of the committee about the introduction of a Master's in Early Childhood Education and Care, and the fact that this would provide a natural progression route for students from their undergraduate study and build on the grounding provided by the research methods subject and the dissertation, we note here that such introduction of a Masters in Early Childhood Education and Care has already been proposed to the relevant University bodies. Final review and approval will be granted by the University's relevant bodies within the efforts made under the Strategic Plan of the Department of Education and the University.

1.d *We recommend that the dissertation remain a core requirement of the undergraduate programme*

We understand and we appreciate the specific suggestion. We have to admit that few years ago, before the first revision of the programme, the dissertation was mandatory course. However, based on our experiences and mainly the difficulties few students faced, we have decided that only the students who are interested in a research orientation need to develop a study. Those students usually decide to continue for further studies, while others have a more practical orientation. However, in order to offer to all students, the opportunity of develop a small-scale study, we are asking for projects as part of the assignment at specific courses, such as the courses “Teaching Science in Pre-primary Education”, “Intercultural Education”, “Conversation Analysis”, at the fourth year of their studies.

2. Student – centered learning, teaching and assessment

(ESG 1.3)

Areas of improvement and recommendations

2.a *The set course literature could in parts be more regularly updated and the international research literature on ECEC be more effectively utilized and merged into the courses. Students can be supported and motivated to consult the wide range of academic journals and e-books that are available in English.*

Adhering to the committee's suggestions, the set course literature in the Program's courses was recently updated and the international research literature on ECEC is going to be more effectively utilized and merged into the courses from the beginning of the new academic year. Students are going to be further supported and motivated to consult the wide range of academic journals and e-books that are available in English. The updated literature as part of the CIPs are presented at the **Annex 2**.

2.b *It would be advisable to encompass more on qualitative research methods in the programme. The existing research subject, Educational Research Methods and Statistics, appears to have a strong orientation to quantitative research methods and analysis. However, the students we had the opportunity to meet appeared to be using only qualitative methods for their dissertation.*

Regarding the program's research subject "Educational Research Methods and Statistics", this is comprised by three teaching hours per week, two of which are dedicated to both quantitative and qualitative research methods, and one hour is devoted to statistics. Regarding the educational research methods taught in this course, those include action research and case studies methodologies, as well as analysis of qualitative data.

Qualitative research methods are also employed in forms of courses assignments, where students need to employ small-scale research methods such as case studies and interviews, as part of the requirements of different courses.

2.c *Relatedly, a greater familiarity with trends and paradigms in contemporary early childhood research would support the interconnectedness of theory and practice in the programme. This would support graduates to further research-based practice in their professional careers, and may inspire more students to continue into post graduate research in early childhood.*

Thank you very much for the comment, we undoubtedly agree. For this reason, in most of the courses which students attend at the third and fourth year, they are asked to develop and complete assignments and projects which relate theory and practice. For example, in the case of the teaching of mathematics (ECMAT300) they are asked to develop small scale case studies for the development of mathematical thinking at the ages of 3-6 years old based on the theories of developmental and cognitive psychology in relation to the recent findings of mathematics education. Similarly, for example they are asked to examine the use of child literature as a useful tool for the development of children's imagination, creative thinking, mathematical thinking, scientific thinking and so on, based on the value of interdisciplinarity. Similar examples can be found at many different courses during their studies.

2.d *The EEC had the impression that thesis supervision was organized to a great extent in connection to staff research interests. Such an approach is positive in so far as it ensures the necessary competencies for supervision. However, it may also narrow the research carried out in the subject area in the institution.*

The academic staff of the department supervise thesis of undergraduate, graduate and PhD students. In the case of the PhD studies we tried to relate, as it is expected, the supervision of the thesis with the academic staff research interests. However, in the case of the undergraduate programme, students have to choose only the domain of their interest for their thesis (art education, mathematics education, technology, physical education, play-based learning etc) and the academic staff easily supports their preferences on specific research areas.

2.e *The internationalisation of the programme could be supported through Erasmus student exchange. Many of the academic staff members have strong experience of studies or research in international institutions, with other universities, or*

associations with international organisations. It might be possible to utilize these connections to leverage international experiences for students, even if this is a via a virtual, technologically facilitated, experience or through initiatives of internationalisation @home.

The internalization of the programme is already supported by the connections that faculty members have with other universities (especially from European Countries through Erasmus funded research programs and third world countries). However, we have already identified the difficulties our students have to take parts at student exchange programs (except Greece) due to their low self-efficacy beliefs about their English language fluency.

We agree with the Committee that emphasis should be placed on internationalization efforts and aim for reaching a broader audience. Clearly for this, the offering of the programs of study in the English language is a prerequisite and this is something we aim introducing in the near future but it is not prudent to do so immediately. We reiterate that the broader issue of internationalization rests in part with the University's strategic plan and general policy to open up programs of study to other markets

Furthermore, the Department is working with the University management to further support its efforts for internationalization and a feasibility study is conducted to offer Master programs in English language through distance learning or blended learning.

The Department already forms a strategy in order to internationalise its staff profile and its students through the increase of mobility via the Erasmus program, further involvement in EU-Conexus networks (Frederick University is an associate member of EU-Conexus European University for Smart Urban Coastal and Sustainability; [Link](#)). Furthermore, international experience is a prerequisite for hiring new staff as shown in the University's website ([Link](#)).

3. Teaching staff

(ESG 1.5)

Areas of improvement and recommendations

3.a *The EEC noted that frames of references for subjects may be mostly historical and knowledge about contemporary debates in the field is rather limited (e.g. reconceptualising movements, critiques of developmentally appropriate practices, anti-bias and decolonising approaches). We acknowledge the importance and contributions of historical figures in the development of early childhood education and education more generally, and their place in early childhood education programmes. However, we believe there is scope to support staff development in ways that strengthen staff's appreciation of contemporary debates in early childhood research and theory.*

To support this, we suggest the following:

- Aspects of professional development adopt a 'whole of team approach' so that there is some shared discourse and development concerning early childhood theory;*
- Teachers are supported in their professional development by using the opportunities for teacher exchange in Erasmus (incoming as well as outgoing), possibly in combination with sabbatical leave systems*
- Organise a system of time to debate and reflect about ECEC research and pedagogy in the team (share insights, readings, and so forth) for example, through a departmental, ECEC research focused seminar series*
- Organise a system of university support for collaborative research of staff with foreign colleagues that would create mutual and reciprocal learning opportunities.*

We appreciate and embrace the committee's recommendations regarding program's areas of improvement in reference to the teaching staff domain.

In response to the recommendations, the Department has decided to take the following actions in order to support staff development in ways that strengthen staff's appreciation of contemporary debates in early childhood research and theory:

- To place a particular focus on the whole-team approach in our shared discourse and development concerning early childhood theory, within new ECEC research focused seminar series that are being organized, where we will share insights and readings. These seminar series have been decided with the Program and Department leadership to be set in place within the next academic year.
- To further support academic staff professional development by increasing mobility via the Erasmus program in order to internationalise its staff profile. Additionally, the Department has granted sabbatical leaves to members of the teaching staff of the Pre-Primary Education Program in the past, and recently has granted a sabbatical leave for a faculty member, for the Fall Semester of 2021.
- To organize a system of time to debate and reflect about ECEC research and pedagogy specifically in the team, through a departmental, ECEC research focused seminar series. This seminar series is currently being organized by the Departmental Research Committee and the academic staff, who are involved in curriculum theory, and are well aware of the reconceptualization movements and in particular those that happened both in the curriculum studies field and pedagogy. In this context, all academic staff teaching in the Pre-Primary Program will further appreciate and enhance their understandings, interpretations, theory and praxis in curriculum, instruction, care and pedagogy.
- To organize specialized research seminars by invited speakers of international research calibre. The Department has agreed with visiting faculty members to provide research seminars in their field to Pre-Primary Education faculty members, in order to create mutual and reciprocal learning opportunities through research collaborations. A recent Erasmus International Mobility agreement has been established between Frederick University and the British Columbia University of Canada. Within this mutual agreement, Rita Irwin, a worldwide known scholar in Art Education, will visit Frederick University in the new academic year.

In respect to the reference to the historical aspects in childhood education, we appreciate the committee's comments. We believe that at the introductory courses we need to present the historical dimension of the development of the pedagogical science in order to enable our

students to understand that every educational policy is situated at a specific social, economic, cultural and scientific context. Changes at the structure of the courses have been done (Annex) in order to relate further the historical perspective with the nowadays philosophy and the contemporary debates in the field. For example, they study about the Summerhill and the Montessori's method under a historical perspective and we relate their impact on the development of childhood education through the innovation of the School of Nature for the ages of 3-5 years we have established at our university recently. The exploration and investigation in games and activities are explained under the social, educational, cultural etc framework which asks for the relevant at the same time parental involvement. Similarly, we discuss for example the impact of Piaget in education and the following up impact of the neo-piagetian perspective for the child development in educational activities. Finally, in order to discuss further recent issues which are central at the childhood education all the course outlines have been revised and recent references have been added (Annex). Many of those references are used for activities which aimed to develop students critical thinking, analytical thinking and creativity.

3.b *The external evaluation committee appreciates the efforts that are made to combine research and teaching and the overall guidelines of the university to do so. However, there may be a distance between the guidelines and the everyday realities for some staff which needs to be monitored. There may be a discrepancy between staff members who have more teaching or other duties and who have less opportunities to research and publish, while the evaluation criteria are the same for all.*

We welcome the Committee's suggestions that aim at improving research activity among faculty members. It is recognized in the report that some members publish in leading international journals, but there is indeed room for improvement among other members, and significant variation in research output is a problem that must be addressed. It is noted that the Department has identified several challenges relating to its research output in its research plan. Under a broader university plan, the Department has identified a series of research-related KPIs so that members of staff can relate to tangible and quantifiable targets as well as a series of support mechanisms to help their achievement.

In response to the recommendations, the Department has decided to take the following actions in order to promote the research culture and activity among staff, as well as to support staff development concerning early childhood research and theory:

- To further enhance the seminar series where all faculty members, as well as invited speakers, present their research work and receive feedback on their research work. The use of online technology was recommended to limit travel costs for invited speakers.
- New seminar series are organized through the newly established Center of Educational Excellence (starting from September 2021). The Department of Education at Frederick University, and the Pre-Primary Education Program alike, is committed to preparing the next generation of teachers, scientists and educational leaders, offering opportunities for continuous professional development to educators, and advancing the body of knowledge through research in different disciplines of the teaching profession. Thus, the Department of Education aspires to be a nationally recognized leader in teacher education in all levels (undergraduate, masters and PhDs). A Center of Educational Excellence has recently been established within the University (the present of the University Council is responsible for the Centre), in order to promote research in teaching among faculty members and students, to make even more visible the research it conducts, and to attract and retain high quality faculty members, researchers and academically advanced students, who will work in a stimulating and supportive environment. According to the decision taken at the University Council, the Center offers professional development training programs to the University's faculty, which will be developed and delivered by the Department of Education Academic Personnel, regarding teaching and assessment principles and methodologies.
- To organize a system of time to debate and reflect about ECEC research and pedagogy specifically in the team, through a departmental, ECEC research focused seminar series. This seminar series is currently being organized by the Departmental Research Committee. Academic staff, and especially those involved in curriculum theory, know very well the reconceptualization movements and in particular those that happened both in the curriculum studies field and pedagogy. The lecture notes and other academic materials we translate for our courses, as well as the conversations generated with the students thereon, include recent efforts to enhance our understandings, interpretations, theory and praxis in curriculum, instruction, care and pedagogy.

- To organize specialized research seminars by invited speakers of international research calibre. The Department has agreed with visiting faculty members to provide research seminars in their field to faculty members and PhD students.
- To increase the research support administration capacity. It has been identified that many colleagues are reluctant to engage in funded research initiatives due to the administrative overhead this often entails. For this reason, a new research officer has been hired in the Research and Interconnection Service with such specific duties.
- To increase training capacity towards faculty members for matters relating to research engagement. In February 2021 the University hired a new research officer with experience in administering research projects, editing research proposals, and enhancing/facilitating research network development. The new recruit focuses on the provision of training and development seminars to faculty and assisting them in developing and enhancing their research collaborations.
- To establish a series of incentives and further enhance existing ones which aim at promoting research output. These include:
 - i) Teaching load reduction. The University's teaching load reduction scheme is enhanced to include eligibility for faculty that engage in research activities which mentor junior faculty or faculty with limited publication record. Equally importantly, the Department will enable faculty members for requesting load reduction in anticipation of future research results (publications/research grants) rather than the standard University practice were such load reductions are given upon achievement of research outputs.
 - ii) Internal funding for faculty members that require financial assistance to develop their research ideas. Notably, faculty members will take advantage of the decision by the Senate in Fall 2020 to fund competitive research proposals. Specifically, the Senate has allocated a portion of the University's Research Fund for an internal funding scheme through which members of staff that have lacked the financial support to further their research through external means and indicate a reasonable path to the generation of research output can apply for internal small-scale financial support (5,000 to 10,000 euro per project). The call was announced in January 2021 and several groups in the department have submitted proposals in their fields of expertise.
 - iii) Increase the funding for participation in Scopus indexed conferences that lead to publications by 50%. It is noted that the University already allocates a budget to the

Department for these activities. In the past year the Department utilised ~3,000 euro for conference-support activities and a further 4,000 euro for research expenses. Clearly, the COVID pandemic has restricted expenditure in conference participation. As mentioned, in order to boost participation in high-impact publications, such activities will further boost the departmental budget by 50%.

The Department has re-iterated the importance of utilizing European funds and in particular European COST actions in the last departmental meeting in December 2020. A number of faculty members already participate and expressed their interest to continue. They have also shared experiences with other faculty members to increase participation in this important form of European funding. Additionally, and in the field of ECEC, we submitted last year the research project proposal “Children safe in outdoor education” for Erasmus+ funding, and we were also engaged in the EC’s Rights, Equality and Citizenship program, with a particular focus on the objective “to promote and protect the rights of the child”.

3.c ECEC as a field of research itself is relatively new, and demands particular attention in order for it to be defined as its own field of study – not just a “little brother of” education more broadly.

We agree that every pedagogical department has to give equal significance to the development of educational research at different levels of education. Our academic staff publish studies for pre-primary, primary, secondary and higher education. Mainly our interest concentrates on pre-primary and primary education, since the first two programs of studies of our department were for pre-primary and primary education. Two members of the academic staff (Chrisa Nitsiou and Maria Vassiliadou) represent our country in the World Organization for Early Childhood Education (OMEPE) and they serve as Board Members on the Cyprus OMEPE Committee. The World Organisation for Early Childhood Education (OMEPE) is an NGO founded in 1948 operating in more than 60 countries that works to defend Human Rights of girls and boys since they are born until they are eight years of age (Early childhood). OMEPE multiple initiatives range from training and honing skills for teachers, professionals and education agents, as well as public officers and lawmakers to the organization of congresses, seminars, courses, awards, and incentives concerning training needs of the

several actors in the Early Childhood Education and Care systems in different educational and social contexts.

Additionally, Nicoletta Christodoulou who is associate professor of the Department established and she currently coordinates the School of Nature ([Link](#)), an innovation for our country, which is for children ages 3-5 years old. Members of the academic staff in collaboration with students examine scientifically issues which are related with the school.

3.d *Staff should be actively and strategically supported to meet the quantitative outputs expected by the management for personal promotion (numbers of PhD, output in peer reviewed journals).*

The EEC recommends therefore that staff are offered professional support through mentorship or other forms of systematic professional support to publish internationally in the specific field of ECEC and in ECEC-oriented journals and books. This might involve, for instance, academic writing seminars; collaborative transnational research projects; support in writing grant applications through a system of peer review.

We welcome the Committee's suggestions that aim at improving professional development of faculty members. We believe that the professional development of the members of the academic staff concentrates on teaching and research. Indicative actions which are developed:

- To further enhance the seminar series where all faculty members, as well as invited speakers, present their research work and receive feedback on their research work. The use of online technology was recommended to limit travel costs for invited speakers.
- New seminar series are organized through the newly established Center of Educational Excellence (starting from September 2021). A number of those seminars is about the professional development of academics concentrating on research abilities (especially funded programs) and teaching processes (innovative student-centered processes).

4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

(ESG 1.4)

Areas of improvement and recommendations

4.a *An MA programme focused in early childhood would create a defined trajectory for ECEC research, thus the research in this subject area could be notably strengthened and also broadened also beyond the research interests of the current staff.*

The introduction of a Master's in Early Childhood Education and Care has already been proposed to the relevant University bodies.

Main objectives of the proposed Masters in Early Childhood Education and Care are:

- to provide the interested teachers and professionals of the field with the appropriate tools that will maximize the understanding of the complexity of the phenomena that take place during the early childhood years, as well as
- to provide in-depth knowledge about the appropriate pedagogical methods that will empower and shape the development and learning of the young child, within favorable learning environments, based on contemporary research results in the field of Early Childhood Education and Care.

Final review and approval of the operation of the Master's in Early Childhood Education and Care will be granted by the University's relevant bodies within the efforts made under the Strategic Plan of the Department of Education and the University.

5. Learning resources and student support

(ESG 1.6)

5.a *Although the library provides access to a wide range of relevant academic journals, undergraduate students reported that they did not read articles that were in English (or languages other than Greek). Adding just one recent international ECEC research article to the set literature for each subject (or a number of key subjects) would greatly enhance the internationalization of the programme, the connectedness to the broader international field, and the positionality of the programme. Such articles could perhaps be read together for ease of understanding and to generate class discussion.*

The coordinators of the program discussed this issue and we asked from all academic staff to include at least one such article in their courses, aiming to generate discussions with the students; also, we will share articles amongst us and hold relevant conversations. All the updated CIPs are presented as part of the **Annex 2**.

However, currently, we do show films, short videos, and other educational material addressing inquiry, critical thinking, differentiation, continuous assessment, and the importance of early childhood for the growth and the development of the person, within the context of the courses dealing with curriculum and instruction, assessment and school experience. Our students, in curriculum, instruction, and pedagogical classes get in touch with recent pedagogical works and theories. At times, they may be more reluctant to read material in English, yet, watching films and short videos, even in English, raises their interest and generate many fruitful and rich conversations.

6. Conclusions and final remarks

The programme has a number of strengths, and possibly increasingly unique aspects. For example, expertise in many aspects of the creative arts, museums, quantitative research and robotics. We also acknowledge the diverse range of specialist expertise represented in the programme.

- 6.a *Our overview of the programme indicates that what could be further strengthened is knowledge and understanding of contemporary trends in early childhood education and care research and pedagogy and a coherent philosophical underpinning for the programme. In future, team reviews of the programme guided by a consideration and understanding of established and emerging early childhood approaches could strengthen these aspects.*
- 6.b *This could build on the discussions that already appear to have taken place regarding the pedagogy of relationships, ethics of care and commitment to intercultural ways of working, already evident. We were impressed by the care and dedication staff showed students and their commitment to produce empathetic graduates committed to a sensitivity to diversity.*
- 6.c *We recognize that the university has taken a number of steps to support staff development in relation to grants and publication and their own personal progression, and these steps already appear to have had impact. However, we believe there is scope to further support staff publish in international early childhood education and care journals and in obtaining research funding with a focus on early childhood education and care, through co-publishing, scaffolding workshops, mentorship and so forth. Team approaches can be very effective in creating a departmental research culture of mutual support and encouragement.*
- 6.d *The unique strengths of the programme may benefit international peers as well as international collaborations may strengthen and deepen the team's reflections about the programme. We are confident that investments in international exchanges (through literature, seminars, joint projects, teacher exchange, and so forth) will contribute to the future development of the programme with benefits for students and teachers alike.*

Firstly, we would like to sincerely thank the External Evaluation Committee for their hard work, the constructive discussions held during the virtual visit, and the valuable recommendations made for improving our proposed program. We deeply appreciate the fact that the committee is acknowledging the fact that our programme has a number of strengths, and possibly increasingly unique aspects, as well as the fact that we have a diverse range of specialist expertise represented in the programme. In relation to the recommendations made by the EEC, we have taken the necessary actions to fully adopt them, as evident from our responses in sections 1 to 6 of this response.

Furthermore, the staff's care and dedication showed to students and our commitment to produce empathetic graduates committed to a sensitivity to diversity is an ongoing endeavor within our programme, as we live in a diverse society where empathy is a skill that can be developed from early on in a child's life.

Regarding the committee's recognition in relation to the University's efforts to support staff development, and as mentioned in a previous section, the "FREDERICK" Internal Funding Scheme for Research Proposals, is already providing seed funding to potentially high-impact research proposals, and the expected impact of this funding scheme will take the form of future research projects, publications, attraction from external funding from competitive calls, as well as close collaborations with important research stakeholders.

Finally, the Personal & Professional Development @ Frederick Office for Research and Innovation, has recently organized two webinars for faculty members in regards with new Erasmus Calls titled "How to write successful ERASMUS + proposals", as well "Proposal Budgeting Principles & RIF Bridge Proposal Budgets", both of which were attended by faculty members interested in submitting research proposals. The University's commitment to staff development will further contribute to the future development of the programme with benefits for students and teachers alike.



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CYPRUS AGENCY OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION



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B. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Signature</i>
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Prof. George Demosthenous Rector

