

Doc. 300.1.2

Date: 13.02.2025 Date.

Higher Education Institution's Response

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

- **Town:** Nicosia, Cyprus

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

In Greek:

«Δημόσια Υγεία (3-8 Έτη/180 ECTS, Διδακτορικό)»

In English:

“Public Health (3-8 Years/180 ECTS, Doctor of Philosophy)”

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

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

- **Concentrations (if any):**

In Greek: Concentrations

In English: Concentrations



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 2021 [\[L.136\(I\)/2015 – L.132\(I\)/2021\]](#).

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 or 300.1.1/1 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. The answers' documentation should be brief and accurate and supported by the relevant documentation. Referral to annexes should be made only when necessary.*
- *In particular, under each assessment area and by using the 2nd column of each table, the HEI must respond on the following:*
 - *the areas of improvement and recommendations of the EEC*
 - *the conclusions and final remarks noted by the EEC*
- *The institution should respond to the EEC comments, in the designated area next each comment. The comments of the EEC should be copied from the EEC report **without any interference** in the content.*
- *In case of annexes, those should be attached and sent on separate document(s). Each document should be in *.pdf format and named as annex1, annex2, etc.*

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 by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
1. Regarding the design, to ensure comprehensive coverage of distinctive public health research topics that clearly distinguish the field from adjacent health research domains, we recommend implementing a comprehensive initial assessment of students' public health competencies. See Section D – Conclusions and final remarks.	We thank the EEC for this recommendation. Based on this, we have included a comprehensive initial assessment of applicants' public health competencies. Further details on this issue appear in Section 4 of our response. In summary, we have developed a set of interview questions assessing basic knowledge on fundamental principles of Public Health, which will be asked during the formal interview process and will comprise an additional criterion for entry into the Programme.	Choose level of compliance:
2. The programme benefits from external expertise, and could benefit more by inviting international reviewers as members of the doctoral committees.	<p>We are grateful to the EEC for observing this practice in our doctoral degree. External academics and researchers are members of the Ph.D. Supervisory Committees and we will continue inviting more based on the EEC recommendation. Some examples of external supervision practices are listed below:</p> <p><u>PhD student:</u> Marina Georgiadou (Spring 2023 entry) <u>Topic:</u> Mixed methods study on determinants and barriers to access to health services among asylum seekers in the Republic of Cyprus <u>External supervisory member:</u> Prof Dikaïos Sakelariou (Professor of Disability Studies and Occupational Therapy, Cardiff University, Wales)</p> <p><u>PhD student:</u> Stamatia Damianakou (Spring 2023 entry) <u>Topic:</u> Investigation of socioeconomic inequalities in adverse mental health outcomes and psychological resilience</p>	Choose level of compliance:

	<p>during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Greek population</p> <p><u>External supervisory member:</u> Dr Theodosios Dimitrakos (Associate Professor of Statistics, University of the Aegean, Greece)</p> <p><u>Associate Professor</u></p> <p><u>PhD student:</u> Yiannis Koutras (Fall 2015 entry)</p> <p><u>Topic:</u> MedWeight Cyprus: Identification of factors associated with maintaining weight loss</p> <p><u>External supervisory member:</u> Prof Maria Yiannakoulia (Professor in Nutrition and Eating Behavior, Harokopion University of Athens, Greece)</p> <p><u>PhD student:</u> Demetra Kefalonitou (Fall 2015 entry)</p> <p><u>Topic:</u> Evaluation of positron emission tomography combined with computed tomography (PET/CT). The case of Greece and feasibility of integration in Cyprus</p> <p><u>External supervisory member:</u> Prof Kyriakos Souliotis (Professor of Health Policy and Dean at the School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Peloponnese, Greece)</p> <p><u>PhD student:</u> Ioannis Thanasis (Fall 2017 entry)</p> <p><u>Topic:</u> Epidemiology of HPV in Greece - Evaluation of knowledge of young adolescents and improving acceptance of vaccination through Health Education</p> <p><u>External supervisory member:</u> Dr Dimitrios Paraskevis (Associate Professor of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece)</p> <p>Following the EEC recommendation, we will pursue this even further in order to expand our collaborations and</p>	
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	enhance the supervisory experience of Ph.D. students, with external expertise.	
3. Although the programme is transparent in the selection criteria, it must make also public in the website more documentation about the doctoral programme, that is, detailed information on learning outcomes, qualification details, teaching and assessment procedures, pass rates, and graduate employment data	<p>The additional information requested by the EEC has been included in the Programme's website (link). Appendix I lists in detail the changes from the old version (link to old version).</p> <p>In more detail, the Appendix shows the content of the current version of the website (left-hand side of the document) and the revised content to be included in the new version of the website (right-hand side of the document). The document also includes a series of attachments to be included in the revised website and an indication on where exactly these attachments will be inserted.</p>	Choose level of compliance:

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

Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
1. Programme learning outcomes and profile of the future graduate should be amended regarding the teaching competences of the students. More elaboration is provided in the final section of this document, Section D - Conclusions and final remarks.	<p>Following the recommendations of the EEC, we have enriched our programme with teaching material and activities aimed at enhancing teaching competences among our Ph.D. students. Specifically, we have included two (2) new sections in the course PHE710 (Applied Research Skills and Ph.D. Dissertation Preparation), which are dedicated to pedagogical approaches, curriculum development, and teaching competences.</p> <p>As a result of this, the programme learning outcomes and objectives have also been updated accordingly (please see Appendix II - Programme Guide, pages 2-4). Additions are highlighted in yellow. In summary, we have enriched our overall programme aim in that we train students so that “...they can provide effective public health services and education, as well as scientific and research support at national and international level”.</p> <p>Accordingly, we have included a new programme objective: “To provide the necessary academic skills and competencies to support a new generation of educators in the field of Public Health and other relevant fields” and a new learning outcome: “Develop pedagogical skills and competences, as well as relevant experience in teaching and course development and coordination, which will enable PhD candidates to become competent educators in the field of Public Health and other relevant fields”.</p>	Choose level of compliance:

	<p>The updated Syllabi of all courses, with additions in the content of course PHE710 involving training to enhance pedagogical competencies can be found in Appendix III. Additions are highlighted in yellow. In summary, two thematic sections have been added in the specific course:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic and pedagogical skills I: Teaching skills • Academic and pedagogical skills II: Skills for developing and coordinating teaching courses 	
<p>2. Based on comments of the previous external evaluation, the Schools have changed the requirements for final exam and graduation. Based on advice from the University, a new set of rules for requirements for final exam and graduation was decided (Phase 3). The EEC gives specific advice in the final section of this document, Section D - Conclusions and final remarks.</p>	<p>In agreement with the recommendation of the EEC, we have amended the requirements for publications. As per the EEC's suggestion, we have replaced "<i>should</i>" with "<i>must</i>" and now request two (2) published papers in the case of an extended chapter-based dissertation.</p> <p>Please see the more detailed response in Section D -Conclusions and Final Remarks, where we respond to the EEC full recommendation.</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>

3. Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
<p>1. The research activities must fit the health at the population level in Cyprus. It is strongly recommended to use the State of Health in the EU – Cyprus - Country Health Profile 2021 (https://health.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-12/2021_chp_cyprus_english.pdf) as a guide to develop future activities that can have an impact on relevant stakeholders (Ministry of health, Local health authorities, Schools). As a consequence of the above mentioned, the public health issues in which the research activities are carried out by the teachers do not cover all the fields of public health. So, the recommendation is to increase the research activities on the following public health issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Tobacco smoking o Alcohol consumption and abuse o Cancer epidemiology 	<p>The current research priorities of the Programme have been further developed taking into consideration the recommendation of the EEC to address the Public Health priorities of the country. Our alignment with the Cyprus Smart Specialization Strategy, is documented in the "Research priorities in Public Health – Department of Health Sciences" document which is available in the Programme's website (please see here, section "Call for Submission of Application for Doctoral Studies" and included here as Appendix IV).</p> <p>Based on the recommendations of the EEC, we have further enriched the research priorities of the programme, based on the latest EU – Cyprus - Country Health Profile (2023).</p> <p>More specifically, the suggested topics fall under the broad research priorities of the Department of Health Sciences, particularly priority #2 ('Lifestyle, genetic predisposition, and their role in chronic disease epidemiology') and priority #1 ('Health inequalities, social exclusion, and migrant health'). Therefore, the following topics were added:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Tobacco smoking o Alcohol consumption and abuse o Cancer epidemiology o Childhood obesity 	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>

	<p>Further details on how these are highlighted as major public health priorities in the EU Cyprus Country Health Profile (2023) and how they have been incorporated in the Ph.D. programme's research priorities, can be found in our detailed response in Section D -Conclusions and Final Remarks.</p> <p>As mentioned above, the updated Department of Health Science Public Health research priorities can be found in Appendix IV. Additions are highlighted in yellow for the convenience of the EEC.</p>	
<p>2. Some of this activities can be carried out also with strong collaboration at the international level. Higher attention must be given to the development and implementation of cohort studies as well as case-control studies.</p>	<p>We thank the EEC for its recommendation regarding this issue. Currently, there are specific plans to kickstart multiple large cohort studies (which would eventually include nested case-control studies) via the SCEPI project, which is already underway at the School of Medicine. This involves large-scale participant recruitment and longitudinal self-reported data collection via smartphones, and is expected to enable and facilitate epidemiological research throughout EUC irrespective of resource constraints.</p> <p>In addition, a large-scale population-based prospective survey aiming to continuously and systematically evaluate basic health indicators, main disease outcomes, lifestyle factors, and quality of life in the Cypriot population, is currently under development, as a collaboration between the Ministry of Health and different Academic Institutions, with EUC faculty from the Public Health team at the Department of Health Sciences</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>

	<p>having a major role in the development and implementation of the study.</p> <p>This is anticipated to facilitate the research activities of all our Public Health faculty and increase the opportunities for our students participating in important local and international epidemiological consortia, also involving cohort studies.</p>	
3. Give relevant information on the learning objectives of the courses that are delivered in the PhD programme, as well as the contents and textbooks, at least on the website of the EUC.	<p>The additional information requested by the EEC has been added accordingly, enriching the Programme's website. Please see in Appendix I changes to the current website. The updated website will be released upon the final decision of CY.Q.A.A. and will include the following changes in order to address the EEC recommendations:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Inclusion of the Aims, Objectives and Learning Outcomes of the Ph.D. Public Health programme. 2. Inclusion of the Ph.D. Public Health Course Syllabi, which include learning objectives of taught courses, contents of these courses and relevant textbooks for each course. 3. Research Priorities in Public Health for both Departments. 4. Ph.D. Public Health complete list of Admissions Criteria. 	Choose level of compliance:
4. Increase the number of recognised visiting teaching staff	<p>We are in agreement with the EEC that this recommendation will bring added value to the Programme. We have therefore recently included in the programme a new visiting faculty, Prof. Thalia Bellali,</p>	Choose level of compliance:

	<p>Professor of Mental Health Nursing in Psycho-Trauma at the International Hellenic University. Prof. Bellali holds two bachelor's degrees from the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (EKPA), in Nursing and Psychology. and a Master's degree from the same University in Mental Health. She has also attended many postgraduate continuing education seminars and training programs in the field of mental health, health management, and qualitative research methods. Prof Bellali has a vast experience in teaching undergraduate and postgraduate programmes at EKPA, Aristotle University, University of Thessaloniki, and the Open Universities of Greece and Cyprus. She also has supervised over 75 postgraduate research projects and was a member of 12 doctoral dissertations.</p> <p>At European University Cyprus, Prof Bellali holds the position of Adjunct Professor in Mental Health Nursing in Psycho-trauma and acts as a visiting faculty at the Department of Health Sciences. Due to her specialisation in qualitative research, Prof. Bellali is responsible for the training of Ph.D. Public Health students in qualitative research methods, both in context of the formal training received through the programme's specialised courses, but also through continuous support of our students during the fieldwork phase of their Ph.D. projects, particularly in cases involving qualitative analysis.</p> <p>Recognising the importance of involving external expertise in our programme, as rightly pointed out</p>	
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	<p>by the EEC, we are continuously looking to further enrich our team with visiting staff in a targeted manner. More specifically, the Programme Coordinators and other faculty from the Public Health team, utilising their international research contacts, are inviting experts to be formally involved in the programme as visiting faculty. Although this is not always successful due to the high workload of these academics, we are confident that we will be involving more visiting faculty to share their expertise with our students in the near future.</p>	
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4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification (ESG 1.4)

Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
<p>1. As stated under Strengths, the diversity of the students is something that needs to be preserved. However, this comes at a cost, and that is the lack of a pre-existing knowledge in public health of those students from backgrounds other than public health. The solution that was chosen before the visit of the EEC in 2020 was to prescribe mandatory courses in Public Health from the Master's programme. That solution had to be given up because it was not compatible with the Bologna process.</p> <p>An alternative could be to administer an entry assessment in the area of Public Health, and admit applicants to the PhD programme only after passing the test, or after completing learning activities to fill the existing learning needs. For applicants with Master's degree in Public Health no longer than 3 years before the application the test could be voluntary.</p>	<p>We acknowledge the EEC's concern. Both Departments co-offering the Programme highly value the diverse backgrounds of our Ph.D. Public Health students and make all efforts to ensure that they possess a satisfactory level of background knowledge in Public Health.</p> <p>For this purpose, and in line with the recommendation of the EEC, we will incorporate a formal entry assessment during the applicants' formal interview, in effect from the next intake this coming Fall term (F2025). Please see Appendix V for the programme's revised Admission Criteria.</p> <p>As an additional admission criterion to the Programme, the assessment will comprise a set of questions for the formal evaluation of Ph.D. Public Health candidates' knowledge on fundamental principles of Public Health, This set of questions can be found in Appendix VI.</p> <p>With the aim of making this additional admission criterion clear to all applicants, we will also highlight the skills and knowledge required in the programme's webpage. Our aim is to ensure a fair and transparent process where all applicants are duly informed</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>

	<p>and prepared. Please see in Appendix I where the list of Admission Criteria will be included in the website.</p> <p>As mentioned here, the Programme's revised Admissions Criteria can be found in Appendix V. All additions are highlighted in yellow for the EEC's convenience.</p>	
2. EEC is aware of a similar, but weaker, statement on the website, section on admission.	The programme's website will be updated accordingly as it appears in Appendix I and include the complete list of our Admissions Criteria, in order to enhance transparency. Please see our response in topic item 4.1 above.	Choose level of compliance:

5. Learning resources and student support (ESG 1.6)

Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
1. Given the rather small number of PhD student admission rate, the programme can benefit from developing a more systematic approach to anticipating and responding to potential fluctuations in student numbers, ensuring consistent resource adequacy across different scenarios	We concur with the EEC's concern. Based on our annual planning of the two Departments, the Ph.D. Public Health programme is exclusively delivered by the two Department's full-time faculty members. As such, it does not face issues with adequacy of human resources. Even in periods of very low student numbers, Public Health faculty teach courses from the Masters programme in Public Health, as well as undergraduate courses in Research Methods, Epidemiology, and Biostatistics.	Choose level of compliance:
2. Regarding funding resources, a limited national research funding may hinder large-scale, high-quality doctoral research projects. Actively seeking international grants and industry partnerships could address this	<p>As noted by the EEC, in our efforts to augment the number of student applicants, we are enriching our research portfolio, which in turn, will facilitate our ability to secure funded projects. Our faculty members are actively striving to attract research funding, both from national and international (primarily European) funding bodies. Some examples follow below:</p> <p>A recently funded project is the SCEPI project, described above, which will facilitate large-scale longitudinal data collection from the population, enabling our team to set up cohort studies and eventually join international partnerships and consortia.</p> <p>Additionally, funding granted by faculty at the Department of Health Sciences has ensured</p>	Choose level of compliance:

	access to the large-scale (over 500,000 participants) population-based UK Biobank database, enabling the availability of a very rich dataset comprising hundreds of variables and covering multiple aspects of epidemiology and public health, providing thus a unique opportunity for prospective PhD students to be involved in large-scale epidemiological investigations.	
3. In addition, to include in the programme student training to write research proposals based on European and international templates can be an added value for future public health researchers, as well as exploring alternative funding models	<p>We thank the EEC for this suggestion. Currently, we are utilising proposal templates from the Cyprus national funding body (https://www.research.org.cy/en/) for the purposes of training our students in research proposal write-up.</p> <p>Based on the suggestion of the EEC, we have now expanded the training for preparation of research proposals including international templates</p> <p>In particular, proposal templates from 'Horizon Europe Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) - Doctoral Networks Action' will be used in formal training of our students as regards writing up of research proposals based on international (European) templates during interactive tutorials in course PHE710.</p> <p>Example templates from 'Horizon Europe MSCA - Doctoral Networks Action' can be found online at MSCA Doctoral Networks 2024, while and guidance on the specific call, which will be used as a means of training for our Ph.D. students</p>	Choose level of compliance:

	can be found at: Submit a proposal — Electronic Submission System - Online Manual - Funding Tenders Opportunities	
4. Recognizing the heightened mental health challenges faced by doctoral students, particularly their increased vulnerability to anxiety and depression, the EEC emphasizes the critical importance of exceptional mentoring capabilities for all faculty members. To address these challenges, we recommend comprehensive professional development that equips faculty with essential skills in mentoring, pedagogical approaches, and advanced supervision techniques	<p>The Office of the Vice Rector for Academic Affairs runs a comprehensive professional development programme across the University which is required by all faculty members. More specifically, EUC staff members complete at least 35 hours of compulsory educational training at the beginning of their employment. The programme offers advanced training in pedagogical approaches and advanced teaching competences and focuses on the use of communication technologies for effective teaching and learning. The programme is enriched every academic year to include, among others, mentoring and supervision training. The training period is internally recognized by the award of a certificate, which describes the courses attended/successfully completed by the participant. We are thus committed to enhancing the pedagogical knowledge and skills of our instructors, as this will ultimately contribute to the overall improvement of the educational experience for our students.</p> <p>In addition, EUC the “New to Teaching” Professional Learning Programme by Advance HE has been incorporated into our continuous professional development (CPD) curriculum as of 2022. Moreover, all faculty on our CPD platform are invited to attend a ‘Connect</p>	Choose level of compliance:

	<p>Benefit Series' of webinars and informational material, offering guidance on how to benefit from EUC's membership with Advance HE. Examples of relevant courses from the "EUC Faculty Professional Development Programme for All Newly Hired Academic Staff" can be found in our response in Section D - Conclusions and final remarks.</p> <p>In addition, at the departmental and programme level, the Ph.D. Public Health Programme Coordinators ensure that all involved faculty and supervisors undertake the revised training and are thus formally trained as regards their supervision and mentoring competences.</p> <p>Of usual use at the Departmental and Programme level is the "EUC Framework on Mentoring Scheme for Newly Hired Full-Time Academic Staff and/or Part-Time Academic Staff" (Appendix VII). This Internal Regulation of EUC aims to provide training and hands on experience to all newly hired full-time and part-time faculty for empowering them to enhance their teaching and course coordination/management competences, as well as advancing mentoring and supervision skills.</p> <p>Further information on this can be found in our response in Section D -Conclusions and final remarks.</p>	
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1. Additional for doctoral programmes (ALL ESG)

Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
1. There must be a stronger link between the doctoral programmes of study and the society, especially based on research activities established as a priority at the national level.	<p>We would like to thank the EEC for this recommendation. While this is already one of the strategic pillars of the Programme, we concur that it can be further enhanced based on the recommendations of the EEC.</p> <p>Specifically, we have aligned the programme's research priorities with the country's health priorities, as outlined in the EU Country Health Profile for Cyprus (2023).</p> <p>Further information on this can be found in our detailed response in Section D - Conclusions and Final Remarks.</p>	Choose level of compliance:
2. The maximum time of completing the programme must be revised. The recommendation is that the programme lasts maximum 4 years (c.f. Compliance rating for Subarea 6.1).	<p>As the maximum time of doctoral education is set by law in Cyprus (please see, for instance CY.Q.A.A. communication Reference Number/Αρ. Φακ. 07.14.327.105, dated 24th June, 2022, where it is stated that "the minimum duration is three years and the maximum is eight" and that this should apply to all doctoral degrees). Consequently, the University sets the maximum duration of doctoral studies at eight (8) years for all doctoral programmes, which is accordingly abided by the Ph.D. in Public Health. Nonetheless, we do agree that</p>	Choose level of compliance:

	<p>8 years is a very long duration for a Ph.D. completion. In this regard, the Programme Coordinators will be emphasizing both to students and supervisors the importance of prompt completion of Ph.D. studies, ideally before 5 years and will emphasize possible challenges and barriers that student may face in case of prolonging the duration of Ph.D. completion.</p> <p>Ph.D. students will receive all support from both Programme Coordinators and supervisors, in reaching a timely completion of their Ph.D.</p>	
<p>3. For the publication requirements for PhD Public Health graduates, if the ambition of the School is to become an international player, the option “1 peer-reviewed publication” must be avoided. The recommendation is that only the option “3 peer-review publication” must be in place (c.f. Compliance rating for Subarea 6.2).</p>	<p>We agree with the EEC that one (1) required publication for those students opting for the extended chapter-based dissertation might not be enough to enable the required impact in the local and international Public Health scene that we envision to have. As described further below in the Conclusion section, although we cannot abandon the option of the extended chapter-based dissertation as per the University regulations, we are increasing the requirement for graduation to two (2) paper publications instead of one (1). In addition, as we already do, we will strongly encourage students to opt for the collection-of-published-papers dissertation option, which requires at least three (3) publications.</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>

	<p>Further information on this can be found in our response in Section D -Conclusions and final remarks.</p> <p>The revised publication requirements can be found in the updated Programme Guide in Appendix II (pg. 12).</p>	
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7. Eligibility (Joint programme)

(ALL ESG)

N/A

Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
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B. Conclusions and final remarks

Conclusions and final remarks by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
It must be made sure that none of the candidates who matriculated a few years ago is allowed to graduate according to the old requirements for graduation, assessment and awarding the PhD. If the programme allows graduation after 9 years then there can be no conservation of standards of the past.	<p>We hereby confirm that the new publication requirements for graduation are in effect for all registered students, irrespective of when they enrolled in the programme. This was stated during the site visit and we confirm that it applies here as well.</p> <p>Please see Appendix II - Updated Programme Guide (page 13).</p>	Choose level of compliance:
The EEC thinks that Conference Presentations are not an adequate substitute for a peer-reviewed publication in an international journal of a non-predatory publisher. It is still important for a student to present and discuss at a conference	<p>We totally agree with this recommendation and this is why our updated publication requirements to include only papers and not conference presentations. Please see Appendix II-Updated Programme Guide (page. 12).</p> <p>We will, of course, continue to encourage our students to participate in local and particularly international conferences, such as the annual European Public Health Conference, in which we have a yearly presence as a programme, during the past 5 years.</p>	Choose level of compliance:
A "Strong recommendation", as used in the First Phase, is ineffective. The expression "should", as it appeared in	We do acknowledge the need to do this modification. We have therefore amended the Programme Guide (Appendix II) accordingly, replacing "should" with "must", in all instances.	Choose level of compliance:

<p>Phase 2 code, is an invitation to use an open shortcut, and some humans will take the shortcut. “should” must be avoided and replaced by “must” if you want to establish clear and unequivocal quality standards.</p>		
<p>The draft for Phase 3 includes an option for an extended comprehensive dissertation plus one (1) peer-reviewed publication in an international journal as a first author. The description contains the word “should” twice. The EEC recommends deleting the word “should” and replacing it with “must”. When comparing this option with international standards, a monograph or book or extended comprehensive dissertation is obsolete, and a single peer-reviewed journal article is insufficient. If</p>	<p>We agree with the recommendation of the EEC, in that one (1) required publication for those students opting for the extended comprehensive chapter-based dissertation might not be enough to enable the required impact on the local and international public health scene that the programme envisions to have. We have therefore increased the requirement for graduation to two (2) peer-reviewed publications as first author instead of one (1), for this option. Please see Appendix II - Updated Programme Guide (page 12). As noted above, although we cannot abandon the option of the extended comprehensive chapter-based dissertation, as this is governed by University regulations to which the Ph.D. Public Health programme must abide.</p> <p>Furthermore, as already done, the Programme Coordinators will continue to strongly encourage students to opt for the collection-of-published-papers dissertation option, which requires at least three (3) publications.</p> <p>In addition, following the EEC recommendation, we have amended the Programme Guide (Appendix II) accordingly replacing the word “should” with “must” in the guidelines.</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>

EUC aspires to be an international player, this option should be excluded.		
<p>The draft for Phase 3 includes a second option to use a collection of 3 published articles. The word "should" appears three times in the criteria. The EEC recommends deleting the word "should" and replacing it with "must".</p> <p>Furthermore, the EEC suggests to add the requirement of a brief introduction (less than 5 pages) that is putting the three (or more) original papers into context, rather than paraphrasing the papers.</p>	<p>We confirm that the collection-of-published-papers dissertation option, does include a short Introduction and a short Conclusion section.</p> <p>Please see Appendix II - Updated Programme Guide (page 11). We have also ensured to replace "should" with "must" in all instances, as per the EEC's recommendation.</p>	Choose level of compliance:
<p>The EEC is sceptical regarding the criterion of "Q1 or Q2 Scopus ranking" as the sole way of determining academic quality. Scopus ranking is a metric for journals, not for articles in journals. Please allow us to use a</p>	<p>We acknowledge the concerns of the EEC as regards relying too much on Scopus rankings for evaluating the quality of our Ph.D. students' research articles. To accommodate this concern and align with the University-wide regulations, set by the Senate, we are taking extra measures for evaluating the quality of Ph.D. research articles, emphasising the assessment of the quality of the publications themselves (rather than the journals) by the Supervisory Committee, the Interdepartmental Programme Committee (headed by the two Programme Coordinators) and eventually the ad-hoc Examination Committee, which will evaluate the Ph.D. dissertation at the end. For this purpose, the Programme Coordinators are now leading an initiative for a series of meetings with all involved faculty from the two Departments in order to agree on a plan, based on existing literature, on the evaluation of the quality of manuscripts resulting from Ph.D. Public Health projects.</p>	Choose level of compliance:

<p>metaphor: it is like measuring the size of the box rather than the quality of the apples in it. Publication in predatory journals must not be acceptable, and that should be made known. Evaluation of scientific research is one of the top cognitive abilities of a scientist. It may be convenient to do so, but it cannot be true that academic institutions delegate the responsibility for evaluation of scientific research to an agent with purely monetary interest and no expertise in measuring quality of research. Remember, Scopus does not hold a PhD in Public health, it is just a proprietary algorithm. EEC had the impression from the discussion that the Faculty was treating this as a controversial issue. Instead of prescribing a solution, EEC</p>	<p>Students are therefore encouraged to submit to journals with high impact, but without the impact of the journal being a criterion of students' academic merit. We believe that this approach suggested by EEC, helps refocus our academic culture and apply more stringent quality assurance criteria for the quality of the research output of our programme.</p> <p>Regarding the issue of predatory journals, we fully agree and publication in such journals is already discouraged in our programme, although we note the extensive grey area in what constitutes a predatory journal. Students receive training during their studies (particularly in courses PHE700 and PHE710) on how to distinguish predatory journals and the exact reasons for why these should be avoided. In order to address the matter more explicitly, we have now included specific guidance for avoiding predatory journals in the updated publication requirements, which can be found in the revised Programme Guide (Appendix II, page 12).</p>	
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<p>suggests that the Faculty seeks external advice, and/or advice from the scientific literature and develops a plan.</p>		
<p>Moreover, EEC is really convinced that researches conducted in Public Health at the population level need to be focused mainly on the health needs of the population. This means that it is strongly recommended to use the State of Health in the EU – Cyprus - Country Health Profile 2021 as a guide to develop future activities that can have an impact on relevant stakeholders (Ministry of health, Local health authorities, Schools), especially for topics not covered or partially covered actually by EUC (i.e., tobacco smoking, alcohol consumption, cancer epidemiology).</p>	<p>This has now been addressed as noted above by enriching the programme's research priorities. The current research priorities of the programme have been developed taking into consideration the Public Health priorities of the country, in alignment with the 'Cyprus Smart Specialization Strategy', as documented in the 'Research priorities in Public Health – Department of Health Sciences' document available in the programme's website and included here as Appendix IV.</p> <p>Following the very useful recommendation by the EEC, we have enriched the research priorities of the programme, taking into consideration the latest 'EU – Cyprus - Country Health Profile (2023)'. In particular, we have added the EEC recommended research areas (tobacco smoking, alcohol consumption, cancer epidemiology), as well as another major identified public health issue (childhood obesity), under our research priority #2 ('Lifestyle, genetic predisposition, and their role in chronic disease epidemiology'), while the social aspects of some of these health outcomes are also included under our research priority #1 ('Health inequalities, social exclusion, and migrant health'). In more detail:</p> <p><u>Tobacco smoking:</u></p> <p>The EU – Cyprus - Country Health Profile (2023) concludes that: "The proportion of adults smoking daily remains higher in Cyprus than in most EU countries – particularly among men. Almost one fifth of all deaths in 2019 could be attributed to tobacco consumption (including direct and second-hand smoking)".</p> <p>We already have an active PhD project focusing on the effects of active and passive smoking on vitamin D levels in the Cypriot population (PhD student: Alexandros Papoutsis; PhD supervisor: Alexandros Heraclides).</p> <p>Furthermore, a newly hired faculty member (starting September 2025), Dr Panayiotis Kouis (https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=zrHYMQAAAAJ&hl=en) is an expert in Environmental Health and among his priorities for future research is the investigation of the impact of tobacco smoking, as well as e-cigarette use, particularly among younger people.</p> <p>Furthermore, members of our team (Dr Demetris Lamnisos and Dr Alexandros Heraclides) are involved in a new project aiming to set up</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>

a nicotine exposure observatory for the Cypriot population, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and other partners from the industry. In this context, at least one PhD project could be hosted under this initiative, aiming to investigate the distribution and major determinants of high nicotine exposure (as a result of increased smoking prevalence) in the Cypriot population.

Finally, given our strong focus on the social determinants of health, we have included topics on the investigation of socioeconomic inequalities in smoking (including e-cigarettes), particularly among adolescents in the Republic of Cyprus.

Alcohol consumption and abuse:

The EU – Cyprus - Country Health Profile (2023) concludes that: " In 2019, regular heavy drinking among adults in Cyprus was the lowest among EU countries. However, the proportion of 15-16-year-olds who reported heavy drinking in the past month was much higher".

Based on the above, we have enriched our research priorities to include topics on the long-term health effects of alcohol abuse in the form of binge drinking during adolescence and early adulthood.

In addition, as in the case of smoking noted above, topics on the investigation of socioeconomic inequalities in alcohol abuse and binge drinking among adolescents in the Republic of Cyprus, have been included.

Cancer epidemiology:

The EU – Cyprus - Country Health Profile (2023) concludes that: "In 2021, cancer was the second leading cause of death in Cyprus (after CVD), accounting for 22% of all deaths, with mortality rates remaining unchanged over the past decade".

Although the majority of researchers in our team are primarily focusing on chronic diseases other than cancer (e.g. CVD, obesity, diabetes), a new member of our team, Dr Evi Farazi (<https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=zgEcbmIAAAAJ&hl=en>), is an expert in Cancer Epidemiology and she is really keen to engage in new projects and supervise PhD students in the field of cancer epidemiology, focusing mainly on determinants of hepatic cancer (her main research interest) and thyroid cancer, which according to reports from the Cyprus Cancer Registry, is seeing alarming increasing trends over the past years in the Cypriot population.

In addition, skin cancer (melanoma and non-melanoma) determinants in the Cypriot population relevant to skin pigmentation and sun exposure have been included as a topic of interest, given its

	<p>high relevance in a country of almost yearly sunshine and intense sun exposure during the summer months.</p> <p><u>Childhood obesity:</u></p> <p>The EU – Cyprus - Country Health Profile (2023) concludes that: "Obesity among children is a public health concern in Cyprus, with about 60% of children aged 6-9 being overweight, which is the highest rate among EU countries".</p> <p>Based on the above, we have enriched our research priorities, including the investigation of the basic epidemiology (frequency, distribution, and determinants) of childhood obesity in the Cypriot population.</p> <p>Furthermore, since obesity has previously been found to be socially patterned in the Cypriot population (Ann Ig. 2022 Jul-Aug;34(4):293-317. doi: 10.7416/ai.2021.2483), we have included as a topic of interest the social determinants and socioeconomic inequalities in childhood obesity in the Republic of Cyprus.</p> <p>All above additions of topics in the PhD Public Health, can be found highlighted in the revised "Research priorities in Public Health" document (Appendix IV).</p>	
<p>The EEC strongly recommends to invite experts from other institutions to review the original articles and the thesis and thus contribute to the final assessment of the PhD candidates.</p>	<p>We thank the EEC for noting this, which is in line with the EUC regulations. In particular, the University regulations, to which the Ph.D. Public Health abide, require at least one external expert in the field of each Ph.D. project, to be a member of the Doctoral Examination Committee.</p> <p>In the case of collection-of-papers dissertations, a role of these external examiners will also be to evaluate the quality of Pd.D. students' research articles.</p> <p>Please see Programme Guide (Appendix II, pages 13-14).</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>
<p>During the conversation with currently enrolled students and recent graduates, the EEC learnt that many of the graduates enjoy newly acquired teaching obligations. For some of them, the</p>	<p>Based on the EEC recommendation, we have included sections on teaching skills and relevant pedagogical methods in our curriculum, so that our students receive more formal training in teaching and course development and management. In particular, we have included two (2) sections in course PHE710, dedicated to pedagogical approaches, curriculum development, and teaching competences. Further details about this, can be found above, in section 2. Student – centred learning, teaching and assessment.</p> <p>Furthermore, we will provide opportunities for Ph.D. Candidates to deliver tutorials and assist in formal teaching in undergraduate</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>

<p>prospect of a teaching role was a motivating factor for them in taking up PhD studies. Furthermore, the EEC sees educating the public as one of the ordinary roles of a public health professional. But how can they without being trained for it. Weaknesses in public education and science communication became visible during the last pandemic, and in many countries, the public space was left to virologists. Teaching competence was not among the goals of EUC's PhD programme, teaching skills were not listed in the transversal skills of the programme. Therefore, the EEC suggests to include basic pedagogy training and pedagogical content knowledge for public health in the curriculum and the graduate profile. It should</p>	<p>courses (primarily in Research Methods and Biostatistics), as well as the M.Sc. in Public Health programme.</p> <p>Please see Ph.D. Public Health Course Syllabi in Appendix III, including the revised version of course PHE710, now including material on enhancing academic and pedagogical competences,</p>	
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be noted that education is more than lecturing, and there are many opportunities for PhD students in public health to gain teaching experience.										
Given the observation that PhD students are more susceptible to anxiety and depression than the general population, excellent mentoring skills are crucial for all teachers in the programme. All teachers involved must participate in training in mentoring skills, basic pedagogy, pedagogical content knowledge in public health, and skills of an excellent supervision.	<p>A comprehensive online professional development programme ('Faculty Professional Development' course on Blackboard), is currently in place by the Office of the Vice Rector for Academic Affairs and all faculty members are required to attend this.</p> <p>This Faculty Professional Development programme offers extensive training on pedagogical approaches and is currently enriched to offer additional training on supervision and mentoring, which as rightly noted by the EEC, is essential for offering the highest possible level of supervision and support to our PhD students. All faculty (including visiting faculty) involved in the PhD Public Health Programme have already successfully completed this course. Furthermore, the PhD Public Health Programme Coordinators will ensure that all involved faculty and supervisors undertake the revised version of the programme and are thus properly trained and empowered regarding their mentoring and supervising competences.</p> <p>In addition, EUC has joined Advance HE as an international member in November 2021 and the 'New to Teaching' Professional Learning Programme by Advance HE was incorporated into our continuous professional development (CPD) curriculum. Moreover, a 'Connect Benefit Series' of webinars and informational material has become available to all faculty members on our CPD platform, offering guidance on how to benefit from EUC's membership with Advance HE.</p> <p>Examples of courses are:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">EUC Faculty Professional Development Programme for All Newly Hired Academic Staff 2023-2024</p> <table><tr><th>A/A</th><th>TITLE</th><th>HOURS</th><th>DATE ATTENDED</th></tr><tr><td>1.</td><td>Orientation Session Fall 23</td><td>5</td><td>12/9/2023</td></tr></table>	A/A	TITLE	HOURS	DATE ATTENDED	1.	Orientation Session Fall 23	5	12/9/2023	Choose level of compliance:
A/A	TITLE	HOURS	DATE ATTENDED							
1.	Orientation Session Fall 23	5	12/9/2023							

	2.	Advance HE “New to Teaching Programme”	25 hours	20 th & 27 th /9/2023, 4 th , 18 th & 25 th /10/2023 & 22 nd /11/2023	
	3.	Induction to Blackboard Learn Ultra	2	22/9/2023 & 28/9/2023	
	4.	Research Policies and Procedures at EUC	2	29/9/2023	
	5.	Faculty Professional Learning Communities (fPLCs)	1	17/10/2023	
	TOTAL HOURS		35 Hours		
	<p>Furthermore, EUC has in a place a “Framework on Mentoring Scheme for Newly Hired Full-Time Academic Staff and/or Part-Time Academic Staff”, This Framework ensures that all newly hired faculty receive appropriate training and hands on experience from more senior faculty at each Department, as regards not only the enhancement of their teaching competences and course coordination competences, but also on how to effectively mentor students, including the supervision of doctoral students. The Framework is included as Appendix VII.</p> <p>Finally, the PhD Programme Coordinators have in place an extensive induction session at the beginning of each semester with all new supervisors in the programme, analysing in depth the duties and responsibilities involved in PhD supervision. Although this is already done, following the EEC suggestion, this induction will be enriched to include issues such as overall mentoring, guidance on matters beyond the scientific aspects of the Ph.D. research project, including psychological support for students, if and when required and to the extent possible. Regarding the latter, the psychological support services offered by the University to all students in need, will be further highlighted by both Programme Coordinators and supervisors, so that students have a clear picture on when, where, and how they can get support.</p>				

C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Dr. Alexandros Heraclides	Programme Coordinator: Department of Health Sciences, School of Sciences	
Dr. Theodoros Lytras	Programme Coordinator and Chair of Department of Medicine, School of Medicine	
Dr. Irene Polycarpou	Chairperson of the Department of Health Sciences, School of Sciences	
Prof. Panayiotis Papageorgis	Dean of the School of Sciences	
Prof. Elizabeth Johnson	Dean of the School of Medicine	

Date: 13/2/2025

