

Doc. 300.1.2

Date: 19/4/2023

Higher Education Institution's Response

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

In Greek:

Επιστήμη της Άσκησης και της Φυσικής Αγωγής (3 έτη
, 180 ECTS, Διδακτορικό)

In English:

Exercise Science and Physical Education (3 years, 180
ECTS, PhD)

- **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.*

The staff and all the people responsible for the program would like to thank the External Evaluation Committee for their fair, comprehensive, and constructive assessment of the program «Ph.D. in Exercise Science and Physical Education» of the University of Nicosia. We are grateful for the positive comments and the recognition of the strengths of the program, which were commented on by the committee, and in short, are listed below:

- All students reported to have been excellently supported by their supervisors.
- It looks like the University of Nicosia has found an exemplary positive way of student-centered learning
- Supervisors possess international research profiles.
- A process is defined for the enrollment of Ph.D. students where several faculty members and entities are involved.
- Access to infrastructure appears adequate.
- There is a broad base of academic supervisors from multiple disciplines available for students to work with as part of a supervisory team. The evaluation panel were particularly impressed with the number of multidisciplinary projects which were currently being delivered. PhD students were encouraged to publish their research work and the department has a solid track record of achieving these publications over the past few years.

The current document is a response to the ***Areas of improvement and recommendations*** noted by the committee. It includes a detailed summary of the actions the University of Nicosia is willing to take to improve the program in accordance with the proposals by the external evaluation committee. The document is organized so that the points made by the committee appear first in the order they appear in the report. Next to each point, the response/action is included in bold.

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

Findings

The ph.d. program needs attention.

The faculty of the PhD program will take into serious consideration the comments from the EEC in order to improve the quality of the program and solve the issues raised by the committee.

Strengths

All students reported to have been excellently supported by their supervisors.

Supervisor support is crucial for the PhD student. We are pleased that the EEC has positively noted it.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For official use Only
It is very problematic that phd students are required to pay tuition fees while not receiving any type of salary during their education as researchers. The systems in Europe vary. However, most countries consider ph.d. students an invaluable part of the research ecosystem and it must be ensured that the students have the possibility to engage fully in their scientific education. Several solutions exist. One is that phd students are provided a salary from externally funded research projects. Another that the university offers competitive phd scholarships. A third is that phd students are offered a fixed 3-4 year contract that includes teaching obligations and supervision of for example master students. Thus, the problem has many possible solutions but must be addressed.	We thank the committee for the suggestions. We agree that both the tuition fees and the lack of salary are important issues for PhD students. The University of Nicosia sets tuition fees, and it is out of the control of the Sports Science program. The faculty of the PhD Program in Exercise Science and PE will be more active in submitting research proposals for funding in order to cover the expenses of the PhD students. In addition, the program will ask the University to offer some PhD scholarships. Regarding teaching, some PhD students were hired as part-time lecturers in the Sports Science program, however, this depends mainly on the current needs of the program. If there is a need to hire a lecturer for a specific course, PhD students can apply and the University usually favors such applications. In addition, all doctoral students can participate in the Student Teaching Assistantship (STA) scheme (paid by the University).	Choose an item.
According to what we have learned from a phd student some amount of ongoing costs for lab work (i.e. consumables) have to be invested by the phd students themselves. If this were true, we think it is an unacceptable	We do agree with the committee on this point. Some consumables are available through the School of Life and Health Sciences. However, when a student wishes to do a very specific and potentially costly biochemical assay, for example, the cost can exceed the amount the School covers. Therefore, there is a real issue here for some PhD	Choose an item.

situation. The department should hold a budget to support these activities.	students. As mentioned above specific costs will be covered by external funding.	

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

Findings

Phd students reported to have benefited greatly from the very direct way of working with their supervisors

We thank the EEC for pointing this out. Indeed, a direct way of working between the supervisors and the PhD student exceeded, resulting in the important outcomes of the research studies, reflected in publications in high-quality scientific journals.

Strengths

It looks like the University of Nicosia has found an exemplary positive way of student-centered learning.

We thank the EEC for the supportive comment.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For official use Only
We did not see evidence of how progress for PhD students is monitored and how any potential problems may be circumvented in a more formalised and structured way	<p>The University of Nicosia has specific procedures for the monitoring of PhD Students progress and a number of Doctoral Studies (DSO) forms. These forms must be filled out every semester or annually and are related to the progress of the PhD studies, or if the student followed the right steps (for instance, if the student submitted and obtained the approval of the national bioethics committee if the final research proposal has been approved by the supervisory team etcetera. All forms must be sent to the DPPC committee for approval. So, this Committee will review the progress of all research students in the program and monitor the progress and quality of training offered to the student. The DSO forms safeguard the students' progress and welfare all the way from Registration to Graduation. They are available through the Office of Vice Rector for Faculty and Research and include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DSO/1 – Registration Form • DSO/2 – Request for Changing Supervisor(s) • DSO/3 – Request for Interruption of Studies • DSO/4 – Semester Student Supervision Record Sheet • DSO/5 – Annual Student Progress Report • DSO/6a – Final Research Proposal Approval Form • DSO/6b – Ethics Committee Clearance of the Final Research Proposal • DSO/7 – Thesis Completion Form 	Choose an item.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DSO/8 – Thesis Defense Approval • DSO9a – Pre-Thesis Defense Examiners’ Preliminary Evaluation Report • DSO9b – Thesis Defense Examiners’ Evaluation Report • DSO/10 – Confirmation of Changes • DSO/11 – Recommendation for Awarding the PhD Degree Title • DSO/12 – Final Thesis Submission Cover Sheet. 	
<p>For the three courses that students must successfully undertake at the start of the PhD - could the University award a postgraduate certificate of research training on successful completion? This would mean that students are leaving with an extra qualification which may be helpful in their future careers.</p>	<p>We thank the committee for this suggestion that can give doctoral students an extra qualification that may be helpful in their future careers. The students will receive a transcript stating the completion of these courses.</p>	<p>Choose an item.</p>

3. Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

Findings

1) Teaching staff recruitment and development

All ph.d. supervisors are well qualified researchers.

We thank the EEC for commenting on the quality of research activities of supervisors.

2) Teaching staff number and status

No lack of capacity for ph.d. supervision was apparent.

We thank the EEC for pointing this out. Indeed, efforts were made to have the adequate capacity of supervisors within the program.

3) Synergies of teaching and research

PhD students were engaged as teachers but apparently more often for personal financial reasons than because their field of phd studies were relevant for current students.

Some PhD students were hired as part-time lecturers in the Sports Science program and that was good for the development of their CV and teaching skills. Unfortunately, in some cases, the classes they have to teach were irrelevant to their Ph.D. research topic; however, teaching duties financially supported the students during their studies.

Strengths

Supervisors possess international research profiles

We thank the committee for the supportive comments.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For official use Only
The department should hold a budget to help support PhD students.	The Department directs part of their budget for the purchase of common consumables used primarily for PhD students. This reduces significantly the budget of the PhD project.	Choose an item.

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

Findings

No comments provided by EEC for the PhD program

Strengths

It is a strength that a process is defined for enrollment of ph.d. students where several faculty members and entities are involved.

We would like to thank the EEC for commenting on our student enrollment process.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For official use Only
<p>The university and the department (possibly with the help of external funders from local organisations, entrepreneurs and businesses) should find ways to help Ph.D. students find funding for their studies, because we are sure that the department and the university would greatly profit from Ph.D. students who are able to focus even more on their research performance (instead of thinking about how to secure their daily living).</p>	<p>We thank the committee for pointing this out. We agree that obtaining external funding will be beneficial both for the doctoral students and the University. A number European (HORIZON) and national (Research and Innovation Foundation of Cyprus) proposals have been submitted over the last two years, yet despite high marks, we were not successful in gaining that funding. We will continue our effort to secure external funding. In addition, the program coordinator will organize a seminar for the PhD students regarding funding opportunities (European and national programs) for young researchers.</p>	<p>Choose an item.</p>

5. Learning resources and student support (ESG 1.6)

Findings for Ph.D.

Activities of the phd students should be prioritised.

We agree with the EEC comment. For this reason, the research office of the University developed guidelines and a roadmap with relevant steps/progress forms to document every step of the Ph.D. in order to help the student to prioritise their activities. In addition, the supervisors and the Ph.D. program coordinator are helping also with this and guide/advise the students when is needed.

Strengths for Ph.D.

Access to infrastructure appears adequate.

We thank the EEC for this comment. The PhD students have access to university's infrastructure, including various laboratories within the department and school.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For official use Only
<p>It should be considered to support ph.d. students more intensively in the research situation. This could for example be by close interaction with master thesis students or partly allocation of support staff. At the moment, the risk of ph.d. progression to be delayed by unforeseen events is high since the ph.d. students appear to be solely responsible for progression. Areas of attention is methodological problems, logistical problems and personal situations (ie. pregnancy).</p>	<p>Indeed in the past, when the Sports Science program was smaller, the first PhD students had to work purely independently. However, in recent years, as the master's program grew in numbers, some of the master students worked alongside PhD students, both in data collection and analysis. This point will be seriously taken into consideration and every effort will be made to encourage collaboration of PhD students with master students.</p> <p>Most PhD supervisors work very closely with their PhD students, and every effort is made to assist them throughout their studies. With regards to the methodology used in PhD research, it has to be approved by the supervisor before a bioethics application is submitted. All methodological development and pilot studies take place before data collection and the supervisor must be aware of all processes involved. In order to follow up on the committees' comment, the current PhD coordinator will further look into the matter of supervision and liaise with all supervisors in order to solve potential problems such as those mentioned by the committee.</p>	<p>Choose an item.</p>

6. Additional for doctoral programmes (ALL ESG)

Findings

The phd program has a clear organisational structure in place addressing all critical issues

We thank the EEC for the supportive comment about the program's organizational structure.

Strengths

There is a broad base of academic supervisors from multiple disciplines available for students to work with as part of a supervisory team. The evaluation panel were particularly impressed with the number of multidisciplinary projects which were currently being delivered. PhD students were encouraged to publish their research work and the department has a solid track record of achieving these publications over the past few years.

We thank the EEC for the supportive comments. Indeed, the PhD program and the Life Sciences department encourage multidisciplinary projects. The Sports Science faculty collaborates strongly with faculty members from different disciplines and publications in high-quality journals in different research areas.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For official use Only
<p>In our view the Ph.D. students, but also all others doing research in the department, might profit from collaborating and developing a clear and concise mission statement on practices of Open Science and Reproducible Research. The following resources might be useful to reflect upon this issue:</p> <p>Open Science Framework: The Open Science Framework (cos.io)</p> <p>FAIR principles: https://www.nature.com/articles/sdata201618</p>	<p>The Life Sciences Department and PhD Program of Exercise Science and Physical Education will consider these resources and suggestions. We highlight that members of the University of Nicosia participate in the Informal Advisory Group for Open Science of Cyprus. The Council of Ministers approved the updated version of the "National Policy of the Republic of Cyprus on Open Scientific Practices" on the 27th of May 2022 (Annex 1). The University of Nicosia will proceed to adopt this policy.</p>	<p>Choose an item.</p>
<p>The low number of applicants for phd studies raises a concern that the incentive to enrol less qualified candidates is possibly too high.</p>	<p>Potential PhD candidates are evaluated, based on the available criteria, before being admitted The PhD Programs, in general, are for a limited number of students. The quality of the PhD students was generally high, reflected by their publications in high-quality international peer-reviewed journals. The faculty of the PhD Program will be more active in submitting</p>	<p>Choose an item.</p>



	<p>research proposals for funding in order to offer some scholarships and work for PhD students. In some cases, we ask for partial financing of PhD Students and they also have the opportunity to teach and gain both experience in teaching and research and be paid. During the covid pandemic, two applicants who were ready to start their PhD studies withdrew their applications (consequences of the pandemic/lockdowns). New applicants have expressed interest in the PhD program already.</p>	
--	--	--



7. Eligibility (Joint programme)

(ALL ESG)

N/A

Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For official use Only
Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Choose an item.
Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Choose an item.
Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Choose an item.
Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Choose an item.
Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Choose an item.




B. Conclusions and final remarks

Conclusions and final remarks by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For official use Only
<p>The panel has been convinced that the evaluated programmes offered by the University of Nicosia were of the highest standards in Cyprus based on the feedback from professors, management, students and external stakeholders to the University. The educational programmes evaluated were of a standard commensurate with other European programmes that the panel is familiar with. However, we strongly encourage that the University invests in research support services. What is clear from the evolution of the most successful universities worldwide is that researcher independence and excellence in research provides the basis for excellence in teaching and education. Whilst investment is required this will have a positive impact on other University KPIs. Investment in research not only increases the quality of the University. Investments can also be expected to provide economic return in the form of more and larger grants with overhead as well as increased international recognition followed by elevated student application rates (and further success in international University rankings not the least). It should be noted by the University of Nicosia that the EU funds for research in 2023-2024 is 13.5 billion EUR. Several of the EU research topics are relevant for researchers in the evaluated programs. The panel notes that permanent staff at the evaluated</p>	<p>We thank the committee for their time and effort in evaluating our programs. We agree that the University should invest more in research and acknowledge that, in recent years, measures have been taken in this direction. Sports Science is one of the most active programs of the School in terms of research. The committee’s suggestions and advice will be seriously considered to improve the quality of our research activities and increase the international recognition of the faculty and the University.</p>	<p>Choose an item.</p>



<p>department are relevant and competitive in this regard. Finally, we would like to thank everyone involved in the evaluation process - the panel received fantastic support from Emily at the Agency through to all the staff and students at the University of Nicosia. Thank you all. We hope you find our recommendations and suggestions helpful and we are convinced that they will help the sport science programmes at the University of Nicosia continue on an upward trajectory over the next 5 years.</p>		
---	--	--

C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

Name	Position	Signature
Dr. Christoforos Giannaki	Associate Professor/Program Coordinator	
Dr Eleni Andreou	Associate Professor, Head of Life Sciences	
Prof. Kyriacos Felekkis	Professor, Dean of School of Life and Health Sciences	
Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	
Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	

Date: 19/04/2023

