

Doc. 300.1.2

Date: July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022

# Higher Education Institution's Response

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

- **Town:** Nicosia

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

**In Greek:**

Συμβουλευτική Ψυχολογία (2,5 έτη/ 150 ECTS,  
Μάστερ)

**In English:**

Counseling Psychology (2,5 years/ 150 ECTS, Master  
of Science)

- **Language(s) of instruction:** English
- **Programme's status:** Currently Operating
- **Concentrations (if any):**

**In Greek:** N/A

**In English:** N/A



**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 300.1.1/2 or 300.1.1/3 or 300.1.1/4) must justify whether actions have been taken in improving the quality of the programme of study in each assessment area.*
- *In particular, under each assessment area, the HEI must respond on, without changing the format of the report:*
  - *the findings, strengths, areas of improvement and recommendations of the EEC*
  - *the conclusions and final remarks noted by the EEC*
- *The HEI's response must follow below the EEC's comments, which must be copied from the external evaluation report (Doc.300.1.1 or 300.1.1/2 or 300.1.1/3 or 300.1.1/4).*
- *In case of annexes, those should be attached and sent on a separate document.*

We would like to thank the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) for their professional and thorough work during the onsite evaluation of the MSc in Counseling Psychology programme. We would also like to express our appreciation for the collegial and constructive approach with which they conducted their evaluation.

We do welcome the Committee's recommendations for improvements, which will enhance the quality of our programme; they will be addressed in the corresponding sections below.

For simplicity purposes the 1) *Findings*, 2) *Strengths*, and 3) *Areas of improvement and recommendations* are copied from the EEC report and presented here in *Italics*. The Programme's response appears in regular font under each area where a response is warranted.

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

The programme has been found by the EEC to be fully compliant for the criteria 1.1, 1.3, and 1.4 and partially compliant for the criterion 1.2 Design, approval, on-going monitoring and review.

### Findings

#### 1.1 Policy for quality assurance

*The quality assurance procedure is governed by the general quality assurance regulations of the University of Nicosia. Appropriate procedures seem to be in place. There is a clear pedagogical support structure. This offers additional quality assurances.*

### Response

The EEC has found the programme to be fully compliant with the criteria of this section. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified.

#### 1.2 Design, approval, on-going monitoring and review

*The MSc Program in Counselling Psychology was developed based on the educational guidelines proposed by European (EuroPsy), British (BPS) and American (APA) professional organisations in Psychology. It also meets the legal requirements of the Republic of Cyprus for registration in the Registry of Professional Psychologists with a specialisation in Counselling Psychology. The program consists of 150 ECTS, of which 100 ECTS come from compulsory courses, 35 ECTS from compulsory practicum and 15 ECTS come from electives (students choose either a Master's thesis or two additional courses on child-topics). The program has substantial overlap with another master's program of the department, i.e. the M.Sc. in Clinical Psychology (180 ECTS). In the compulsory part of the program, seven courses (52,5 ECTS) overlap completely. Three other courses (22,5 ECTS) seem to be 'light' or less advanced versions of courses in the Clinical*

*Psychology program. Only four courses (30 ECTS) cover content that clearly differs from the content of the Clinical Psychology program (couple and family counselling, counselling practice, positive psychology, career counseling). Courses such as on career-oriented personality assessment, and advocacy for social justice, which are as well central to the specialty of Counseling Psychology, are missing from the curriculum of the program. Given the legislation of Cyprus where independent practice begins at the level of a Master's degree, it is important to address this gap for securing the meeting of the corresponding counselling needs (e.g. social advocacy for refugees) of the people in Cyprus. According to the documentation, there is ongoing monitoring regarding the structure and the content of the MSc Program based on the students' needs as well as the needs of the local community in counselling services. During the visit, the staff ensured us that the courses are regularly updated with the latest innovations. However, the documentation does not reflect this adequately. Looking at the course descriptions, some choices about content seem to be somewhat 'outdated', e.g., strong emphasis on theoretical perspectives and their associated therapeutic approaches (rather than evidence-based interventions targeting - often transdiagnostic - mechanisms) and focus on DSM-based disorders rather than dimensionally conceived psychological problems. Also, some of the required textbooks are quite old.*

## Response

The EEC has found the programme to be partially compliant with the criteria of this section. Particularly, the ECC is concerned about a possible similarity with the MSc Clinical Psychology programme of the University. We understand why the EEC may have perceived this overlap and to ameliorate this possible confusion we have proceeded with the changes listed below. We appreciate the EEC members' recommendation and in further enhancing the program pathway the following changes in course names and content were made in response to that:

- (1) The course *PSYC-522 Theories and Models of Psychotherapy* has been restructured to *PSYC-523 Theories of Counseling and Psychotherapy*. The goal of this course is to educate students on representative theories of counseling and psychotherapy as presented in the three main schools of thought and to initiate students in case formulation. We present to our students theories from all basic schools of thought because we believe that this knowledge will give them a flexibility to adapt their way of understanding to their clients' unique life and problems and not try to "fit" their understanding of the clients into one single theory. The clinical material of the course is not similar to the one in the MSc Clinical Psychology program (revised course outline is available in Appendix 1).
- (2) The course *PSYC-531 Psychometric Assessment* has been restructured to *PSYC 532- Psychometric Assessment for Counseling Psychologists*. In the course outline we follow the EEC's comments and we have also implemented the EEC's recommendation on career-oriented personal assessment (revised course outline is available in Appendix 1).
- (3) The course *PSYC- 535 Multicultural Issues and Diversity* has been restructured to *PSYC-637 Diversity issues: Promoting advocacy and social justice as Counseling psychologists*. The focus of this course is to sensitize students on diversity issues and their

role in social justice and advocacy as counseling psychologists (revised course outline is available in Appendix 1).

(4) The course *PSYC-605 Assessment and Clinical Skills II: Adults*, has been restructured to *PSYC-607 Assessment and Counseling skills* and its content was reviewed (revised course outline is available in Appendix 1).

(5) The course *PSYC-606 Psychological Interventions* has been restructured to *PSYC-608 Advanced Counseling Skills and Interventions*. This is part of what we called “chained courses” since our program’s philosophy is structured in a way where some courses proceed in a sequence. Specifically, we teach our students how to understand the clients’ problems and formulate a plan on how to help them based on different theories, something we do with the *PSYC-523* course, and then we teach them basic counseling skills that would help them communicate with their clients and build a strong therapeutic relationship (with the *PSYC-607* course), and after they acquire this knowledge, we move them to more specialized knowledge in more advanced skills with the *PSYC-608* course.

(6) The course *PSYC-630 Special Issues in Counseling Psychology Practice* has been enriched and renamed to *PSYC-631 Issues and Challenges in Adult Lifespan development* that will include career counseling as part of it. We proceeded with this change in order to follow the EEC’s suggestions to examine the principles and standards of the Society of Counseling Psychology (Div.17 APA). In presenting the “services of the specialty”, the Society of Counseling Psychology states “... The specialty addresses typical, atypical, and dysfunctional development encompassing individual, family, group, systems, and organizational concerns. In addition to interventions focused on ameliorating more serious mental health problems, Counseling Psychology uniquely encompasses normal developmental issues and concerns from a strengths-based perspective, with particular expertise in vocational/career issues, prevention, therapy process and supervision, and a contextual approach that focuses on cultural and environmental influences and client diversity...” (p. 5/135), further emphasizing the trend in the literature where the hallmarks in counseling psychology today is emphasis on lifespan development, positive psychology and multiculturalism (DeBlaere et al. 2019), all three areas covered in our program. Based on the above, as well as the Cyprus standards of practice, we believe that it would be more useful and all-encompassing for our students, a course that focuses on lifespan normal adult development where career issues and challenges are a part of (revised course outline is available in Appendix 1).

(6) The following courses, namely (a) *PSYC-640 Professional Issues and Ethics in Counseling and Clinical Psychology*, (b) *PSYC-675 Group Therapy*, (c) *PSYC-505 Adult Psychopathology*, (d) *PSYC-511 Advanced Statistics and Research Methods I*, and (e) *PSYC-512 Advanced Statistics and Research Methods II*, remain the same. Obviously, the two specializations of Counseling and Clinical psychology- because of their nature- share some common academic content; for example, psychopathology is the same for all specializations, and statistical methods are also the same for all social sciences. Additionally, professional issues and challenges are the same for both specializations, while



the material for “Group therapy” (PSYC-675), as suggested in the literature, is the same for both specializations since both Counseling and Clinical Psychologists can organize and lead groups of the same topics and areas.

A revised pathway and typical semester breakdown with the above changes is available in Appendix 2.

The EEC also commented that some choices made regarding the programme’s emphasis on theoretical perspectives and respective therapeutic approaches may seem a bit ‘outdated.’ We agree that there are different models of training in counseling psychology and that our programme follows a more ‘traditional’ model. This model of training is consistent with the way mental health services are provided in Cyprus and prepares students to be able to work in state and private mental health settings. At the same time, and while the programme structure may be more ‘traditional’, individual courses are regularly updated in accordance with new knowledge that emerges in the field. Courses such as “Assessment and Counseling Skills”, and “Advanced Counseling Skills and Interventions” include material on evidence-based interventions and expose students to current research, which also address transdiagnostic mechanisms. However, it is imperative that students continue to become familiarized with the traditional diagnostic systems (e.g. DSM, ICD), since they are widely used in the healthcare sector and have now been officially adopted by the National Health System (GESY). Even though counseling psychologists are not yet part of GESY, they still need to collaborate with other professionals who are part of the system and/or work based on the same guidelines.

Additionally, following the EEC’s comments about some of the required textbooks being quite old, lecturers have been instructed to increase the update cycle of the reading material on an annual basis.

### 1.3. Public Information

*The University of Nicosia website provides clear and accurate information on different aspects of the program: the profile, learning outcomes, academic path, semester breakdown, faculty profiles, career prospects, assessment policy and graduation criteria. Prospective applicants can click on relevant links to access details of individual courses. Staff profiles are clear, and almost all include a brief CV, which is useful for applicants. Only the section on admission criteria is blank, which is rather critical for candidates and transparency.*

### Response

The EEC has found the programme to be fully compliant with all criteria of this section. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified. Missing admission criteria from the website was an oversight which has been corrected. Please see link:

<https://www.unic.ac.cy/counselling-psychology-msc-2-5-years-or-5-semesters/>

#### 1.4. Information Management

*During the visit, we were presented with relevant information about the number of applicants, accepted students, graduates, etc. However, accurate information on students' progress during studies and their career prospects after graduation was missing*

#### Response

The EEC has found the programme to be fully compliant with all criteria of this section. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified. Furthermore, the EEC commented that they did not receive information on students' progress during studies. In terms of the procedures we follow, we have devised a number of criteria, based on which we evaluate our students and we give them feedback about this evaluation bi-annually during the exclusively academic part of their studies (semesters 1,2, and 3). For this part of the evaluation, in addition to the students' marks, we evaluate their performance based on the table "Competency Benchmarks in Professional Psychology", column titled "Expected Developments in Training" (please see Appendix 3 for the related documents).

At the end of the third semester, provided that (a) there are no problems with the previous evaluations that have not been rectified, and (b) students have received a mark of C (73-76) or higher in all their courses, students undergo the "Practicum Readiness Evaluation" in order to decide whether are ready to proceed with the beginning of their practicum experience. During practicum, they are also evaluated and provided feedback on a bi-annual basis (the criteria for this evaluation are also found on the table "Competency Benchmarks in Professional Psychology"), and at the end of their practicum experience, students undergo the "Professional Readiness Evaluation" to evaluate whether they have acquired all the expected qualifications and they are ready to practice (please see Appendix 3 for the related documents).

Furthermore, in the table below, we may observe that, since 2016, there is a steady increase in the number of students enrolling in the program and in the number of students remaining in the program. The number of graduates is smaller than the number of students enrolled because (a) the program can be pursued on a part-time basis and we have students who work in addition to studying, which results in a delay for the completion of their studies, and (b) due to COVID-19, a number of practicum sites were unavailable for our students to practice, which also resulted in a delay for the completion of their studies.



Table: Student enrolment and graduation data for Counseling Psychology (MSc) programme of study.

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
New Students	6	9	10	12	13	15
Total Number of Students Registered	26	25	25	32	35	41
Number of Graduates	7	7	6	8	1	0
Cumulative Point Average Grade (CPA)	3.068	3.518	3.483	3.595	2.987	n/a

In terms of graduates' career prospects, they can be employed in the public or private sector. We have graduates who are employed as counseling psychologists in private schools, hospital settings (i.e. "Arodafnousa"), counseling centers, or they open up their own private office. We make great efforts to keep up with information of our graduates' career paths after the completion of their studies. From the data we have for the last five years of our graduates, they are all employed.

### Strengths

- *Clear information about most aspects of the program is available in the public domain, through the Institutions' website. This point was also explicitly raised by students and graduates of the program we met.*
- *KESY is a clear strength of the programme and allows students to access a group of people who they can support while developing their skills, under the supervision of trained counseling psychologists.*
- *Academic staff are appropriately trained, demonstrate continued engagement in research, have a national and international profile, and there is good evidence that they offer considerable support for their students, which the students fully appreciate.*

### Response

We thank the EEC for identifying and pointing out some of the strengths of the programme in the areas of programme design and development. All programme faculty is indeed highly trained and pursues continuous professional development. The fact that the programme is supported by KESY, the university's training clinic for the applied programs in psychology, is a true asset.

## Areas of improvement and recommendations

- *The EEC is of the view that having a master's thesis as compulsory part of the master's program is indispensable to meet international standards. We recommend the program team reconsider this matter.*
- *The EEC considers that it would be good to better articulate the specific profile of the Counselling program (in terms of how it differs from the Clinical Psychology program) to facilitate prospective students' decision to apply for either of both, to foster a strong counseling psychology identity for the students and graduates of the program, and to maintain the integrity of the specialty of counseling psychology by preventing misunderstanding and/or misrepresentation of the qualification.*
- *Objectives and Learning outcomes of Advanced Statistical & Research Methods 1 programme has a focus on quantitative and qualitative methods (including ethnographic methods and focus groups), but the course content does not appear to have any qualitative methods topics. Advanced Statistical & Research Methods 2 course appears to be even more heavily weighted towards quantitative methods. In fact, through many parts of the curriculum, we noticed a preponderance of quantitative approaches to qualitative approaches (e.g., in Thesis 1: course purpose and objectives, and learning outcomes, make reference to 'hypotheses'; recommended textbook is for SPSS – same for Thesis 2). During the visit we learned that staff is aware of this and has already increased attention to qualitative methods (including a lecture on it, encouraging students to choose qualitative methods for their research activities etc.). Additional staff could be considered for this purpose, as the expertise does not seem to be represented in the current staff.*
- *In addition, staff could enhance the management of the information regarding the program and maybe ask for additional administrative support. A MSc program like this, with a rather large number of students each year, justifies the need for extra administrative support.*

## Response

We thank the EEC for identifying and pointing out areas of improvement for the program and for making relevant recommendations to achieve this.

- (1) The EEC encourages us to make the master's thesis as compulsory part of the master's program. We have considered the suggestion and we fully agree to that. We are also in full agreement with the EEC's recommendation regarding changing the thesis structure into a journal article style output. We have revised the Course Outlines for Thesis I & II (PSYC-696 & 697) to reflect this change (see Appendix 1 I & J for Revised Course Outlines). This change will go in effect and will be applicable to the next cohort of students who will be admitted in the next cycle of admissions. Necessary revisions will also be made in the updated Student Handbook to reflect this change.
- (2) The EEC considers that it would be good to better articulate the specific profile of the Counselling program. The comment is well received. To this extend, we have revised the pathway (as described in 1.2) and the profile of the program has been updated on the

website. Please see link: <https://www.unic.ac.cy/counselling-psychology-msc-2-5-years-or-5-semesters/>

- (3) The EEC points out that courses focusing on research (Advanced Statistics & Research Methods I and II) seem to have a disproportionately stronger emphasis on quantitative rather than qualitative approaches. In order to facilitate a more balanced learning experience for our students, the course outlines for the Advanced Statistics and Research Methods I & II (PSYC-511 & 512), as well as the course outlines for Thesis I & II (PSYC-696 & 697) have been revised accordingly to be more inclusive of qualitative research methods (see Appendix 1 B, C, I, & J for Revised Course Outlines). Following the EEC's report, we also requested that the Research Skills and Development webinar series, organized by the Office of the Vice-Rector for Faculty and Research (which includes training webinars on qualitative research methods) be made available to our students. Our request has already been approved. In addition, the Department will consider whether candidates possess expertise in qualitative research methods for future faculty hires. Finally, the Department plans on following the EEC's suggestion of hiring Visiting Faculty to supplement the Department's expertise in qualitative research methods when fulfilling future teaching needs of the program and the department.
- (4) The EEC suggests that in order to enhance the management of the information regarding the program, to ask for additional administrative support. We fully agree with the EEC's recommendation and a request was submitted to the administration regarding this matter.

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

### Findings

#### 2.1. Process of teaching and learning and student-centred learning methodology

*We saw and heard good evidence that the teaching was student-centred, and there were good mechanisms in place to solicit student feedback. Individual as well as group meetings with students are regular during the academic year on different occasions (courses, evaluation for practicum, supervision, etc.). Students are encouraged to express their needs and they are being treated as active learners. At the same time, their demands on extra activities are seriously considered (this was mentioned by students as well).*

#### Response

The EEC has found the program to be fully compliant with all criteria of this section. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified.

#### 2.2. Practical training

*Students have the opportunity to engage in practical training via KESY, under the supervision of trained counseling psychologists. Additional placements are found from outside the University. Where external placements are found, there is a contract/agreement with external providers, and regular check-in with course staff to ensure that learning objectives are met. We recognised that there were some limitations in terms of possible placements for international students who do not master the Greek language. These students more often get delayed in finishing their practicum and graduating.*

#### Response

The EEC has found the program to be fully compliant with all criteria of this section. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified. We agree with EEC that there might be some limitations in terms of possible placements for international students who do not master the Greek language, since it is possible that their practicum experience will be delayed. To the extent that this is possible, especially considering the need for practicum placements from all graduate programs in related areas in Cyprus, we try to collaborate with placements where our foreign students have access to non-Greek speakers. At the same time, our students are aware that they have the option to recommend new practicum site opportunities, and if we evaluate that the specific placement meets the program's requirements as well as provides the knowledge we expect our students to gain, we form a collaboration with the specific placement exclusively for the specific student.

Furthermore, when it comes to non-Greek speakers, arrangements can be made for practicum sites overseas (e.g. through Erasmus plus). We are continuously following up for placements for English speakers (i.e. refugee programs, etc.).

### 2.3. Student assessment

*This appears mainly via examinations and coursework/presentations and is in line with the learning objectives for each course. Each course is required to use at least two different assessment methods (e.g., continuous assessment + final exam). Plus, there is continuous evaluation of students regarding their readiness for involvement in practicum and direct psychological services to the public. However, there is no evidence regarding how this continuous assessment and formative feedback is provided and guaranteed. Documentation regarding assessment was misleading in some courses and formative assessment remains unclear in others. During the visit, we learnt some aspects of the assessment were inaccurate in the documentation.*

### Response

The EEC has found the programme to be partially compliant with the criteria of this section, and there are questions concerning student feedback and the assessment process. Students are receiving written feedback on their papers and they have the chance to discuss this feedback on individual meetings with the instructors. The documentation was “misleading” or “unclear” in some circumstances because instructors of the program upload to Moodle separate instructions for each paper (i.e. instructions for the papers are not always provided extensively in the course outline but in separate documents). As for the information about “inaccurate aspects of the assessment”, if this is an information received through the interview with the students, this might be due to the fact that instructors re-assess the assessment material between semesters and it is possible that some papers or assessment material has been replaced by other type/form of assessment. To further clarify the issue, we asked the instructors to provide clear formative documentation and feedback for the assessment of their courses.

### Strengths

- *The programme presents a good ratio of the student per class in relation to the number of allocated teaching hours.*
- *Student welfare: We saw evidence of good support systems available to all students from within the university. Speaking to the students, it was clear that the academic staff were very approachable and supportive.*
- *The structure and organisation of the practicum through KESY and other placements (at other agencies) is a real strengths. There are many opportunities for practising in different contexts and groups of people with constant supervision by trained and experienced supervisors. Also, it seems that there is good monitoring of the process of practicum at all stages.*

## Response

We thank the EEC for identifying and pointing out some of the strengths of the programme in the areas of student-centered learning, teaching and assessment, as well as the structure and organization of the practicum through KESY and other placements. Indeed, we believe that the academic staff is very approachable and supportive of the students' efforts throughout their training, and in addition, the structure and organization of the practical training component follows criteria similar to international standards.

## Areas of improvement and recommendations

- *Based on the documentation, the expected format of the thesis seems to be somewhat 'old school'. It would be recommendable to revise it and encourage students to consider revising the thesis structure – to determine whether an 'journal article' style output is acceptable to the University, because this is a useful skill to have for counseling psychologists), and may help add to staff research CVs. We did, however, note that some students were successful in publishing their thesis as journal articles, which is commendable. Therefore, this recommendation should be considered as a means to improve the scale of such successes and provide students with an additional skill (preparing a manuscript for publication) that is useful for the profession.*
- *There appears to be different assessment formats, but exams and written work appear dominant. We would encourage staff to consider other assessment formats also (e.g., creation of video resources, poster presentation, public engagement activities, etc.) and provide regular formative feedback to the students regarding their learning and progress within each of the courses.*

## Response

We thank the EEC for identifying and pointing out areas of improvement for the program and for making relevant recommendations to achieve this.

- (1) We are in full agreement with the EEC's recommendation regarding changing the thesis structure into a journal article style output. We have revised the Course Outlines for Thesis I & II (PSYC-696 & 697) to reflect this change (see Appendix 1 I & J for Revised Course Outlines). Necessary revisions will also be made in the updated Student Handbook to reflect this change.
- (2) The EEC encourages staff to consider including assessment methods other than examinations and written work. Members of faculty are encouraged to adopt this recommendation and include other assessment formats beyond the already existing. In the long-run, changes in the assessment methods will be reflected in the course outlines submitted during the next programme accreditation cycle.



### 3. Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

#### Findings

#### 3.1 Teaching staff recruitment and development

*Teaching staff have the required expertise and commitment to teaching the various courses. Many have had academic and/or clinical qualifications from different countries and experience working in other universities (internationally). This is an asset because it allows them to bring the best of different systems, methods, experiences to develop the current courses. There are development opportunities for teaching staff provided with the university, and some opportunities for continued professional development from outside the university also.*

#### Response

The EEC has found the programme to be fully compliant with the criteria of this section. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified. The EEC highlights the diverse training and education of programme faculty and the continuous professional development opportunities available to the teaching staff.

#### 3.2 Teaching staff number and status

*Teaching staff are well respected by the students, and they are perceived to be approachable and responsive to student needs. They are a clear strength of the programme. The staff-student ratio is good. We felt that staff were suitably qualified to provide expert input into various courses. We were not certain about who amongst the staff members would be providing the teaching and supervision of qualitative methods. Based on the research papers in staff CVs, though there is expertise in the teaching staff, additional input may be required to cover this topic (e.g., in the form of visiting lecturers, adjunct staff, etc.)*

#### Response

The EEC has found the programme to be fully compliant with the criteria of this section. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified. In fact, we thank the EEC for acknowledging the teaching staff as an asset and a strength of the programme. The EEC considers that the programme needs to provide additional teaching and training in qualitative research methods. While there is some expertise in this area among our programme faculty, we will pursue additional expertise through faculty professional development. Finally, the Department plans on following the EEC's suggestions by 1) utilizing adjunct faculty with an expertise in qualitative research methods 2) use faculty in the department of Social Sciences with this expertise that have not been utilised by the program and 3) in the future seek out visiting faculty with expertise in qualitative research methods.

### 3.3. Synergies of teaching and research

*Teaching staff are research active, which is a major credit for the course and recognised by students. The department offers some opportunities for staff to engage in research, through research time being bought out. There appear to be some synergies between teaching and research, though not clear evidence was provided to assess them.*

#### Response

The EEC has found the program to be fully compliant with all criteria of this section. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified. The EEC notes that teaching staff are active in research and that research time release provided by the Institution helps faculty engage in research.

Research activity is strongly encouraged by the University since, as indicated in the University of Nicosia Internal Regulations (Chapter 4) (please see Appendix 4), the University believes that research is vital to the provision of a stimulating learning environment in which faculty and students flourish and fulfill their potential. The University also believes that involvement in research ensures the design and delivery of the University's curriculum is both up-to date and relevant. Research encourages the development of open and critical minds — a vital part of the University's education philosophy through which students interact with faculty and researchers who are working at the forefront of subject knowledge and professional practice and are also involved in research through student projects and case studies.

The teaching faculty of the programme is comprised of academics actively involved in research, evidenced by the growing number of academic output produced and the research funding received. The teaching faculty team is comprised of academics that have been recognized by the academic community as experts in their field. This is evident by the fact that various members serve / have served as members of Editorial Boards of academic journals, are regularly invited to review papers submitted for publication, and/or are members of various committees in their country and abroad. Many members of the Faculty hold close collaborations with world-leading academics and various Greek, European and US universities.

The faculty members involved in the delivery of the programme are actively engaged in all aspects of research and have produced a variety of research output. These include books, chapters in books, peer-reviewed journal articles, papers in peer-reviewed conference proceedings, research reports and book reviews. The research work of the faculty members is also evidenced through their long CV's (please see Annex 3 in the programme's application to DIPAE).

Taught matter is supported by references to published papers and books, as well as, providing the students a list of up-to-date resources. Course outlines are updated every year or whenever the course is taught. Books and e-books, database subscriptions and new published material are being continuously reassessed and ordered in collaboration with the personnel of the Library of University of Nicosia.

Please see below a table with the number of documents currently on Scopus for the upcoming subject rankings.

THE Subject Areas	THE Publications Threshold	UNIC Publications 2017-2021
Psychology	150	187

### Strengths

- *Highly skilled teaching staff, who are responsive, engaged and are actively involved in research, with some national and international collaborations. Students are very positive about the teaching staff, praising the excellent quality level of their lectures*
- *The staff underlined a cultural shift in the University policy towards the management of excessive teaching workload, which enhanced their motives and resources for research.*
- *Staff-student ratio is good.*
- *The programme's coordinator is well equipped for the task.*

### Response

We thank the EEC for identifying and pointing out some of the strengths of the programme in the area of Teaching staff. The EEC considers the staff to be an asset for the programme and note that the students were also very positive about the faculty. The programme also has a good staff-student ratio.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- *Staff could be released further to conduct research by having some of their administrative tasks completed by local administrative support teams.*

- *Research could also be enhanced by means of revising the thesis consideration (compulsory instead of elective) and genre (close to a research paper instead of a monography), and thus, having more students engaged in collaborative applied research activities with their supervisors.*
- *We encourage the improvement of the research activity of the teaching staff.*

## Response

- (1) We thank the EEC for identifying and pointing out areas of improvement. We fully agree with the EEC that additional administrative support would help programme coordinators have more time to engage in research. A request for administrative support was submitted to the administration for examination.
- (2) We are in full agreement with the EEC's recommendation regarding changing the thesis structure into a journal article style output. We have revised the Course Outlines for Thesis I & II (PSYC-696 & 697) to reflect this change (see Appendix 1 I & J for Revised Course Outlines). Necessary revisions will also be made in the updated Student Handbook to reflect this change.
- (3) We agree with the EEC that the research activity of the teaching staff could be enhanced. Even though this is challenging due to the large course and administrative work, at the department there have been efforts to establish different research groups and collaboration between department members. The establishment of research groups would allow for further collaboration between the faculty in the Department as well as interdepartmental and inter-institutional collaborations. The involvement of students in these research groups will be an essential part. Currently, the research across the Department is focused on: 1. Clinical and Health Psychology, 2. Social Psychology, 3. Criminology/Forensic Psychology, 4. Developmental Psychology, 5. Educational Psychology, and 6. Positive Psychology. More fine-grained distinctions regarding the subcomponents of these lines of research will be developed in the upcoming year and made available on the Departmental website. Some research groups are also currently applying for distinct recognition within the School/University, and will be added once successful in their applications.

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

##### Findings

##### 4.1 Student admission, processes and criteria

*The admission process and criteria are clearly documented (although not visible at the website). There appears to be a transparent process by which admission decisions are made: preselection of applicants who meet the criteria by the admission office, followed by interviews at the department do to determine the final selection among them (max=15).*

##### Response

The EEC has found the program to be fully compliant with all criteria of this section. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified. At the same time, the EEC notes that the admission process and criteria are not visible at the website. Missing admission criteria from the website was an oversight which has been corrected. Please see link:

<https://www.unic.ac.cy/counselling-psychology-msc-2-5-years-or-5-semesters/>

##### 4.2 Student progression

*The student progression criteria are clear. The Practicum Readiness Evaluation ensures that students are safe and ready to proceed to this stage of their training. Examination of Professional Readiness assesses the trainee's competence and readiness to function as an independent professional counselling psychologist. There is a system of academic and clinical probation for students who do not make the required grades for progression. There appear to be relevant and required processes and tools to collect and monitor student progress. It seems also, according to the students and graduates' feedback, that there is an easy transition phase to the labour market, since most students are employed right after their graduation. Plus, they feel confident with their qualifications and have a sense of personal growth and empowerment as well.*

##### Response

The EEC has found the program to be fully compliant with all criteria of this section. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified. We thank the EEC for the feedback.

##### 4.3 Student recognition

*Credits (ECTS) are clearly marked for each course. According to the University's Internal Regulations, credits earned at other accredited colleges and universities or in accredited programs are transferable to the University of Nicosia. A transcript is required.*

## Response

The EEC has found the program to be fully compliant with all criteria of this section. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified. The EEC also noted that student recognition processes are largely regulated by the University Internal Regulations

### a. Student certification

*There is a description of the certification process in terms of number of practicum (face-to-face) therapy hours for the registration to both the national register of Counseling psychologists, but also for the optional top-up for EuroPsy accreditation.*

## Response

The EEC has found the program to be fully compliant with all criteria of this section. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified. The programme indeed satisfies the legal requirements of the Cyprus Law for the Registration of Psychologists, under the specialty of Counseling Psychology, and provides the option of additional practicum hours for students who may choose to obtain the EuroPsy qualification.

## Strengths

- *The admission process and criteria are clearly documented.*
- *Student progression criteria are clear.*
- *Students are well supported and taken care of*

## Response

We thank the EEC for identifying and pointing out some of the strengths of the programme in the areas of student admission, progression, recognition and certification. The EEC noted the clearly documented admission process and criteria as well as the student progression criteria. The EEC also highlighted the additional optional clinical practicum hours which give students the option to seek the EuroPsy qualification as a valuable component of the programme.

## Areas of improvement and recommendations

- *In spite of the fact that since the time of application, the criteria with respect to English language proficiency have become more stringent, the new criteria (e.g., internet-based TOEFL  $\geq 80$ ) are still at the lower side compared to international standards.*
- *According to some of the students' concerns about practical sessions, it would be worth considering the knowledge of the Greek language as one of the relevant merits in the admission process*



## Response

- (1) We appreciate the comments made by the EEC members; in response, we have opened a discussion on this matter with the office of the Vice Rector of Academic Affairs as the criteria for English Language Proficiency for graduate programs are set centrally by the University in accordance with the guidelines set forth by the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation on Higher Education (CYQAA). All possible changes/amendments to the above will be publicized via the university website and will be incorporated into our program communication material and documentation.
  
- (2) We thank the EEC for identifying and pointing out the need to consider the knowledge of the Greek language for non-Greek speakers as one of the relevant merits in the admission process. As stated in 2.2., we agree with EEC that there might be some limitations in terms of possible placements for international students who do not master the Greek language, since it is possible that their practicum experience will be delayed. To the extent that this is possible, especially considering the need for practicum placements from all graduate programs in related areas in Cyprus, we try to collaborate with placements where our foreign students have access to non-Greek speakers. At the same time, our students are aware that they have the option to recommend new practicum site opportunities, and if we evaluate that the specific placement meets the program's requirements as well as provides the knowledge we expect our students to gain, we form a collaboration with the specific placement exclusively for the specific student. Furthermore, when it comes to non-Greek speakers, arrangements can be made for practicum sites overseas (e.g. through Erasmus plus). We are continuously following up for placements for English speakers (i.e. refugee programs, etc).

## 5. Learning resources and student support (ESG 1.6)

### Findings

#### 5.1 Teaching and Learning resources

*We saw evidence of student-centred teaching and learning. The resources appeared appropriate and adequate. Computer facilities appeared good. The staff mentioned that the University invested a lot of money in technology and customer service, especially during the pandemic, which will be an asset for all departments and programs in the following years. There is also a student portal that allows students and faculty to handle their learning and other procedures remotely. All resources appeared fit for purpose.*

#### Response

The EEC has found the program to be fully compliant with all criteria of this section. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified. The teaching and learning resources available are indeed plentiful and provide valuable support to students and faculty alike.

#### 5.2 Physical resources

*The physical resources are excellent and appear to be modern and functional. The EEC also notes that the esthetic quality of buildings and premises is at the highest level.*

#### Response

The EEC has found the program to be fully compliant with all criteria of this section. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified.

#### 5.3 Human support resources

*Support services appear to be adequately staffed and the students we met did not raise any concerns. There are provisions for students with special needs. Assistance is offered at an individual level. The administrative staff mentioned that there are also procedures for students' complaints, regarding courses, communication with faculty and sexual harassment.*

#### Response

The EEC has found the program to be fully compliant with all criteria of this section. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified. Indeed, there are provisions for students with different types of special needs, and assistance is offered at an individual level.

## 5.4 Student support

*This is one of the real strengths of the programme. It was clear from the documentation that there is considerable support for students from the wider university, and this was also attested by the students with whom we spoke, who were clear in their appreciation for the teaching staff who offered a lot of support and room for personal development. In addition, there are many informative seminars and presentations during the academic year, especially for newcomers. Based on the evidence, we were left with no concerns that students were well supported.*

### Response

The EEC has found the program to be fully compliant with all criteria of this section and noted that this is an important area of strength for the programme. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified.

### Strengths

- *Good student support given the good staff-student ratio and dedicated staff.*
- *Excellent state-of-the-art physical resources/infrastructure.*
- *Good communication and dissemination procedures with all members of the academia (i.e., weekly news-letter, live chat, telephone, etc.).*

### Response

We thank the EEC for identifying and pointing out some of the strengths of the programme in the areas of learning resources and student support. The EEC highlights the state-of-the-art facilities and infrastructure that support the programme as well as the dedication of teaching staff and the staff-student ratio which contributes to student support.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- *It might be good to decentralise some of the administrative/support services according to the needs of this particular programme*

### Response

We thank the EEC for identifying and pointing out areas of improvement and for making relevant recommendations to further enhance the areas of learning resources and student support. The EEC suggests that the program uses some administrative support for its needs. We fully agree with EEC and we have submitted to the administration a request for administrative support.



## 6. Additional for doctoral programmes

(ALL ESG)

NOT APPLICABLE



## 7. Eligibility (Joint programme)

(ALL ESG)

NOT APPLICABLE

## B. Conclusions and final remarks

*Overall, the Msc Counseling Psychology Programme satisfied the EEC in its mission, objectives, processes and general commitment to a worthy area of study, that is certainly needed both locally, regionally and internationally, given the increasing need for holistic counselling services of high quality. The EEC wishes to commend the programme's structure and organization of the practicum, as well as its approach to student welfare and the existing infrastructure. In addition, the academic staff teaching competence, research profile and publication record appear to be another asset of the programme.*

*However, the EEC considers both the status of the thesis (elective instead of required) and its expected format (a monograph instead of a 'journal article' style) somewhat old-fashioned, that prevents the majority of students from engaging in highly quality research activities with their supervisors. Furthermore, the EEC noticed a substantial overlap between this programme and another master programme in Clinical Psychology within the same department and a corresponding gap in the content pertaining specifically to Counseling Psychology that should be addressed in future revisions of the specific content areas covered by individual courses (these are commented on elsewhere in this report).*

*The EEC strongly recommends that the programme's consideration of the thesis, overall focus and corresponding contents are adjusted in line with the specific observations presented in this report. Furthermore, the EEC concludes that this should be accomplished before the next admission of new students*

## RESPONSE

We thank the Committee once again both for the positive evaluation, as well as for the constructive comments and suggestions and the fruitful discussion that we had with its members during the visit. We also thank the committee for the time and thoroughness it dedicated to the evaluation of the programme and for helping us improve the programme through the suggestions made. In preparation for the new academic year, we have already taken action and incorporated all recommendations of the committee as indicated above in our response.

We would like to highlight again the highly positive evaluation and comments of the EEC which we consider as recommendation for accreditation, having satisfied the committee's recommendations.





### C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Polyxeni Georgiadou	Programme Coordinator	
Marios Adonis	Head of Department	
Klimis Mastoridis	Dean, School of Humanities and Social Sciences	
Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	
Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	
Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	

**Date:** 01/07/2022

