

Doc. 300.1.1

Date: Date.

**External
Evaluation
Report (Programmatic)**

- **Higher Education Institution:**
University of Cyprus
- **Town:** Nicosia
- **School/Faculty (if applicable):** Faculty of Social Sciences and Education
- **Department/ Sector:** Department of Education
- **Programme of study- Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)**

In Greek:

Programme Name

In English:

PhD in Language Literacy and Education

- **Language(s) of instruction:** Greek
- **Programme's status**
New programme: No
Currently operating: Yes

The present document has been prepared within the framework of the authority and competencies of the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education, according to the provisions of the “Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education and the Establishment and Operation of an Agency on Related Matters Laws of 2015 to 2019” [N. 136 (I)/2015 to N. 35(I)/2019].

The Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher education established an evaluation panel on the 6.2.2020 for the evaluation and accreditation process of two programmes (Master in Language Literacy and Education/90 ECTS (7.14.2990.99) and PhD in Language Literacy and Education/273 ECTS (07.14.290.098) in accordance with the provisions of Laws 136(1)/2015 to 35(1)/2019.

The council originally planned an onsite visit in December 2020. However, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the decision was made following guidance from the CYQAA, to proceed as there is included in its law special provision for distance assessments. The panel was notified of this decision on the 13.11.20 and an online evaluation took place on the 16.12.2020. The final panel included Professors M Baynham, K Smith, G Xydopoulos and J Dockrell. A range of materials were made available to the panel on line prior to the assessment including an online tour of the University. This provided the panel with a clear outline of the programme and allowed the team to meet to plan their approach to the evaluation. The meeting was recorded but due to technical problems was not available to the assessment team.

The online assessment process included six separate sections over the course of one day:

1. An introduction and presentation by the rector including a presentation of the Institution, key developments, reach and impact
2. A meeting with HOD and the programme coordinators including information about the programme structure and where the courses are positioned within the Education department.
3. a detailed presentation of the programme’s admission criteria, learning outcomes and key staff
4. a meeting with teaching staff and details of course content, assessment approaches and compliance with teaching guidelines, NO SAMPLES OF COURSE WORK WERE SEEN BY THE PANEL, however given that these would be in Greek three of the panel members would not have been able to comment on these
5. A meeting with students and graduates
6. A meeting with members of the administrative staff.

Despite the move to online assessment and the enduring challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic the panel unanimously felt that all the necessary information was provided and when additional information was requested this was done efficiently. There was a full and frank discussion about programme strengths and challenges and as a group we are confident to be able to make a fair and balanced assessment of the programmes

A. External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>University</i>
Mike Baynham	Professor	University of Leeds
Kenny Smith	Professor	University of Edinburgh
George Xydopoulos	Professor	University of Patras
Julie Dockrell	Professor	University College London
Giorgos Christodoulou	Student	Open University of Cyprus
Name	Position	University

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

Sub-areas

- 1.1 Policy for quality assurance**
- 1.2 Design, approval, on-going monitoring and review**
- 1.3 Public information**
- 1.4 Information management**

1.1 Policy for Quality Assurance

The University policy on quality assurance appears to be “in development” rather than in place, so the panel was not able to gain concrete information about quality assurance processes apart from the fact they are still at the planning stage. This issue is clearly wider than the programmes evaluated, but nevertheless impacts on them, as will be seen in 1.2 and elsewhere. This said, there was plenty of evidence in discussion with programme Coordinators that review and improvement is part of their daily practice as teachers and academic administrators, but this is not as yet evidenced in policy and procedures. We therefore judge the programme to be non-compliant, though this is an issue to be addressed at institutional level.

1.2 Design, approval, on-going monitoring and review

The programme takes a clear and well-articulated sociolinguistic approach to literacy, addressing both schooled literacy and literacy in community and institutional settings such as prisons and workplaces. As such it benchmarks well internationally with other similar educationally based programmes for example at King's College London, Teachers College, Columbia and the University of Pennsylvania. Programme staff have strong links

with leading international universities which helps to make it informed by and engaged with the latest research. Addressing an issue of prime societal importance, the programme of study is clearly in line with the Departmental Mission and indeed with the four purposes for Higher Education of the Council of Europe and has clearly stated objectives aligned with clear outcomes. With regard to the study programme itself, the panel found it to be up to date and societally relevant for example in its emphasis on digital literacies. However the panel noted a distinct lack of emphasis on some core issues and bread and butter topics in a coherent postgraduate literacy programme, such as a focus on learning, which was not at all in evidence in the programme objectives. The academic staff were able to reassure the panel that learning theory occupies an important place in the actual course content but this in turn suggests a discrepancy between the objectives and course content which needs to be addressed, in order to provide a more transparent guide to the architecture of the degree and also to comply with international norms in such courses where a focus on learning would be an essential component. The panel was also concerned about the presentation and ordering of research methods, with only qualitative research being addressed at Masters level and optional quantitative research at Doctoral level. The panel therefore recommends a generic research methods course at Masters level, followed by more specialist courses on Qualitative and Quantitative research at Doctoral level. Students intending to progress to doctoral research could augment their research training by taking a Qualitative or Quantitative research model as an elective in their Masters programme. With regard to the ongoing evaluation and improvement of teaching, this is at present largely dependent on an end of semester student evaluation which is processed by the University's Centre for Teaching and Learning. However in the absence of quality assurance processes there is no explicit mechanism by which insights gleaned in the process feed through into quality improvement.

1.3 Public Information

The Department's Postgraduate Handbook provided a full and informative outline of the postgraduate course offerings and it was clear that there was a rich offering of electives to be chosen. However there was a distinct discrepancy between the entry for the Language Education postgraduate courses, both at the level of programme title and the individual course titles and descriptions. The panel understands that this is due to university regulations, yet it might prove confusing for prospective students.

1.4 Information Management

With relatively small numbers of students, the Academic Coordinators appeared to be familiar with their students and their progression, both academically and in their careers. However there didn't seem to be a particularly explicit system of information management, perhaps linking back to the lack of an active and implemented quality assurance framework identified in 1.1. In some ways the programme seems to run on tacit knowledge, whereas QA frameworks are intended to make explicit and visible tacit knowledge and practices.

Findings

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

Strengths

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

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

Please select what is appropriate for each of the following sub-areas:

Sub-area		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
1.1	Policy for quality assurance	Non-compliant
1.2	Design, approval, on-going monitoring and review	Compliant
1.3	Public information	Compliant
1.4	Information management	Compliant

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

Sub-areas

- 2.1 Process of teaching and learning and student-centred teaching methodology
- 2.2 Practical training
- 2.3 Student assessment

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

The courses on the programme use a varied range of modes of delivery and assessment. Course materials we saw embedded theoretical issues in concrete ways in the local context, e.g. connecting theory on multilingualism with multilingualism in Cyprus and current events related to the refugee crisis in the Mediterranean.

The student cohort on the programme is quite small, which potentially raises concerns about the viability of classes with very few students, but in practice class sizes are good (8-10 students even for the smallest classes) given the sharing of courses across programmes and across years within each programme. Teaching seems to be delivered in 3 hour blocks, which must pose challenges for teaching staff in keeping students engaged. In-house teaching delivery was in the past augmented by a visiting speakers programme, but this has been cancelled due to budget restrictions.

Students on the programme come from quite a diverse range of academic backgrounds, but teaching staff articulated a range of strategies for coping with differing degrees of familiarity with the subject material. The students we met were clearly very engaged and enthusiastic about their courses and the teaching staff, particularly the programme coordinators. Students did however suggest that more practice presenting in English would be useful (e.g. in preparation for conference presentations).

We were concerned that the department's current accommodation (on a secondary campus separate from the main campus) would pose problems for students, reducing their integration with the rest of the student body and/or in restricting their access to facilities at the main campus (including the main library).

Processes for dealing with student complaints appear to be entirely in-house, i.e. complaints are directed to the programme coordinators or head of department. While this didn't appear to be a problem in practice, an external route for raising concerns would be desirable, to avoid direct conflicts of interest for the staff members receiving complaints.

2.2 Practical training

The programme offers a mix of theoretical and empirical study, and the main practical component is in research methods. Research methods training focuses on qualitative methods, and as discussed in section 1 there is no compulsory training on quantitative methods (although there is a quantitative option and some students on the programme may have studied quantitative methods as undergraduates).

2.3 Student assessment

A varied range of assessments used, some of which are inventive and look likely to lead to good student engagement (e.g. group video projects). The programme coordinators and teaching staff seem to have been quite inventive in adapting modes of assessment due to the 2020 pandemic, which is to be commended.

As far as we could tell there is relatively little oversight of marking of assessments - i.e. we could not see any mechanisms for checking whether marking was consistent across students or courses. It's important that these processes don't become onerous for staff members to complete, but some thought could be given to whether any light-touch mechanisms for moderation of assessments are required to ensure equity and consistency.

Findings

The programme is supported by engaged and proactive staff who utilise a range of innovative methods of teaching and assessment. There was little evidence of moderation of assessments. Graduate students would benefit from wider opportunities to present their preliminary research findings in English.

Strengths

- Dedicated and engaged teaching staff who are clearly committed to and respected by their students.
- Varied delivery of course materials and assessments, and sensitivity to needs of students with varied academic backgrounds.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

Please select what is appropriate for each of the following sub-areas:

Sub-area		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
2.1	Process of teaching and learning and student-centred teaching methodology	Compliant
2.2	Practical training	Partially compliant
2.3	Student assessment	Compliant

3. Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

Sub-areas

3.1 Teaching staff recruitment and development

3.2 Teaching staff number and status

3.3 Synergies of teaching and research

3.1 Teaching staff recruitment and development

The HOD department spoke of a number of opportunities for staff to develop research and teaching skills, attend conferences and embed research in teaching. This was further supported by discussion with the staff.

No data were available about staff recruitment.

In previous years a budget was available for visiting academics to present workshops, courses and generally contribute to the leading edge of the courses. This has been halted which is unfortunate (as highlighted in section 2). Not only is this an important avenue for complementing current staff expertise by providing knowledge of other key discipline areas which are relevant to language and literacy it also serves to offer staff CPD.

3.2 Teaching Staff numbers and status

To allow a clear picture of the staff that doctoral students have access to we have included information about masters level teachers as well. We assume these academics are available by doctoral students for consultation.

The masters programme is staffed by six individuals, including two course coordinators. These are experienced professionals with a range of teaching and research experience. Virtually all staff have doctorates achieved in either the US or UK. There is currently one vacancy

Table 1 presents current masters level teaching staff and their respective disciplines.

Table 1. Masters level teaching staff

Staff Member	Rank	Discipline
Elena Ioannidou	Assistant Prof (FT)	Language Arts
Stavroula Kontovourki	Assistant Prof (FT)	Language Arts
Eleni Loizou	Assoc Prof (FT)	Childhood education
Charoula Angeli-Valanides	P (FT)	Educational Technology
Stavroula Philippou	Assistant Prof (FT)	Curriculum and teaching
Zelia Gregoriou	Assoc Prof (FT)	Philosophy of Education
New member		Education research and evaluation (qualitative)

The doctoral programme is primarily led by three experienced academics. Between them they hold a rich portfolio of expertise in sociocultural approaches to education language

and literacy thereby providing a strong basis for the development of doctoral work (see Table 2).

Table 2. Doctoral programme teaching staff

Staff member	research focus for doctoral work
Elena Ioannidou	Sociolinguistics and education, language variation, language and identity, language policy,
Stavroula Kontovourki	Literacy and language arts education, literacy development and literacy practices, the performance of literate identities in and out of school, multimodality (textual and embodied),
Professor Kyriakides	Effective teaching, skills development, school improvement and school leadership

3.3 Synergies of teaching and research

One of the key strengths of this programme is the synergies between research and teaching. This point was made vociferously by the students who felt that both the opportunities to be taught by research experts in their respective fields and to be engaged in research was an excellent opportunity for professional development.

It was significant and important that all staff are research active, publishing and presenting their work in international fora. Research activities also included extensive journal reviewing (see Kontovourki as an example) and other developmental work. Staff also are represented on journal editorial boards, conference organisation committees etc. e.g. Editorial board Global Research in Education and Social Science (Kyriakides), and in wider professional service e.g., Literacy and Reading Association of Cyprus (LitRaCY), Vice-president of the academic board (Ioannidou).

Staff publications typically resulted from funded research projects. These projects also underpin teaching and have provided students with opportunities for dissertation topics. Staff research projects are also embedded within the curriculum. For example

Ioannidou: *Prison Literacy*

Kontovourki: *Storying the teaching profession 'from below' and amidst change: a study of four cohorts of elementary teachers' life histories in the Republic of Cyprus (late 1970s-2010s)*

Kyriakides

Improving educational effectiveness of primary schools (IEEPS), under the Lifelong Learning

The programme(s) are based within the Faculty of Education which currently employs 22 academic staff. The staff on the current programme are significantly smaller in number ($n = 6$ masters programme; $n = 3$ doctoral programme) and there was little evidence of cross faculty engagement with the programmes to complement the current team. Developing research and teachings links across disciplines would add to the appeal of the doctoral programme.

Findings

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

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

Students benefit from the synergies between teaching and research.

Strengths

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

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

Please select what is appropriate for each of the following sub-areas:

Sub-area		Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant
3.1	Teaching staff recruitment and development	Compliant

3.2	Teaching staff number and status	Partially compliant
3.3	Synergies of teaching and research	Compliant

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

Sub-areas

4.1 Student admission, processes and criteria

4.2 Student progression

4.3 Student recognition

4.4 Student certification

Findings

4.1 Student admission, processes and criteria (see section 7.1)

4.2 Student progression

Student progression is subject to University of Cyprus regulations and is appropriately monitored and acted upon. Students interviewed during the evaluation event were extremely positive and expressed their absolute satisfaction with the way they are supported in their study by members of staff and especially by the two programme coordinators.

4.3 Student recognition

Recognition of students' masters degrees is based on regulations and processes of the Cyprus Council of Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications (KYSATS). Recognition of formal and non-formal learning is also ensured by the particular admission criteria set by the programme that refer to a differential academic background in the areas of literacy, language and education.

4.4 Student certification

Student certification is governed by the regulations of the University of Cyprus, applying to all faculties, departments and programmes of the institution. Students receive certification explaining the qualification they have gained, including the learning outcomes and the context they have achieved, as well as the level, content and status of the studies they have pursued and successfully completed.

Findings

The Programme follows the Cyprus council of Higher Education Qualifications. Doctoral level work is appropriately supervised. Numbers as would be expected are small. See section 7 for further details of doctoral programme.

Strengths

1. Appropriate processes of admission are in operation.
2. Prospective students receive full and clear information about admission criteria and procedures.
3. Students are extremely satisfied with the support they receive from programme staff.
4. Academic qualifications held by candidates are appropriately recognised by the Cyprus NARIC authority.
5. Student certification is appropriately organized and implemented and monitoring of progress throughout the doctorate clearly articulated...

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

Please select what is appropriate for each of the following sub-areas:

Sub-area		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
4.1	Student admission, processes and criteria	Compliant
4.2	Student progression	Compliant
4.3	Student recognition	Compliant
4.4	Student certification	Compliant

5. Learning resources and student support (ESG 1.6)

Sub-areas

- 5.1 Teaching and Learning resources**
- 5.2 Physical resources**
- 5.3 Human support resources**
- 5.4 Student support**

5.1 Teaching and Learning resources

The University of Cyprus is developing state of the art premises in its central site, including a Learning Centre complex. However the programme's location off the main campus and at some distance from it (cf 5.2 and also section 2) creates problems of access for students. With regard to the teaching and learning resources for the programme, there seems to be a strong empirical research orientation, a combination of academic reading and real life data to engage with analytically, assignments, including group assignments which encourage a critical, investigative orientation to learning. Another strength is the responsiveness of the programme to changes in the social context: currently the refugee crisis as it plays out in Cyprus and the Covid-19 pandemic. Assessment combines in-course assessment and exams.

5.2 Physical resources

It was clear to the panel that the location of the Department of Education at some distance from the dynamic and expanding main campus was felt to be a disadvantage by academic staff, though the panel was also informed of plans for the Department in due course to move onto the main campus. The panel's view is that this distance from the university centre disadvantages academic staff and students

5.3 Human support resources

The Programme, like the rest of the Department are supported by a knowledgeable and experienced administrative team, who were clearly the first port of call for students with queries about their study programme.

5.4 Student support

The panel found that students on the programme were well supported both by the departmental administrative staff and the academic staff. Students also have access to central university resources in the case of stress and other emotional difficulties or study difficulties.

Findings

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

Strengths

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

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Distance from main campus may hinder access to resources on the main campus

Please select what is appropriate for each of the following sub-areas:

Sub-area		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
5.1	Teaching and Learning resources	Compliant
5.2	Physical resources	Compliant
5.3	Human support resources	Compliant
5.4	Student support	Compliant

6. Additional for distance learning programmes NOT APPLICABLE

7. Additional for doctoral programmes (ALL ESG)

Sub-areas

- 7.1 Selection criteria and requirements
- 7.2 Proposal and dissertation
- 7.3 Supervision and committees

7.1 Selection criteria and requirements

Entry requirements for the PhD programme are clear and appropriate; candidates are interviewed by the programme directors, which is good. The formal requirements for progress through the PhD, maximum and minimum study periods, and major landmarks (qualifying exam, proposal, final dissertation) are clear. Based on the written information available we were concerned that the latter part of the PhD (after the completion of taught courses and qualifying exam) was relatively unstructured; however, based on discussions with staff it seems that

students meet regularly with their supervisors and are set regular semester-level goals and deadlines, which is good.

See also section 4 for discussion of modules and relevant progression.

Proposal and dissertation

All formatting requirements and examination procedures for the proposal and dissertation are documented and appropriate.

Supervision and committees

The composition of the supervisory team, the dissertation committee etc. are appropriate and documented. The separation of the academic advisor role from the research supervisor role is a nice feature and provides an additional layer of protection and pastoral care for students.

Students receive support to attend conferences and present their work, although see recommendation in section 2 to provide more opportunities for students to practice presenting in English.

In addition to their taught courses and other formal requirements of the PhD, PhD students also participate in 4-5 research seminars per year, involving other PhD students and academic staff (particularly the programme directors). These sound like a fantastic opportunity for skill sharing and cohort building, and since these seminars are tailored to the students' needs they provide a very flexible way of meeting students' needs outside the more rigid set of taught courses offered. However, running these seminars is likely to be a substantial burden on academic staff, particularly the programme directors.

We were also concerned as to whether the space available to students on the programme (for teaching or research) were adequate to their needs.

Findings

The doctoral programme provides students with a rich opportunity to develop their skills as researchers and potential academics. The department provides excellent support for their students with a responsive mentoring program.

Strengths

- Dedicated and engaged teaching staff who are clearly committed to and respected by their students.
- Excellent support for students through research seminars, support for conference attendance

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Ensure that staff time invested in supporting research seminars for PhD students is recognized in their work load, to avoid over-burdening those staff.

- Provide additional opportunities for PhD students to practice presenting in English, particularly relevant to PhD students who are likely to have opportunities to present at international conferences.
- Consider whether teaching and research facilities available to PhD students meet their needs.

Please select what is appropriate for each of the following sub-areas:

Sub-area		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
7.1	Selection criteria and requirements	Compliant
7.2	Proposal and dissertation	Compliant
7.3	Supervision and committees	Compliant

8. Additional for joint programmes (ALL ESG) NOT APPLICABLE

B. Conclusions and final remarks

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



C. Signatures of the EEC

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Professor Julie Dockrell	
Professor Mike Baynham	
Professor Kenny Smith	
Professor George J. Xydopoulos	
Giorgos Christodoulou	
Click to enter Name	

Date: 28th January 2021