

Doc. 300.1.1

Date: Date.

External Evaluation Report (Conventional-face-to-face programme of study)

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

In Greek:

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

In English:

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

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



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].

In Greek: Concentrations
In English: Concentrations



A. Introduction

Due to the impact of COVID-19, no on-site visit was conducted. Prior to the meeting, the external evaluation committee (EEC) was provided with pre-recorded virtual tours of various facilities (promotional videos) and was granted access to a number of relevant documents pertaining to the programme. Additionally, all powerpoint presentations were made available to the committee after each session.

The committee met with university and departmental personnel virtually, via zoom, over a one-day period, April 12, 2021. The Agenda for the meeting covered Departmental and programme related issues and included meetings with academic and administrative staff, students and graduates. The committee appreciated the commitment that staff made to attend and contribute to the discussions, and their open and thoughtful responses to our queries and feedback.

The agenda for the virtual visit is attached.



B. External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

| <i>Name</i> | <i>Position</i> | <i>University</i> |
|----------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Frances Press | Professor | Manchester Metropolitan University |
| Michel Vandebroeck | Professor | Ghent University |
| Arniika Kuusisto | Professor | Stockholm University |
| Evrydiki Kolokoudia | Student Representative | University of Cyprus |
| Name | Position | University |
| 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**

Findings

Quality Assurance

Quality assurance processes that impact on the pre-primary programme operate at two levels:

- The internal quality assurance reviews at the level of 1) the programme; and 2) the Department; and
- The externally driven reviews, such as that of the CYQAA.

The internal evaluation for the academic programme involves representation from or focus groups with students, graduates, employers and professional bodies. On-line course evaluation by students feeds into the overall programme evaluation, as does a programme self-evaluation.

Programme evaluation involves focus groups with external stakeholders and is informed by a range of data, including student attrition, performance and graduate destinations. Programme evaluation, in turn, feeds into Departmental evaluation, which in turn feeds into the university's own quality assurance review.

There is formal student representation throughout the quality assurance process. Two student representatives are on the Internal Quality Committee; there are two student representatives on the Council of the Department; and two student representatives on the Council of the School.

The Pre-Primary Programme report indicates that the programme has been reviewed every two to three years, although it is not known whether the processes for these previous reviews followed the format outlined above.

A search for the quality assurance approach for the programme of study on the university's website was not successful.

As we were not on-site, we were unable to talk with external stakeholders about the programme. The names of key stakeholders were not identified in the materials provided. However, students readily reported that their feedback was tangibly responded to within the programme.

Design

The pre-primary programme contains a suite of subjects relevant to the preparation of pre-primary teachers.

The small cohort of students enables those teaching in the programme to provide individualised support to students. The students themselves expressed much appreciation for the support they received.

A relatively small proportion of staff teaching on the programme have an early childhood specialisation. A significant number of the staff have a background in areas other than early childhood, including primary education and physical education. The relatively small size of the intake naturally necessitates that staff teach across different education programmes and there can be strengths in academic staff bringing their own specialisations to bear into programmes.

The design of the programme appears to reflect the areas of expertise of the existing staff body. Existing staff expertise needs to be balanced by considerations of what knowledge is required to be a reflective, research-based early childhood (pre-primary) educator.

Early childhood education is usually typified by child-centred approaches that emphasise play-based learning and a recognition and facilitation of children's agency. The review team were therefore surprised to see the subject of play appear late in the course design, and wondered if the programme was structured in such a way that it emphasised teacher-directed approaches to children's learning, over the creation of learning environments that responded to the capacities and needs of each child.

We also noted that some subject readings in the set course literature were dated, and or oriented to an older age group. We understand that the course is taught in Greek and this might limit the pool of references staff can draw on, however, we do believe there is scope to directly address this issue by a careful review of reading lists and resources. Courses that might be adapted for pre-primary from other education courses, need to ensure that the subject's readings and content are appropriate to an early years age group. This necessitates that those subjects reflect an understanding of theories pertaining to young children's development and learning, and approaches to early childhood pedagogy.

The course offers a diverse array of option units, which also appear to reflect the particular research expertise of staff. This can be a strength because of the expertise that is brought to the teaching of the subject. However, few options appeared to have a strong early childhood orientation.

Please note we were unable to determine the appropriateness of some subject readings as the reading lists were in Greek.

We feel that there are opportunities for the course to consolidate its early childhood focus, including in the option units that are offered, and include recommendations below for the teaching team to consider.

Strengths

The Faculty's offer of a pre-primary programme is driven by a stated commitment to the potential long term impact of high quality early childhood education.

The course offers a diverse range of subjects and includes a strong emphasis on the creative arts as well as, for instance, robotics.

Students reported that their feedback was tangibly responded to within the programme.

Students favourably commented on the timely way staff and the programme responded to the impact of COVID and enabled them to continue with their studies effectively.

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

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

The programme provides numerous opportunities for practical experience within schools that the students reported as highly beneficial for their learning.

Research is one of the pathways students become reflective practitioners. Thus, the focus on students as researchers is another strength of the course. An example of this focus is the well-developed subject covering quantitative methodologies. Another example is the 12 ECTS points that are dedicated to the students' dissertation.

The requirement to do a thesis at the end is an important aspect of the programme that develops students research skills and contributes to the development of a reflective mindset for the programme's future graduates.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

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

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

The range of subjects in the programme has the potential to offer students a rich and varied experience in many areas, but the ECEC core research content does not appear to be embedded throughout. We suggest that all the staff teaching on the programme come together to review the course in line with such benchmarks and key contemporary evidence grounded in early childhood research. In this review the team should jointly consider: 1) the key knowledge and skills required for an early childhood teacher, in the light of contemporary research literature; and 2) how this is – or could be – reflected in the programme, an in each subject.

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

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

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

#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 | Compliant |
| 1.2 | Design, approval, on-going monitoring and review | Compliant |
| 1.3 | Public information | Partially compliant |
| 1.4 | Information management | Compliant |

Check information gathered

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

Findings

The cohort is small, with an anticipated annual intake of between 15-20 students, offering the opportunity for personalised support and learning. Small group sizes enable more student-centred learning and teaching that respects and attends to the diversity of students and their needs. However, as the language of instruction is Greek - which the international members of the panel are not competent in - we could not evaluate effectively the virtual footage of on-line classes.

The pre-primary programme offers students a variety of learning experiences and access to specialist facilities – for example, the robotics lab, outdoor nature learning and puppetry.

Although most subjects utilise exams as a component of their assessment, a variety of assessments are deployed throughout the course, including for example: practical work, projects, exams, written assessments, lesson plans and portfolios. The EEC were unable to review a wide range of assessment because of the language barrier.

Not surprisingly, the language of instruction is Greek, which precludes the effective participation of non-Greek speaking international students. Two subjects are offered to students on English, and the students with whom the EEC consulted had good English skills. This indicates that there may be opportunities to offer students an international experience to countries where subjects are taught in English, as well as providing student experiences in Greece.

The teaching staff mentioned that there had been a review of course gradings resulting in the Bell curve being applied more than previously in order to use a broader range of grades in assessment.

The attrition rate is reportedly only 5%, which is relatively low, especially over 4 years.

Strengths

Our consultations with students and graduates provided the following insights:

- teachers and students learn to know each other on a personal basis, which was emphasized positively in student experiences.
- mutually respectful relationships support students' individual and social development.
- students reported that they acquired life skills as a part of their participation in the programme.
- graduates reported the programme has prepared them for the real-life professionalism as ECEC teachers.
- different ways of experiential learning through art and nature, for example, were mentioned as helpful.
- practicums were highlighted as very significant to students' experiences of their learning.

Student representatives reported that course feedback from students is taken into consideration and acted upon.

Structures are in place to support student who require additional support, for instance through the enabling of flexible learning paths. Counselling services and referral to further support are established.

Our virtual tour of the facilities indicates that student have access to appropriate teaching spaces, computer labs, and specialist resources. However, we were unable to verify this through on-site inspection.

The librarians reported that students have access to on-line materials through VPN access to a wide variety of databases of relevance to the field, including major academic journals and e-books.

The free preparatory programme for newly enrolled students to prepare them for university study is an excellent initiative to support students later success.

The EEC congratulates the Department for ensuring that no student was prevented studying because of the financial impact of Covid-19.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

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

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

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

The internationalisation of the programme could be supported through Erasmus student exchange. Many of the academic staff members have strong experience of studies or research in international institutions, with other universities, or associations with international organisations. It might be possible to utilize these connections to leverage international experiences for students, even if this is a via a virtual, technologically facilitated, experience or through initiatives of internationalisation@home.

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 | 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**

Findings

The institution is relatively young and this is reflected in the research, publication and positional profile of the staff.

A large number of staff are involved in teaching the programme and bring a diverse range of expertise to the programme. Relatively few staff in the programme have a background in early childhood education. A significant number of the staff have a background in areas other than early childhood, such as primary education, special education, arts. The EEC recognises that the relatively small size of the student intake necessitates that staff teach across different education programmes. There are also strengths in academic staff bringing their own specialisations into programmes. However, we refer to the recommendations made earlier relating to course content and coherence.

We do note, however, that those staff with early childhood expertise appear to have strong influence on programme.

An update of staff CVs, that was received by the EEC upon request, indicates a steady increase in staff publications over the past two years. These span a range of disciplinary / professional areas though only a proportion are focused on areas concerning early childhood education.

Similarly, funded research spans a range of areas, with only a small proportion on early childhood education. However, staff are engaged in a range of unfunded research activities relevant to the area.

The University employs a “tenure track” system, that motivates the teachers to apply for promotions and that give clear career perspectives. Promotions to associate professorship and full professorship are mostly related to (quantitative) output in the field of research (e.g. number of doctoral student supervision; published articles). It is not entirely clear to what extent qualitative criteria in research and in other fields also are taken into account (e.g. societal impact; student appreciation; course updates; etc).

There is a clear allocation of time for teaching and for research (40% research and 40% teaching plus 20% administration and overhead). Some periods of the year are less intensive as far as teaching is concerned and can then be used to be more active in the field of research.

Strengths

There are sufficient numbers of staff to deliver high quality and personalised teaching.

The staff are committed and dedicated.

The staff are knowledgeable in different fields, including arts, drama, robotics, nature pedagogy, and other adjacent fields.

A particular strength that is much appreciated both by the staff and the EEC, is the internal allocation of research funds for domains that are less successful in obtaining external research funds.

There is a systematic evaluation of the teaching staff including students' evaluations and the students also testified that they can see the impact of their evaluations. Considering the relatively small class sizes and the personal relations between staff and students, the EEC assumes that the informal feedback is at least as important than these formal procedures.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

To support this, we suggest the following:

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

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

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

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

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



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

| Sub-area | | <i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i> |
|----------|--|---|
| 3.1 | Teaching staff recruitment and development | Partially compliant |
| 3.2 | Teaching staff number and status | Compliant |
| 3.3 | Synergies of teaching and research | Partially 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

The admission requirements are pre-defined and published. It states as follows: “At Frederick University, candidates are considered for admission based on their academic qualifications, regardless of sex, race, national origin, colour or religion. In order to be admitted to the ‘BEd in Pre-Primary Education’ Program, candidates must be graduates of a six-grade public secondary school in Cyprus. If the candidates are graduates of a private secondary school, this must be recognized by and registered under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth (of Cyprus), and meet the criteria of Greek language knowledge as defined by the Department (Language level C1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for languages or other equivalent qualification).” Further criteria is detailed for candidates from international secondary institutions, and for *Prior Learning Recognition and Transfer Admission*.

Student progression in the programme in terms of the acquired ECTS points is monitored throughout. The drop-out rate is only around 5% over the four years. Student attendance is actively monitored and acted upon, to encourage ongoing participation.

With regard to students’ academic progression after the programme, there are several alternative MA programmes and an opportunity to continue into Doctoral studies. However, neither of these degrees/ stages involves a specific focus on ECEC research.

Regulations are in place regarding the recognition of students’ prior learning (see above as regards admissions).

Strengths

N/A



Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

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

Findings

Our assessment of physical resources is necessary incomplete as we were reliant on information provided the university through a virtual, promotional tour, and written documentation. From this material we assume the physical resources to be, but we were unable to verify this by visiting the site

Students have access to a number of specialist facilities: a physical education room, a puppet theatre, drama and music room, an art room and access to the robotics laboratory as well as common teaching rooms.

Support structures are in place for students who experience hardship, including those related to learning (e.g. dyslexia support), psychological (e.g. counselling).

With regard to economic hardship, the university takes a sympathetic stance. For instance, the leadership and administrative personnel of the university communicated to us that those students whose families experienced economic hardship during the pandemic were supported to remain in the course. Further, we note that the fees charged to students are reported to be less than the tuition fees pre-approved through the University. There are also a range of financial support schemes for students to minimize disruption to studies due to financial hardship.

Study skills support is available throughout the course. The Careers office supports students entry into employment through the development of job seeking skills, jobs for students, career fairs and so forth.

Access to on-line materials and on-line learning is well supported through a number of platforms.

As well as access to printed materials, the library provides virtual access to a wide range of relevant data bases.

Strengths

Students access to a range of specialist spaces provides a unique opportunity for students to enhance their skills and understandings throughout their studies.

Students reported that the course response to Covid-19 was well planned and the transfer to on-line learning went smoothly.

Students also commented favourably on the level and effectiveness of various types of support they had received throughout their studies and after graduation/

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Although the library provides access to a wide range of relevant academic journals, undergraduate students reported that they did not read articles that were in English (or languages other than Greek).

Adding just one recent international ECEC research article to the set literature for each subject (or a number of key subjects) would greatly enhance the internationalization of the programme, the connectedness to the broader international field, and the positionality of the programme. Such articles could perhaps be read together for ease of understanding and to generate class discussion.

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 doctoral programmes (ALL ESG)

Sub-areas

- 6.1 Selection criteria and requirements
- 6.2 Proposal and dissertation
- 6.3 Supervision and committees

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

| Sub-area | | <i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i> |
|----------|-------------------------------------|---|
| 6.1 | Selection criteria and requirements | Not applicable |
| 6.2 | Proposal and dissertation | Not applicable |
| 6.3 | Supervision and committees | Not applicable |

Conclusions and final remarks

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

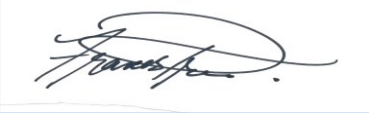



Our overview of the programme indicates that what could be further strengthened is knowledge and understanding of contemporary trends in early childhood education and care research and pedagogy and a coherent philosophical underpinning for the programme. In future, team reviews of the programme guided by a consideration and understanding of established and emerging early childhood approaches could strengthen these aspects.

This could build on the discussions that already appear to have taken place regarding the pedagogy of relationships, ethics of care and commitment to intercultural ways of working, already evident. We were impressed by the care and dedication staff showed students and their commitment to produce empathetic graduates committed to a sensitivity to diversity.

We recognise that the university has taken a number of steps to support staff development in relation to grants and publication and their own personal progression, and these steps already appear to have had impact. However, we believe there is scope to further support staff publish in international early childhood education and care journals and in obtaining research funding with a focus on early childhood education and care, through co-publishing, scaffolding workshops, mentorship and so forth. Team approaches can be very effective in creating a departmental research culture of mutual support and encouragement.

The unique strengths of the programme may benefit international peers as well as international collaborations may strengthen and deepen the team's reflections about the programme. We are confident that investments in international exchanges (through literature, seminars, joint projects, teacher exchange, and so forth) will contribute to the future development of the programme with benefits for students and teachers alike.

C. Signatures of the EEC

| Name | Signature |
|---------------------|--|
| Frances Press |  |
| Michel Vandebroek |  |
| Arniika Kuusisto |  |
| Evrydiki Kolokoudia |  |
| Click to enter Name | |
| Click to enter Name | |

Date: 22/04/2021