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].

Doc. 300.1.1

Date: Date.

External Evaluation Report

(Conventional-face-to-face programme of study)

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

- **Town: Nicosia**

- **School/Faculty (if applicable): Department of Education**

- **Department/ Sector:** Department/Sector

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

  In Greek:

  Προδημοτική Εκπαίδευση(4 έτη/240 ECTS, Πτυχίο)

  In English:

  Pre-Primary Education (4 years, 240 ECTS, Bed)

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

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

- **Concentrations (if any): N/A**

  In Greek: Concentrations
  In English: Concentrations

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A. Introduction

Due to COVID 19, no on-site visit was conducted. The External Evaluation Committee (EEC) committee was provided with pre-recorded virtual tours of various facilities (promotional videos) and key documents in a timely manner, before the site visit.

The committee met with university and departmental personnel virtually, via zoom, over a one-day period on November 11th, 2021. The Agenda for the meeting covered Departmental and programme related issues and included meetings with the Rector, Head of Department, relevant academic and administrative staff, undergraduate students and graduates.

Members of the committee met before the review commenced and also in-camera for short periods of time to ensure, as far as possible, that issues were covered that it needed to consider. The Department later provided access to the powerpoint presentations that had been used throughout the day and additional information as requested.

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 EEC would like to thank the leadership and academic staff at the University and the Quality Assurance Agency for timely arrangements of the visit via zoom-meetings.

The Agenda for the day is attached.

B. External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

Name	Position	University
Frances Press	Professor	Manchester Metropolitan University
Maria Sakellariou	Professor	Ioannina University
Arniika Kuusisto	Professor	Stockholm University
Eleni Vasileiou	Student	University of Cyprus
Name	Position	University
Name	Position	University

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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

A cyclical internal quality assurance process for the pre-primary programme, known as the Internal Programme Evaluation Process (IPEP), is commenced two years after the programme's accreditation by the Cyprus Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency (DIPAE) and completed 1 year before the 5-year DIPAE accreditation expires. The evaluation is a 2-year evaluation process.

The Department of Education appoints:
- an Internal Team of Reviewers (2 senior faculty members from the program, including the Head or Associate Head); and
- an External Team of Reviewers (1 faculty member from another University who is an expert in the programme area), and 1 student from the programme.

The University website states that the University's courses are accredited. Generic information on quality assurance can be found on the University website: Quality Assurance – University of Nicosia (unic.ac.cy). At the time of the web site search, the Student Handbook was being updated.

1.2 Design, approval, on-going monitoring and review

A number of regular course related reviews take place through the year. The Head of Department, Programme Coordinator and Dean meet at the end of each semester to discuss the programme and put forward modifications to the council if required.

Course syllabi are submitted to the course coordinators (faculty members of the Department) and the programme coordinator for feedback. Self-assessments of the programme are also conducted via anonymous questionnaires distributed to the students. Course/faculty evaluation questionnaires are conducted every semester.

The subjects comprising the course provide a coherent programme of study. The EEC appreciates the focus on creativity through various subjects such as drama, dance and art

and noted the innovative focus of literacy through book design. This focus on creative arts is balanced by the focus on STEM.

The programme provides well-structured practicum opportunities, that enable students to gain experience and reflect upon that experience. Practicum covers each age group with the students' time in the service steadily increasing with each practical experience subject and ending in a 10-week internship. In addition, students are provided with opportunities to work with children and the community in other ways through various activities such as the science fair.

Reading lists across subjects vary in relation to how contemporary they are. A number of subjects have reference lists in which the most recent reference is almost a decade old. It would be advisable to review these lists with a view to adding, if appropriate, more contemporary resources. Early childhood education is well researched internationally, and there are many new developments in theory. It was not possible for all committee members to comment on the appropriateness of all reading lists as some titles were in Greek.

The staff body overall are well qualified. 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. However, we note that a number of staff are researching in areas pertinent to early childhood. There is evidence of staff research informing teaching.

Early childhood education is usually typified by child-centred approaches that emphasise play-based learning and a recognition and facilitation of children's agency. When the EEC enquired about whether the programme was informed by a unifying philosophy, staff were able to articulate the underpinning of their subjects, but the EEC was unable to discern what shared understandings of young children's learning and development might unify the programme. Such a unifying stream, for example, might be reflected through an explicit commitment to children's rights (for example, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child); facilitation of children's agency; or play-based learning etc (we note that play-based learning is explicitly referenced in overall aims). This might be worth discussion amongst the staff team.

1.3 Public information

Information regarding the programme of study is publicly available, easily accessible and clear on the website. This information includes learning outcomes; the qualification awarded; teaching, learning and assessment procedures; learning opportunities available to the students and graduate employment information

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It was not possible to discern information about pass rates, or admissions requirements specific to the pre-primary course on the website.

However, information provided by the Department shows relatively low attrition from the programme.

1.4 Information management

Student engagement and progress is carefully monitored. Students are proactively contacted and provided with additional academic support if needed. The small cohort of students enables those teaching in the programme to provide individualised support to students.

Students are asked to provide feedback on their course through anonymised course reviews.

Other issues concerning student support and so forth are picked up in subsequent sections.

Findings

A short description of the situation in the Higher Education Institution (HEI), based on elements from the application for external evaluation and on findings from the onsite visit.

The Department has embedded, cyclical evaluation of the programme, and many points of subject and course review occur throughout the teaching year.

Information about the programme is readily available on the University's website.

The suite of courses which make up the programme appear to be logically sequenced, with a focus across three main strands: educational studies; curriculum content; and teaching methodology. There are a range of elective units attached to each strand. The Learning Outcomes for the programme are appropriate

The programme provides numerous opportunities for practical experience within schools that the students reported as highly beneficial for their learning. One graduate commented that they would like more opportunities for practical experience within the programme

Strengths

A list of strengths, e.g. examples of good practices, achievements, innovative solutions etc.

- ✓ Staff are highly qualified
- ✓ Evaluation is embedded
- ✓ Student feedback does appear to impact upon programmes, for example, the introduction of a subject on dance was reportedly in response to student feedback.
- ✓ External academic input is sought for course reviews
- ✓ There is a balance between creative and STEM subjects within the programme
- ✓ The programme provides numerous opportunities for practical experience within schools that the students reported as highly beneficial for their learning.
- ✓ Activities such as the Science Fair are community facing and provide students with opportunities to work with children and engage with the community

Areas of improvement and recommendations

A list of problem areas to be dealt with, followed by or linked to the recommendations of how to improve the situation.

Internal Programme Evaluation Process (IPEP) appears embedded in the processes of the University and Department. When the EEC asked about stakeholder involvement in the Programme's evaluation process, the academic staff indicated that this would be difficult to achieve. However, the EEC notes that similar programmes in other Cypriot universities do widen the base of stakeholder input by inviting representation from graduates, employers and professional bodies.

The EEC therefore suggests that:

- The Department seeks to enable more external involvement in the review process. It appears that graduates find employment in a range of settings including private kindergartens, as well as the public sector. It might be possible to seek input from employers, as well as professional organisations. In the first instance, a broader base of input, might be achieved by inviting Alumni.

- Student voice could be strengthened by having two student representatives. A lone student may feel less confident to put their views in an academic committee.

- Reading lists across subjects are variable in relation to how contemporary they are. A number of subjects have reference lists in which to most recent reference is almost a decade old. It would be advisable to review these lists with a view to adding, if appropriate, more contemporary resources. Early childhood education is well researched internationally, and there are many new developments in theory.

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

Sub-area		Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant
1.1	Policy for quality assurance	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 purpose of the Pre-primary Education programme is to prepare kindergarten teachers for preschool children (3-6 years old). The curriculum aims for graduates to be able to organize and teach within an appropriate learning environment for the holistic development of children.

The content of the courses and their methodology are aimed at preparing reflective teachers who invest in lifelong professional development. This success of this aim appeared to be reinforced when the EEC met with students and graduates. A number of graduates had gone on to study Masters, with at least two students studying a second Masters degree.

The objectives of the programme are wholly appropriate to preparing students to be contemporary pre-primary teachers emphasizing, for example: the cultivation of 21st century skills (critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration) focusing on holistic learning through exploration and play'; skills for communication and cooperation with the family and social environment of preschool children; and teaching strategies for students with special educational needs in the field of kindergarten, and for children with culturally diverse backgrounds. Additionally, courses such as Introduction to Computer Science and Educational Technology and Robotics enable students to apply and utilize new technologies in the educational process.

The curriculum supports future teachers to critically study research in the field of teaching and learning and to be able to conduct their own educational research.

The teaching and learning of the curriculum is based on the promotion of an "esprit de corps" between teachers and students. This student-centered approach is collaborative is encouraged in a variety of ways, such as non-hierarchical relationships, and strong student representation. A large number of core courses for the entire student body, to ensure deeper engagement. The teaching and learning process is flexible, while the teaching methods chosen by the teachers facilitate the achievement of the planned learning outcomes.

The programme promotes a student-centered approach, focusing on the autonomy and active role of students, both in the educational process and in the structure of the curriculum. The students' point of view through and through the evaluations of the teachers and the courses seems to be taken seriously with respect.

Students are encouraged to co-design learning paths, undertaking their learning and adapting to specific individual needs in order to ensure adequate preparation for their future professional work.

2.2 Practical training

School Experience at three levels, including a final Internship, supports students to acquire the necessary experience and skills to develop quality work in the field of preschool education.

As presented in the "Guide to School Experience of Pre-Primary Education", School Experience is analyzed in three sub-courses: 1. EDUE 297 - EDUP 297, 2. EDUE 397 - EDUP 397, and 3. EDUE 497 - EDUP 497. The core of the School Experience curriculum and is taught, coordinated and supervised by permanent members of the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Pedagogical Studies. School Experience includes evaluation and feedback by the faculty members and faculty who are responsible for the program, as well as self-evaluation, critical reflection by students. The School Experience bridges theory with practice and emphasizes the teaching event (planning, conducting, evaluation of teaching) and the pedagogical event (student presence at school, communication with faculty members, participation in school activities). Students cannot enroll in the School Practicum if their CPA is below a required score.

The design of the School Experience, supports its broader purpose, which is the familiarization of the student with the events in the classroom and in the wider area of the kindergarten in general, and orientation to the responsibilities that the profession of the kindergarten teacher implies. At the same time all its specific objectives are supported.

In the first School Experience, EDUP 297 (4th semester), students attend a weekly course at the University and attend classes in kindergartens for six consecutive weeks, one day a week. In the 2nd School Experience, EDUP 397 (5th semester), students attend a weekly course at the University and attend and teach courses from all course areas of the curriculum, for nine consecutive weeks, two consecutive days a week. In the 3rd School Experience, EDUP 497 (8th semester), students attend a weekly course at the University and are placed for ten consecutive weeks in kindergartens, where they have the opportunity to experience the school community and to undertake systematic teaching in various subjects.

Based on the design of the Internship, students carry out their own autonomous, didactic intervention. Students design and implement a weekly teaching program, incorporating modern techniques and strategies (e.g. interdisciplinary approach, individualized learning, project method, action research). The internship is evaluated as follows: 1. Evaluation of the student by internship supervisors; 2. Evaluation of individual work / student portfolio by the School Experience coordinator; 3. Evaluation of the student by the class teacher / mentor (B 'and C' phase); and 4. Self-assessment. This global form of assessment enables the student to reflect and express themselves on a post-cognitive level.

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The structure of the Internship is primarily student-centered and is based on modern pedagogical innovative approaches to teaching and learning. Through the design of each phase of the School Experience, the role of the reflective student is highlighted and students are required to present their views on a metacognitive level. The Internship receives 25 ECTS throughout the Curriculum, is carefully structured, in an academic manner, while the professional expectations and standards to be achieved are described very clearly.

2.3 Student assessment

The evaluation of students as shown by the course outlines is appropriate, transparent, objective and supports student development. A variety of teaching and assessment approaches are used, which are known in advance to the students. The evaluation of School Experience / Internship engages everyone involved in the educational process: the coordinator / teacher of the course; the class teacher / mentor; and the student.

During the phase of preparation of his teachings, the student is asked to cooperate with the School Experience coordinator and the class teacher / mentor. According to the regulations and the reports of the students, the collaboration concerns both the methodological reflection and the scientific extraction of the material. For the preparation of the student, it is necessary to refer to rich and valid bibliography, both for the extraction of the subject matter, and for the observance of the appropriate methodology. The student cooperates with the kindergarten teacher of the class in which he / she is placed and takes care of being informed about the classroom conditions, the teaching resources, the supervisory means, as well as about other related issues. In consultation with the Management and the staff of the kindergarten, the student prepares from the previous week, the weekly teaching schedule for the next week and records it in the Weekly Planning Form. Every week the student sends this form electronically to the School Experience coordinator. After the teaching of the student in the kindergarten, the student makes a self-assessment, a reflective discussion between the supervisor and the student, identifying possible points, submitting suggestions for improvement, discussing and solving other problems of the student's internship. After the end of the internship, the student submits his / her individual work / portfolio for evaluation to the School Experience coordinator. The date of submission of the assignment is specified in the course diagram.

The fourth-year individual work / portfolio has as its main purpose the collection of the student's teaching practice and experiences during internship. This is a reflective tool for their progress and development. The student includes in the portfolio representative samples from their actions implemented in kindergarten such as: recordings, photographic material - visualizations of specific activities, results of children's activities (e.g., constructions, drawings, written texts, blueprints, etc.). This work encourages autonomous learning, conscious educational action and promotes cognition.

The class teacher / kindergarten mentor completes an evaluation for the student, which is sent to the coordinator of the School Experience. Finally, the student is given the opportunity to exercise total self-criticism in the teaching that he applied both orally and in writing, analyzing and evaluating positive and is graded with A, B, C, D and F. In case a student is graded with F (Fail) the student identifies the points for improvement and is provided with support to improve.

Students' progress is continuously evaluated throughout the semester with various methods and techniques designed based on the Learning Outcomes and the objectives of the course. The assessment methods across the programme include: midterm and final written examinations, assignments, lesson plans, group and individual assignments, small-scale research, case studies, presentations, micro-teaching, scientific reports, and performances.

Students have a number of avenues for support from the University, including the Centre for Research and Counselling Services (KESY); the Student Affairs Department; Academic Advising and Student Support. All available student services are described in detail in the Student Handbook which is accessible electronically at https://www.unic.ac.cy/useful-resources/student-Student progress is closely monitored progress – and students with a low CPA receive additional support.

Students are also provided with opportunities to enrich their Learning Opportunities through volunteering in the Mentor Program, in the PASYKAF Christmas Exhibition, in the Performances for children at Makareio Hospital. Students also support other students, participate in project-based summer schools in Europe, participate in research studies, participate in Erasmus exchange programs, as well as Science Exhibitions and Literacy Exhibitions.

Findings
A short description of the situation in the Higher Education Institution (HEI), based on elements from the application for external evaluation and on findings from the onsite visit.

Please see the summary above

Strengths
A list of strengths, e.g. examples of good practices, achievements, innovative solutions etc.
- ✓ The Undergraduate Education Programme is a well-structured curriculum.

- ✓ The orientation of the Programme is student-centered on a theoretical and practical level.
- ✓ Innovative pedagogical approaches.
- ✓ Alternative forms of student assessment.
- ✓ Collaborations with highly internationalized European universities
- ✓ Opportunities for students to learn and develop in multicultural international work environments.
- ✓ Networking
- ✓ Opportunities for learning and development of teachers in the undergraduate programme through interaction with students.
- ✓ High quality research and teaching staff.
- ✓ Linking teaching and research.

Areas of improvement and recommendations
A list of problem areas to be dealt with, followed by or linked to the recommendations of how to improve the situation.

We suggest there is scope for the programme team to jointly discuss what might be the underpinning drivers of the programme in relation to contemporary understandings of early childhood pedagogies. This might not result in 'the same approach' across all subjects, but the benefits of such dialogue are that it supports the clear articulation of what is being taught and why and can support further thinking in this area.

One graduate commented that they would have like to have had additional practical experience. The committee notes that there is a substantial 10 week internship in the final year of study. There might be scope to introduce short or single day a week placement earlier in the programme, or engage students more fully in community facing actives with children. However, this is for consideration only as most students and graduates we spoke with reported being satisfied.

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

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

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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 academic and teaching staff are highly competent, both with regard to their degree qualifications and research outputs. Their qualifications are suitable for achieving the objectives and planned learning outcomes of the study programme, and for ensuring quality and sustainability of the teaching and learning.

Many academic and teaching staff members have international degrees, also facilitating further collaboration networks. There are numerous past and international collaborative research projects, also in the field of pre-primary education specifically. The institution takes part in the HI teaching exchange through Erasmus+.

Continuous staff development and training is facilitated at the department—indeed to an extent that professional development courses are also offered to staff at other departments as well as facilitating alumni participation to in-service training seminars. Research is encouraged both through incentives and resourcing, both in terms of dedication of some of the working time to research, and other resources. Academic staff may typically have, for instance, some 9 hours of teaching and 5 hours of student support per week, the rest of their working time being allocated to research and administration. These weekly hours would naturally vary between staff members according to their administrative or leadership responsibilities at the institution. Staff have access to research resources also in terms of up-to-date literature and travel funds for attending research conferences. Recognised visiting teaching staff (adjunct/ part time) participates in teaching the study programme, and the staff training and professional development courses are also open for part-time and adjunct teaching staff in the programme.

A broad range of teaching methods are being used in the programme. The students praise, in particular, the Science Fair and Garden of Colour events and the interactiveness across the programme, which is further facilitated by the small teaching groups. Technological platforms are utilized in teaching; typically the Moodle platform but further prompted by the pandemic and hybrid/ distance learning, the staff voiced that both students and staff have made a notable leap in their use of new technology in the programme. Virtual tools are incorporated in the instruction.

3.2 Teaching staff number and status

The number of teaching staff is adequate to support the programme of study, and the teaching staff status (rank, full/part time) is appropriate to offer a quality programme of study. The academic and teaching faculty includes 22 faculty members, out of whom seven are full professors, five associate professors, and three assistant professors. Therefore, the visiting staff number does not exceed the number of the permanently employed staff.

3.3 Synergies of teaching and research

Teaching staff collaborate in both teaching and research between different departments within the HEI, both as regards facilities, venues and resources and as regards competencies (e.g. part-time/ adjunct teaching staff in the programme). There is collaboration with partners outside, regarding the teaching practice/ practicum placement networks with supervisor competencies across the field, both in the private and public ECEC units, and as regards other practitioners in the field such as the alumni and the teacher union. These networks are also beneficial for the students, not only for teacher placements but also for potential further employment opportunities. The institution more broadly has extensive international collaboration networks. The pre-primary programme is taught in Greek, which to an extent has limited its direct international collaborations mainly to Greece, for bilateral exchange of both staff and students.

As mentioned above, scholarly activity as in research and conference attendance, is encouraged and facilitated, strengthening the link between education and research. Students also voice the strength of intertwined relationship between theory and practice in the programme, highlighting especially the importance of the three teaching practice placements in the pre-primary schools/ kindergartens.

The teaching staff publications cover a broad spectrum of topics and focus areas, however, many of these do also address younger children's learning and development or Early Childhood Education and Care/ Pre-Primary context. This pre-primary focus on the ECEC research could, however, perhaps be emphasized even more in planning and reflecting on the future strategies for research areas and focus. That would further strengthen also the connection between the research carried out by the teaching staff in terms of their publications, and the courses taught in the programme.

The allocation of teaching hours compared to the time for research activity, which was further specified above, is appropriate.

The members of the teaching staff are supported with regard to the development of their teaching skills through the professional development courses targeted for the university teachers, facilitated by the department also for the broader institutional context. Recent examples of the training courses include training in technological tools and methods in teaching.

Course feedback is continuously gathered from the students. The means of gathering feedback vary from course to course, some for instance being gathered individually through paper forms. The small cohort of students mean makes a paper exercise more difficult to anonymise. A more centralised, anonymous electronical feedback gathering and analysing system could be considered for the future. That would enable the easy analytics and usability also ensure continuous feedback from students as regards their experienced workload for each of the modules and assignments.

Research and scholarly activities are considered for the faculty members' 'ranking and promotion. This is one of the main criteria for their career advancement and development. All faculty is committed to (i) presenting and disseminating their research findings at international conferences, (ii) publishing their work in peer reviewed journals and (iii) getting engaged in research funded projects (both locally and EU/internationally).

As mentioned above, the staff teaching is to an extent connected to their research topics, although the research areas to a great extent also cover older age groups or more field specific areas. Mutual research strategy for strengthening the pre-primary related research in the department could be continuously, consciously and communally reflected upon. We note that the Horizon 2020 funded DIALLS project – aiming towards "teaching children to be tolerant, empathetic and inclusive through talking together" – included a focus on cultural studies and civic education, with a broad spectrum of involved experts, teacher educators, psychologists and literacy specialists from ten universities in nine countries. The project design and implementation has been close to practice, with teachers and their classes in seven countries, developing resources for both teachers and researchers.

As the language of instruction is in Greek, we note that student exchange opportunities are mainly conducted with Greece.

Findings

The programme is carried out by competent academic teaching staff and with appropriate resourcing and support. There is a balance between subjects related to creativity and STEM and continuum of modules and terms is well rounded and in relation to staff competence areas.

Strengths
- ✓ The staff body is highly qualified.
- ✓ There is appropriate support for both research and professional development.
- ✓ The academic teaching staff workload seems balanced between research, teaching, and administration.

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✓ There are research competencies and outputs (publications, projects, external funding) as well as both international and national collaboration in research and teaching (mainly Greece)

Areas of improvement and recommendations
A list of problem areas to be dealt with, followed by or linked to the recommendations of how to improve the situation.

More strategic research emphasis could be laid in the research targeting especially the Pre-Primary Education/ Early Childhood Education and Care research. This could also involve students, for instance as regard to considering to possibly making the BA research thesis an obligatory part of the Pre-Primary Programme degree studies, in order to strengthen their research-based teaching skills in professional practice. Furthermore, though to an extent outside the present evaluation, the continuum from the here evaluated BA level degree programme further on to MA and PhD also with a Pre-Primary focus is a possible area for further development. This would not only further strengthen the research carried out at the department in the field of Pre-Primary Education in particular, but also further contribute towards the research culture for all students and staff.

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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	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**

4.1 Student admission, processes and criteria

The admission requirements are pre-defined. International equivalencies are available on the website. It was not possible to locate the specific information for admissions to the pre-primary programme on the English version of the website.

4.2 Student progression

Information concerning the requirements for graduating from the programme are clear on the website.

The curriculum and sequence of subjects is also readily available

Student progress is closely monitored and wrap around support to enable student success appears deeply embedded in the culture of the university.

4.3 Student recognition

Regulations are in place regarding the recognition of students' prior learning at other accredited institutions. Credits can be transferred under the general principle that 'a student's knowledge, no matter how it was gained, can be considered as long as it is relevant and can be documented'. However, students must complete at least half the degree credits in the University of Nicosia.

4.4 Student certification

The requirements for graduating with a bachelor's degree are clearly stated.

Findings

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A short description of the situation in the Higher Education Institution (HEI), based on elements from the application for external evaluation and on findings from the onsite visit.

See above

Strengths

A list of strengths, e.g. examples of good practices, achievements, innovative solutions etc.

- ✓ Information for students about the nature, requirements and content of the degree is clearly articulated and readily found on the website.

- ✓ There is a clear process for Recognition of Prior Learning.

- ✓ 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.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

A list of problem areas to be dealt with, followed by or linked to the recommendations of how to improve the situation.

It was not possible to find the entry requirements for this programme on the website. The tab under 'admissions' was blank. It would be good to see this rectified.

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

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

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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

According to both the students and the staff members as well as the documents and the virtual tour provided, both students and staff have access to adequate and readily accessible teaching and learning resources. This includes both teaching and learning environments (incl. e.g. Music Lab, Arts Lab), materials, aids and equipment (e.g. research and course literature, Robotics equipment). All of these together support the achievement of objectives in the study programme. The numbers of enrolled students are relatively low at present, but as also electronic resources are available, at least for now the adequacy of resources is ensured. For changing circumstances such as the pandemic, the national programme students were also able to borrow some of the electronical devices (laptops/tablet computers) where needed, however it was noted that internet connectivity may have been a problem for some students.

Though the evaluation panel was not able to physically visit the library and the teaching labs, as far as we can evaluate from the materials and documents provided, the resources are fit for purpose. As the teaching groups are relatively small and the teaching methods and student support—according to several student accounts, too—are well in order, the student perspectives are taken into account when allocating, planning and providing the learning resources. This includes the special needs support adjustments as well as physical and psychological support provided for students and staff where needed.

5.2 Physical resources

As noted above, the premises, libraries, study facilities, and IT infrastructure are, according to the virtual and document material provided and the virtual visit interviews and discussions, adequate to support the study programme. The students were well aware of the resources available and also the graduates evaluated the resourcing positively in their retrospective accounts. Students in changing life situations had also experienced flexibility from the programme side to accommodate to their particular needs.

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The EEC appreciated the availability of specialist labs, such as the drama room, and the flexibility of the workspaces.

5.3 Human support resources

The administrative and student support staff are well equipped and closely follow student progression. Students at the later stages of their studies, with lower grades (GPA around 1.5-1.7), who are considered at risk of not reaching full qualifications in the framework of their programme time, are personally contacted for targeted additional support for their studies. Where needed, special needs or life situations are accounted.

5.4 Student support

In addition to that mentioned above, there are special support structures for students needing support for their health and wellbeing, both within and beyond the institutional structures. Student progress is closely followed and contact is taken in case of absence or weakened course performance in order to target individual support measures.

Several students participating in the group discussion had transferred across institutions and departments to gain multiple degrees or qualifications. Also staff members had to a great extent carried out both research and teaching in various institutions and internationally. Erasmus+ teacher exchange bilaterally with partner programmes/institutions in Greece, as well as international research collaboration and collaboration with the broader society further enhance the resourcing and opportunities for networking also for students.

The supply of teaching materials and equipment, including teaching labs and expendable materials, the condition of classrooms, and adequacy of financial resources seem appropriate for conducting the study programme and achieving its objectives. The staff or students have not brought up needs for supplementation or improvement.

According to the virtual site visit and the videos provided, the resources are appropriate for the study programme. The effectiveness of for instance the teaching labs is ensured through a broad collaboration between units and departments (e.g. Music Lab).

If the number of students would increase notably, there would probably be a need to introduce parallel teaching groups for the seminars in order to fit all the students to the provided teaching labs. This is not a critical risk, given the current number of students.

According to student feedback, they have gained all the necessary support, both as regards resourcing and immaterial social support and flexible study arrangements where needed. Several students particularly praise the "interaction" in the programme, indicating that the information flow has been more than appropriate. They also emphasise having gained support from the programme academics as alumni. Many also collaborate with the

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programme for instance through supervising teaching placement students in their Pre-Primary Education units.

Special needs (health, learning challenges, etc) are well accounted for through the student support services. Student mobility has taken place through international degree studies of some of the students and many of the staff members, however, this was not brought up much in the site visit other than through the bilateral exchange with Greece. Perhaps the teaching language (Greek) sets some limitations here, raising the threshold of international exchange beyond the language of instruction. Still, student mobility as regards national collaborative networks was also supported through the events and programmes carried out together with local actors outside the academia.

Findings
A short description of the situation in the Higher Education Institution (HEI), based on elements from the application for external evaluation and on findings from the onsite visit.

Teaching and learning resources and venues are appropriate for the programme aims. Human and student support structures are appropriate for the purpose.

Strengths
A list of strengths, e.g. examples of good practices, achievements, innovative solutions etc.

Student support structures are appropriate and student progress is closely monitored and followed up.
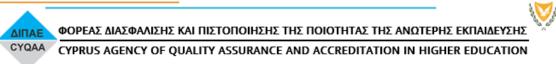
Resources are appropriate for the purposes of the programme.

Areas of improvement and recommendations
A list of problem areas to be dealt with, followed by or linked to the recommendations of how to improve the situation.

There is a possibility for further encouragement to students for international exchange beyond Greek language area. Some digital connections have already been made to Pre-Primary Education students internationally—perhaps the academic and teaching staff could further utilize their international collaborative networks to extend these activities.

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

Sub-area	Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant

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

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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**

6.1 Selection criteria and requirements

Standards

- *Specific criteria that the potential students need to meet for admission in the programme, as well as how the selection procedures are made, are defined.*
- *The following requirements of the doctoral degree programme are analysed and published:*
  - *the stages of completion*
  - *the minimum and maximum time of completing the programme*
  - *the examinations*
  - *the procedures for supporting and accepting the student's proposal*
  - *the criteria for obtaining the Ph.D. degree*

6.2 Proposal and dissertation

Standards

- *Specific and clear guidelines for the writing of the proposal and the dissertation are set regarding:*
  - *the chapters that are contained*
  - *the system used for the presentation of each chapter, sub-chapters and bibliography*
  - *the minimum word limit*
  - *the binding, the cover page and the prologue pages, including the pages supporting the authenticity, originality and importance of the dissertation, as well as the reference to the committee for the final evaluation*
- *There is a plagiarism check system. Information is provided on the detection of plagiarism and the consequences in case of such misconduct.*
- *The process of submitting the dissertation to the university library is set.*

6.3 Supervision and committees

Standards

- *The composition, the procedure and the criteria for the formation of the advisory committee (to whom the doctoral student submits the research proposal) are determined.*
- *The composition, the procedure and the criteria for the formation of the examining committee (to whom the doctoral student defends his/her dissertation), are determined.*
- *The duties of the supervisor-chairperson and the other members of the advisory committee towards the student are determined and include:*
  - *regular meetings*

- o *reports per semester and feedback from supervisors*
- o *support for writing research papers*
- o *participation in conferences*
- *The number of doctoral students that each chairperson supervises at the same time are determined.*

You may also consider the following questions:

- *How is the scientific quality of the PhD thesis ensured?*
- *Is there a link between the doctoral programmes of study and the society? What is the value of the obtained degree outside academia and in the labour market?*
- *Can you please provide us with some dissertation samples?*

Findings

A short description of the situation in the Higher Education Institution (HEI), based on elements from the application for external evaluation and on findings from the onsite visit.

Click or tap here to enter text.

Strengths

A list of strengths, e.g. examples of good practices, achievements, innovative solutions etc.

Click or tap here to enter text.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

A list of problem areas to be dealt with, followed by or linked to the recommendations of how to improve the situation.

Click or tap here to enter text.

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

Sub-area		Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant
6.1	Selection criteria and requirements	Choose answer

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6.2	Proposal and dissertation	Choose answer
6.3	Supervision and committees	Choose answer

C. Conclusions and final remarks

The EEC would like to thank the Department of Education for the comprehensive package of material to inform the accreditation process, and for answering our additional questions, after the review day had concluded.

It is evident that the University of Nicosia has strong international collaborations and is committed to high quality teaching and research. The EEC notes that the University of Nicosia overall is highly ranked for impact, being ranked #1 in Cyprus and Greece and in the Top 15 in the EU. In relation to the quality of its teaching, we note that the THE has ranked the University of Nicosia in its Top 40. This is impressive and is indicative of a culture that supports high quality teaching. Indeed structural supports for teaching improvements were evident and well scaffolded.

The Department of Education employs highly qualified staff, a significant number of whom are engaged in research. During the review meeting the EEC noted a collegiate spirit amongst the staff and a general commitment to student success. Our discussions with students and graduates revealed a great deal of satisfaction with the programme, and we were struck by how animated the students were in their contributions.

We did not discern major problems in the programme for students or staff. The comments that make in relation to the following recommendations are prompts for the Programme team to consider and discuss. The order of the recommendations does not necessarily follow the order in which they appear in the text, but are rather organised in a logical sequence.

- We recommend that the programme seeks contributions from stakeholders, not just external academics, in its programme review process. Further, we believe that if two student representatives engaged in the process, this would strengthen student voice.
- When the EEC enquired about whether the programme was informed by a unifying philosophy, staff were able to articulate the underpinning of their subjects, but the EEC was unable to discern what shared understandings of young children's learning and development might unify the programme, for example, an explicit commitment to children's rights (for example, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child); facilitation of children's agency; or play-based learning etc (we note that play-based learning is explicitly referenced in overall aims). There is scope for the programme team to jointly discuss what might be the underpinning drivers of the programme in relation to contemporary understandings of early childhood pedagogies. This might not result in 'the same approach' across all subjects, but the benefits of such dialogue are that it supports the clear articulation of what is being taught and why and can support further thinking in this area.

- Consider whether a more strategic research emphasis could be laid targeting especially Pre-Primary Education/ Early Childhood Education and Care research. It was not always possible to discern from the research profiles and publications the extent to research was focused on the ages covered by the programme.
- We note that the curriculum supports future teachers to critically study research in the field of teaching and learning and to be able to conduct their own educational research. This could be strengthened by making the dissertation compulsory, rather than optional.
- We recommend that all courses in which the most recent readings are almost a decade old are reviewed and renewed. The area of early childhood education internationally is highly researched and there are developments in pedagogy and theory that may be worth considering and incorporating in set texts and recommended readings.
- Finally, a key Learning Objective for the pre-primary programme concerns the cultivation of intercultural skills. We note that a number of staff have research and publications pertinent to this area, including DIALLS. This is an area of work highly relevant to the context of Cyprus and we recommend that the programme staff consider ways in which staff expertise could be utilised to make an emphasis on intercultural skills more explicit in programme content than it appears to be currently.

D. Signatures of the EEC

Name	*Signature*
Frances Press	
Arniika Kuusisto	
Maria Sakellariou	
Eleni Vasileiou	
Click to enter Name	
Click to enter Name	

Date: 18/11/2021