

Thematic analysis on colleges' short-cycle programmes' evaluation

Report No: 1- April 2019

Title: Colleges' Short-Cycle Programmes' Evaluation: Trends and Dominant Issues

Period: September 2017- September 2018

Number of programmes: 42 (40 accredited/2 rejected)

Positive practice in the field of Quality Assurance:

Programme development follows a feasibility study and investigation of graduate prospects of employability. The requirements of the society and the labour market are taken into account.

Programmes' and institutions' websites have mostly been upgraded.

Resources are in a gradual and constant process of enrichment and upgrading.

All institutions have established Committees and developed processes for Internal Quality Assurance.

There is a progressive trend for upgrading teaching material and libraries. A number of colleges have been electronically connected with libraries and journals of other higher education institutions.

Trends and issues deriving from experts' recommendations and institutions' responses

Standard 1: Programme's profile, learning outcomes, content and methodology, graduate employability

Processes and policies of programme design, development and coordination are not adequate provided that directors have the main responsibility.

Module learning outcomes should be mapped and linked to the programme overall and specific ones. This will help both design a more coherent programme and visually demonstrate how it meets its objectives.

Learning outcomes are not academically linked to the content of the courses. Academic oversight of the programme design is lacking. Those who are responsible for ensuring that the content of the programme is adequate are not sufficiently experienced/knowledgeable.

Students' workload (e.g., compulsory attendance, depth of study, assignments and final exams) need revision and upgrading according to European and International standards in order to correspond to the attributed ECTS.

There is an imbalance between theoretical and practical modules. There is a need for continuous monitoring of the depth of treatment in some of the most practical modules to ensure that the students get the correct balance between theory and application.

Practical training for the short-cycle programmes, mainly professional/vocational must be increased.

All accredited programmes followed the experts' recommendations. The new syllabi have been sent and approved by the experts. The CYQAA Regulations provide for academic councils with permanent staff, responsible for the programmes' design and development and for staff recruitment.

Standard 2. Teaching and learning

Students' admission criteria need to be improved and must include sufficient evidence for having the necessary background knowledge and skills for enrolment.

Building on good current practice, teaching can be further enriched with the introduction of the latest developments of teaching methods, especially to support the application aspects of the programme.

Foreign students' profile and attendance in some cases is problematic because of insufficient evidence regarding the command of the programmes' language. The absence of Pass and Fail Records and of transparent admission criteria for foreign students is a big threat for the quality assurance of higher education in Cyprus.

There is a need for continuous monitoring of the depth of treatment in some of the most practical modules to ensure that the students get the correct balance between theory and application.

The most frequent students' claims refer to the lack of mentoring and feedback, conditions that seriously damage the quality of teaching and the achievement of the expected learning outcomes.

The setting up of an external academic advisory committee would be beneficial for the improvement of teaching and learning, and the cultivation of research culture.

Improvement of teaching methodology is necessary for both academic and practical modules. Standards of academic teaching are missing.

Colleges' responses are positive and directors have thankfully accepted the observations concerning upgrading teaching and the need for pedagogical support of their staff. The majority of the Institutions established pedagogical teams and some of them participate in the Erasmus programmes. The fact that the need has been identified is the first step for upgrading teaching and learning. Follow up procedures have been set up by CYQAA to secure continuous compliance with the experts' recommendations: Open communication, publication on the institutions' website of the teaching staff's academic profile, site-visits, examination of the degree of compliance through the institutions' self-studies, regular collection of information concerning the institutions' operation and observations of progress in the new applications. CYQAA has scheduled seminars in collaboration with the institutions for supporting teaching in higher education.

Standard 3. Teaching staff

Lack of transparent academic procedures for staff recruitment and promotion processes does not safeguard quality assurance since the staff is hired by the directors of the colleges, without independent academic bodies and standards involved.

Considering provisions of the previous law for the establishment and operation of colleges (private and public schools), the majority of teaching personnel do not have the academic profile suitable for teaching in BA and Master's programmes because of their lack of a research profile, publications in refereed journals, experience and a PhD in the field.

The inadequate number of PhD degree holders and a great number of part-time teaching staff is a dangerous trend that threatens teaching and learning quality assurance.

The Colleges' Laws [1996 (67(1)/1996) to 53(I) of 2013] provided for non-permanent staff and also for staff without a PhD for teaching in higher education, a fact that did not support the development of academic culture: "Article 16 (2) The teaching staff of each private institution, by a percentage not smaller than 70%, must possess a recognizable academic degree of one level higher to the level of the programme of study it teaches. The remaining 30% may possess a degree of an equivalent level or a relevant professional qualification."

The accredited programmes are in compliance with the experts' recommendations. Although the directors of the colleges were quoting the provision of the Colleges' Law they are gradually conforming to the new situation.

Standard 4. Research premises, staff and students' involvement in research, publications

Colleges are mostly teaching schools and in some cases the directors admit that they are teaching colleges and not research-oriented institutions. This is not an appropriate justification for the absence of synergies between teaching and research in the programmes and in the academic profile of their teaching staff and of their students.

The lack of a research environment and culture from almost all colleges has been evidenced and analyzed. Experts suggest rejection of the programmes that cannot operate without

research. Two programmes were rejected. Institutions are working for the establishment of research centers and the financial support of their staff for research activities.

Standard 5. Resources, student welfare services, administrative services, laboratories, library

There is a need for better student welfare services with specialised personnel able to support international students in Cyprus, without of course excluding the support of all other students. Social and psychological support, as well as financial information, is inadequate.

Organised orientation to the academic tasks, premises and facilities need to be enhanced and systematically provided.

Records for the employability of graduates are not available, preventing the institutions and their prospective students from essential decision-making information. Employability records are necessary for institutions' self-assessment and policy making.

Colleges upgraded their services and laboratories for the vocational programmes. Services and provisions for international students are gradually being enriched. The majority of colleges' libraries have been connected with the universities' libraries and the recommendations for new books and electronic material has been substantially satisfied.

Experts' recommendations for short-cycle programmes:

Standard 1. Aims, Expected Learning Outcomes, Content and Quality Assurance Processes

I. Expected learning outcomes must: 1) emphasise the vocational outcomes, 2) follow the principles of SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable Realistic, Timely) with emphasis on measurement and assessment of the learning outcomes, 3) be expressed using verbs that indicate what students learn, do, and feel as a result of the programme.

II. Assessment practices could also be more broadly improved, by providing assessment rubrics for all coursework and clear marking criteria.

III. There is a misunderstanding of the terms 'objectives' and 'learning outcomes'. Outcomes must derive from the content of the courses.

IV. A level of external peer scrutiny from academia and industry will enhance the QA of the programme ensuring the effectiveness of teaching and required outcomes.

V. A strong emphasis is needed on the practical applications of the examined theories as well as on the connection of the practical/applied practice modules and the theoretical modules. It is important for those applications to be reflected in the module descriptors and to be delivered by the module tutors.

VI. The lecture hours/laboratory hours per week are missing from the course contents.

VII. The curriculum of the programme will better achieve the learning goals if the over-emphasis on technical software training is reduced and missing aspects are added. The college is encouraged to revise the curriculum accordingly.

VIII. Students' workload does not correspond to the number of ECTS attributed to each course.

IX. A mechanism must be found as a matter of priority to provide non-EU students with suitable industry placements. It has been suggested that it is possible to provide non-EU students with unpaid placements provided that the placement is considered to be an external class and that insurance for the students is provided by the college.

X. We strongly recommend that the institution seek out experienced and knowledgeable individuals who will provide oversight of the programme design for resubmission to the accreditation body.

XI. More area specific modules could be introduced to the programme, so they reflect current trends and developments in the field.

XII. More formalised quality assurance procedures should be followed to ensure that the programme is developed and improved in line with the educators' module self-assessment and student evaluations. This could be done at an annual rate.

Standard 2. Teaching and learning

I. Teaching can be further improved with the introduction of the latest developments of teaching methods to support the practical nature of the programme.

II. The English language entry requirement should be higher than the current one, to allow for a more effective learning experience and to keep the failure rate at low levels.

III. Although teaching personnel possesses adequate qualifications for the modules undertaken, the pedagogic training and continuous support provided could be enhanced (for instance with the establishment of a regular peer review observation scheme).

IV. There should be continuous evaluation of the balance and suitability of assessment and feedback methods.

V. The possibility of short industrial internships or involvement in industry-led projects should be investigated.

VI. The teaching material is not up-to-date. Experienced and qualified staff is needed for the revision of the teaching material. Readings need to be updated to reflect current research in the area.

VII. More formalised quality assurance procedures should be followed to ensure that the programme is developed and improved in line with the educators' module self-assessment and student evaluations. This could be done at an annual rate.

VII. Each student should be allocated to a personal tutor, who will monitor their performance and provide mentoring/support services.

VIII. Committee recommends putting in place statutory mechanisms and clear guidelines on supervision, support and assessment of students throughout and by the end of their work placement.

Standard 3. Teaching staff

I. Staff must be encouraged to participate in international conferences and to visit institutions with similar programmes.

II. Participation in the Erasmus programmes will be very positive for students and staff.

III. The skills of the teaching personnel are insufficient for teaching specific digital topics, which is more demanding than teaching a standard programme. In particular, no full time faculty has an academic degree in the field or professional experience. The committee suggests hiring full time faculty with the aforementioned essential qualifications.

IV. Although teaching personnel possesses adequate qualifications for the modules undertaken, the pedagogic training and continuous support provided could be enhanced (for instance with the establishment of a regular peer review observation scheme).

V. Insufficient number of permanent staff.

VI. More staff with a Ph.D. and experience should be appointed and that will improve the academic content of the programme. The staff must have the academic qualifications and experience in the field.

VII. There is a need for further continuous staff development to ensure that teaching staff are up-to-date with the latest developments and practice in teaching methods and in the subject area.

VIII. The academic staff should have a clearer career path for professional development and progress.

V. Standard 4. Research premises and culture, staff and students' involvement in research

I. The research culture in the institution should be improved and appropriate mentoring should be available to junior staff by appropriately qualified and experienced researchers.

II. Visiting professors will contribute to the cultivation of research culture.

III. The setting up of an external academic advisory committee would be beneficial for the improvement of teaching and learning and the cultivation of research culture at CTL.

IV. There is a need to build research in areas that can influence and inform the programme of study scrutinised here, with more explicit examples of research and industrial practice. This should inform and support the curriculum, ideally with direct student involvement where possible.

V. Small institutions are also not well placed to carry out excellent market research.

Standard 5. Resources, student welfare services, administrative services, laboratories, library

I. The facilities, mainly hardware and software and access to journals and industry papers and references, need to be kept up-to-date and enhanced in the areas of games technology delivery, especially in areas such as virtual and augmented reality, and software to support games development and gamification.

II. Enrich the collection in the library and improve the loan policy. The library's inventory of books and periodicals, printed or electronic, should be enriched and the library must be electronically connected with other libraries.

III. As student numbers grow, the current facilities will not be adequate.

IV. New facilities that have a stronger fit for purpose must be found as soon as possible.

V. Size of the institution may prove a limiting factor over time. Small institutions may also struggle to provide certain aspects of student support and clearly defined roles.

VIII. The space devoted to the laboratories is rather limited. There is no electric machinery laboratory.

IX. Consider using simulation labs.

X. The current library facility lacks the essential learning material that is necessary for the programme, such as textbooks, subscriptions to accounting journals and relevant databases. The committee suggests investing in the aforementioned resources essential for this programme.

ANNEX 1.

Codes and patterns for short cycle programmes

Dimensions of Evaluation	Sub-categories	Re-occurring patterns/ frequency
1. Programme	Design and development	Insufficient Coordinator's credentials/35 Enrichment of practical experience/38

		<p>Lack of academic procedures/32</p> <p>Lack of correspondence between ECTS and students' work/15</p>
	Aims, objectives and expected learning outcomes	Misunderstanding and lack of connection/21
	Content	<p>Non-research driven No research and teaching synergies/40</p> <p>Coherence and sequence of courses - suggestions for changes/40</p> <p>Imbalance between theory and practice/33</p>
	Methodology	<p>Lack of academic teaching and appropriate methodology/34</p> <p>Feedback missing/27</p>
	Information to students	Insufficient information/30

	Policy and quality assurance processes	Inappropriate/20 Involvement of directors/35
2. Teaching and learning	Admission criteria	Command of English language for international students is needed/32
	Assessment	Upgrading the assessment system and final exams/23
	Teaching material	Updating teaching material and bibliography/38
	Mentoring	Insufficient mentoring and feedback/11
3. Teaching staff	Ratio of permanent/non-permanent staff	Insufficient permanent staff /40 Staff without experience/19 Staff without appropriate academic profile in the field/31
	Processes of academic personnel recruitment and promotion	Lack of explicit promotion processes /9 Lack of published recruitment processes/26

	Teaching and research synergy	Lacking /27
4. Research	Research premises Staff involvement	Lack of research premises, activities and publications/40 Lack of students' research skills/40
5. Resources	Laboratories	Insufficient /27
	Library	Upgrading - to be enriched/39 Lack of essential material/20
	Student welfare services	Upgrading/23 Lack of qualified personnel/12