

Professor Jenny Higham
MBBS, MD, FRCOG, FRCP, FHEA, HonFACadMed, HonDMed
Principal
Executive Officer (Principal's Office): June Phillips
+44 (0)208 725 5008
PrincipalPA@sgul.ac.uk



Medicine, Biomedical Sciences, Health and Social Care Sciences
Cranmer Terrace, London, SW17 0RE

27 October 2020

By email: edeligianni@dipae.ac.cy

Dr Eleni Deliyianni
Education Officer
Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education
Cyprus

Dear Dr Deliyianni

Subject: Cross-border / franchise program of study at University of Nicosia

Thank you for your letter of 5th October 2020 regarding the delivery of the St George's Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) programme by the University of Nicosia under a franchise agreement with St George's.

We understand from your letter that the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation is reviewing the franchise agreement between the two universities to ensure compliance with European Quality Standards. We are pleased to confirm that we will provide you with whatever information you need to carry out this review. To that end, we have responded to the questions in the order that they appear in your letter. As you are no doubt aware, the franchise arrangement between St George's and the University of Nicosia is well-established and successful. Students report high levels of satisfaction with their experience as learners, progression and completion rates are good and many graduates from the programme are now successfully practising medicine around the world.

1. How do you check that students admitted to the program meet the admission criteria?

The academic requirements for entry to the programme are determined by St George's as the awarding university and are the same as those for the MBBS programme delivered in the UK. At present, applicants must have Bachelor's degree with at least a 2.1 class honours degree or its international equivalent (3.3 GPA in the USA, 3.2 in Canada) or a higher degree (e.g., MSc, MPhil or PhD) in any discipline.

The process for selecting applicants is again determined by St George's and applicants who meet the academic requirements must sit an aptitude test approved by St George's to determine their capacity for high-level study in medicine. Only applicants who achieve the cut-off score in the aptitude test are invited to interview. Multiple Mini Interviews (MMI) are used to decide whether the applicant's personal attributes and values equip them to study and practise medicine.

Operationally, the Associate Dean for Admissions at St George's works closely with her counterpart at the University of Nicosia (the Director of Enrolment Services) to ensure that the admissions policy, as it is described here, is delivered. Detailed discussions focus on applicants with non-standard academic entry qualifications. The Associate Dean and Director of Enrolment Services are accountable through the governance structures that underpin the franchise for all admissions decisions.

2. Do you have information about the profile of incoming students?

Individual students admitted under the franchise arrangement are registered for the St George's MBBS degree, enter our assessments and, if successful, receive a degree certificate awarded by St George's. Under applicable data protection legislation, we collect only the basic information about incoming students that we need to administer these tasks and to maintain a permanent record of student achievements. We also collect additional information to meet our reporting obligations to regulatory bodies in the UK.

3. How do you ensure that students have a good command of the program's teaching language?

If an applicant graduated from a degree programme that was not taught and assessed in English, the applicant must take the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) or equivalent (e.g., TOEFL). An IELTS score of 7.0 overall (with a score of 7.0 in the written element and no less than 6.5 in any other element) or equivalent is a requirement for entry to the programme. Fluency in written and spoken English is confirmed through the admissions policy.

4. What are the minimum required qualifications of the teaching staff?

As the awarding body, St George's does not specify the academic and professional qualifications that teaching staff must hold. This is a matter for the University of Nicosia.

However, as has been noted, the franchise arrangement is established, and the first students were enrolled onto the programme in 2011. In preparation for the launch of the franchise programme, St George's was contracted to work closely with the University of Nicosia to help it identify, recruit and train the faculty that it would need to successfully deliver a medical degree to the standard expected by the UK General Medical Council. As part of our own due diligence process, we reviewed the University of Nicosia's policies and procedures for staff recruitment and concluded that these were fit for purpose. The CVs of the University of Nicosia faculty in place to deliver the programme in 2011 were made available to St George's as part of the validation process at the time.

In this context, we would emphasize that the programme aims and intended learning outcomes are the same as those for the programme delivered in the UK. Through our many interactions with the University of Nicosia, we are aware that the faculty delivering the curriculum receive ongoing training. A selection process is in place to recruit to key roles (e.g. PBL tutors) and some faculty members have gained a postgraduate qualification in teaching, learning and assessment awarded by St George's. We are also aware there is continuous feedback on the quality of teaching through peer review, and continuing online feedback from students that is used to monitor the quality of teaching.

5. Have you checked the exam papers?

All examinations (written, practical and professional) are set by St George's University of London.

6. How do you check that the programs are implemented based on quality criteria? What evidence do you request from University of Nicosia?

The criteria that we use to quality assure the delivery of the franchise programme are the same as those that we use to quality assure in-house provision. These include the effectiveness of the admissions process; student satisfaction with their experience as learners, student performance in assessments (in comparison with UK-based students) progression and completion rates; appeals and complaints data; reports from external examiners; graduate destinations; reports from regulators and professional bodies.

The University of Nicosia submits an annual report that addresses these areas based on the performance of the programme in the previous academic year. In addition, the University of Nicosia submits six-monthly reports to highlight immediate quality issues. We have additional processes to review the performance of the programme over an extended period of time (*periodic review*) and the effectiveness of joint working between the two universities (*partnership review*).

The provision of St George's MBBS curriculum by the University of Nicosia is subject to quality monitoring by the UK General Medical Council. The annual reporting process requires completion of a self-assessment questionnaire mapped to the GMC standards in *Promoting Excellence*. The University of Nicosia participates in the GMC QA process and submits an annual self-assessment questionnaire which is then triangulated and analysed prior to GMC submission.

7. Have you ever visited classes where your programs are taught in Cyprus? What is the teaching methodology followed?

We have carried out site visits to the Medical School in Nicosia on a number of occasions since 2011 and we have also visited the sites used by the University of Nicosia to deliver the clinical components of the MBBS programme as part of our validation and monitoring activities. In addition to the clinical sites in Cyprus, visits to clinical sites in the US, and Israel have taken place. It is not our practice to observe teaching directly during these visits or at any other time.

In terms of teaching and learning methodologies, these evolve across the four years of the programme. The focus in year 1 is on the clinical sciences that underpin medical practice. A learning week structure is used within which students working in small groups (~10) are given a clinical problem to investigate, to diagnose and to suggest an appropriate course of action. Student learning is facilitated by a problem-based learning (PBL) tutor and is complemented by a range of other learning opportunities including lectures, expert fora, tutorials, clinical and communication skills sessions and demonstrator-led anatomy teaching. Students are also introduced to patients early in the programme in a variety of clinical settings.

As students move from one year to the next, the balance shifts so that there is a reduction in PBL blocks and a corresponding increase in time spent in clinical placements under the supervision of clinicians. Year 3 is a fully clinical year with students rotating through a number of specialist and general clinical firms. The final year acts as preparation for

becoming a Foundation Year 1 doctor. In addition to further clinical placements, students also undertake five-week assistantships in medical, surgical and primary care settings shadowing F1 doctors.

I hope this information is of use to you as you conduct your review of the franchise agreement between St George's and the University of Nicosia. If you have any further queries, please feel free to contact my colleague Derek Baldwinson (dbaldwin@sgul.ac.uk).

Yours sincerely

Jenny Higham
Principal