

Doc. 300.3.2

Date: 13.03.2025

Higher Education Institution's Response

(Departmental)

- **Higher Education Institution:**
University of Limassol
- **Town:** Limassol
- **School/Faculty:** Social Sciences and Humanities
- **Department:** Department of Education
- **Programme(s) of study under evaluation**
Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)

Programme 1

In Greek:

Μεταπτυχιακό Πρόγραμμα στην Ειδική Αγωγή και Νέες Τεχνολογίες (1.5 yrs 90 ECTS or 2 yrs 120 ECTS) - Εξ αποστάσεως

In English:

MEd in Special Education and New Technologies (1.5 yrs 90 ECTS or 2 yrs 120 ECTS) – eLearning

Programme 2

In Greek:

Πτυχίο στην Προδημοτική Εκπαίδευση (4 yrs, 240 ECTS) - Conventional

In English:

Bachelor in Early Childhood Education (4 yrs, 240 ECTS)- Conventional

Programme 3

In Greek: N/A

In English: N/A

- **Department's Status:** New



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].

A. Guidelines on content and structure of the report

- *The Higher Education Institution (HEI) based on the External Evaluation Committee's (EEC's) evaluation report (Doc.300.3.1) must justify whether actions have been taken in improving the quality of the department in each assessment area.*
- *In particular, under each assessment area, the HEI must respond on, without changing the format of the report:*
 - *the findings, strengths, areas of improvement and recommendations of the EEC*
 - *the deficiencies noted under the quality indicators (criteria)*
 - *the conclusions and final remarks noted by the EEC*
- *The HEI's response must follow below the EEC's comments, which must be copied from the external evaluation report (Doc. 300.3.1).*
- *In case of annexes, those should be attached and sent on a separate document.*

1. Department's academic profile and orientation

Sub-areas

- 1.1 Mission and strategic planning
- 1.2 Connecting with society
- 1.3 Development processes

1. It is very likely that the Department's programmes will attract good students, however it could be spelled out in more detail how the Department will ensure that it is attractive for the best students in Cyprus and beyond.

The Department of Education follows a plan that has been implemented for other programmes at the University, to ensure that its programmes will be attractive for the best students from Cyprus and beyond. It includes components and incentives as mentioned below:

- merit-based scholarships,
- partnerships with other institutions in Cyprus and internationally,
- research opportunities for students and mobility exchanges,
- high-caliber faculty employing innovative methods of teaching and learning
- innovative aspects of the programmes of the Department such as focus on practicum, technology integration etc.
- attractive career prospects and assisted employability.

2. It would be beneficial to arrive at a consistent English name for the Department. We came across various names, such as Department of Education during the presentations and Department of Educational Sciences in the application document.

The Department's name is settled as *'Department of Education'*.

3. As a more general note, we would like to point out that a more equal representation of genders in University leadership positions, and pointed measures to reach such a representation, would be advantageous.

A more balanced representation of genders in University and Schools' leadership positions is part of the University's strategic plan, and one of the University's top priorities. The University actively promotes gender diversity in leadership positions by implementing targeted measures, such as:

1. Explicit gender-balance policy at all levels with priority focus to leadership positions
2. Transparent recruitment and promotion policies
3. Leadership development and mentorship programs
4. Work-life balance and family-friendly policies
5. Active talent identification and outreach
6. Recognition and incentives
7. Monitoring of progress in attainment of institutional targets

By implementing these measures, the University can create a more inclusive and balanced leadership structure, benefiting both the institution and its academic community. See **Annex 1** the UoL Policy Document for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for 2022 – 2029.

4. Regarding Criterion 1.1.3, short, mid and long term strategic goals were explained to us during the site visit but could be made more visible in the strategic documents.

This is added to the Department of Education Internal Regulations Handbook and will also be visible on the Department's website and in other channels of our visual identity, as soon as the status of the Department is confirmed by CYQAA. See the updated Handbook of the Department of Education in **Annex 2**, pages 29-33).

5. Regarding Criterion 1.1.6, we assess the extent of participation in the Department's development strategy to be of very good quality, however the involvement of students and stakeholders could be addressed more systematically.

- We agree that involving students in the development of our Department of Education enhances the quality, relevance, and impact of its programmes. To address student engagement more systematically, the Department is implementing the following strategies:

1. Established formal student representation as described in the university's charter document which focuses on the creation of student advisory committees that provide feedback on curriculum development, teaching methods, and department policies. This also includes student representatives in decision-making bodies such as faculty meetings and strategic planning committees (see **Annex 3**, pages 19, 20, 21, 39)

2. Feedback mechanisms are already in place including regular student surveys on course quality, faculty performance, and overall student experience. We also implement a transparent system for responding to student concerns and demonstrating how feedback leads to improvements (e.g. 'You said, we did'). See the feedback evaluation form distributed to students twice during the semester, **Annex 4**.

3. We have also established research opportunities where students work alongside faculty on projects (education conferences, workshops, and outreach programs). Our students in collaboration with some of our faculty plan to participate at the Panhellenic Student Conference on (Pre)School Pedagogy (<https://1synped.conf.uoi.gr/>).

4. Fostered a stronger departmental Community by organising regular student-faculty networking events, roundtable discussions, and informal gatherings.

- We believe that involving stakeholders in the development of our Department of Education ensures that programmes remain relevant, responsive, and impactful. Here are some ways we engage our stakeholders in our quality assurance processes:

1. Established formal stakeholder engagement mechanisms. Our stakeholders participate in our advisory boards, committees for curriculum review, research collaboration, industry partnerships with diverse stakeholder participation and annual consultations.
2. Partnerships with schools and other educational institutions. We have developed school-university partnerships to align teacher education programmes with real classroom needs. We have also established student teaching collaborations with schools to provide hands-on training for future educators (see **Annex 5**).
3. Enhanced stakeholders' involvement by encouraging them to participate in guest lectures, workshops, and advisory roles. We have already scheduled a series of guest lectures in our existing modules of Spring semester for the MSc in Educational Leadership.
4. Actively engaging policymakers and government Agencies, by establishing formal collaborations with pedagogical institutions to ensure alignment with national education policies. We have close collaboration with the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute, and two of these members were present during the accreditation meeting. Our stakeholders are involved in departmental forums, conferences, workshops and public events.
5. Using digital tools for stakeholder engagement such as the online University stakeholder feedback form (see **Annex 6**) to encourage constructive feedback and allows for ongoing engagement with our stakeholders. We are also using social media, newsletters, and webinars to maintain continuous communication and engagement.

2. Quality Assurance

Sub-areas

- 2.1 System and quality assurance strategy
- 2.2 Quality assurance for the programmes of study

1. **A diversity of external stakeholders are clearly involved. While the role of academic stakeholders in the form of the Advisory Board was clear, less detail has been provided as to how other external stakeholders will be part of the quality assurance process.**

We agree on that. Our stakeholders' group includes academics, educators from different educational levels, school leaders, career counselors, parents school associations, and community and civil society representatives. Here are some ways on how other external stakeholders participate in our quality assurance processes:

1. Community and Civil Society Engagement – We collaborate with non-profits and NGOs to integrate social issues into education programmes. For example, we worked closely with the UoL Research Center to submit research proposals in collaboration with some NGOs in Cyprus and Europe. Also, the UoL Research Center keeping us informed about any available seminars and workshops delivered by external agencies.
2. Partnerships with schools for practicum. We have signed agreement (Memorandum of Understanding) with schools in Cyprus, where students are placed during their practicum. (see **Annex 5**).
3. Collaboration with educators, schools and other educational institutions. For example, we are invited to visit the Laniteio Lyceum (April 29th, 2025) in Limassol to observe the special education unit. The experiences and knowledge gained will be transferred on our MEd in Special Education and New technologies.
4. Collaboration with some school career consultants. There is a two-way collaboration between the university and career consultants, where we share our courses information to then be shared with school students and vice versa.

2. **Technological infrastructure and academic support are excellent; physical resources such as classrooms, student space, and library fulfil the basic requirements but could be improved considerably. Plans for the new campus were presented and will substantially increase the quality of the physical infrastructure.**

The Government has approved the construction of our new campus in Limassol, so we anticipate significant changes and advancements in the next few years, regarding the physical infrastructure of our university. Until then, we are planning to make significant changes on our current campuses, so we can promote a more student friendly environment that will be accessible to all. To achieve this, we have invited our students to share with us their thoughts and ideas on how to improve the current campuses. It's also important to mention that the University is on the final stage to locate a third building in Limassol (4 in total), while we are on the process of obtaining the master plan planning permit for our Campus in Palodia.

- 3. Regarding Criterion 2.1.1, we would like to point out that the Department has presented to us a clear and cohesive policy for quality assurance which is also part of the institution's strategic management, however since the Department has not yet been established, we cannot assess whether and how this policy has been made public.**

As soon as the Department is established, this will be published on the University's website.

- 4. Regarding Criterion 2.2.7 and 2.2.8, we would like to point out that relevant information has been provided to us and is convincing, however it is not yet been published since the Department is not yet established. This is why we don't assess these criteria.**

As soon as the Department is established, this will be published on the University's website.

- 5. Students' involvement in quality assurance could be expanded beyond student evaluations of courses, for example in having student representatives in (some of the) committees.**

Established formal student representation as described in our university's charter document which focuses on the creation of student advisory committees that provide feedback on curriculum development, teaching methods, and department policies. This also includes student representatives in decision-making bodies such as faculty meetings and strategic planning committees (see **Annex 3**, pages 19, 20, 21, 39).

- 6. Clearer procedures are recommended regarding external stakeholders' involvement in quality assurance, for example by assigning them regarding the mission and strategy of the Department.**

Our stakeholders are involved in the quality assurance procedures of our Department of Education to ensure that programmes remain relevant, responsive, and impactful. We have established formal stakeholder engagement mechanisms by asking them to participate in our advisory boards, committees for curriculum review, research collaboration, industry partnerships with diverse stakeholder participation and annual consultations. This is reviewed every six months during our Departmental council meetings. Possible amendments and changes happen based on the data we have up to this stage following the strategic plan of the department.

- 7. Staff's awareness of assessment and evaluation procedures was very high, however some additional training in these issues, including also shared reflection on these issues, could be beneficial. Discussion of assessment and evaluation could even be made part of the teaching contents, since this is an educational Department whose graduates will most likely be working within the educational sector. If the resources allow for this, we would also recommend occasional cross-grading among teaching staff in order to practically calibrate grading procedures.**

This is a part of our strategic development plan for the first year of the Department of Education. We are prepared upon accreditation to provide all Education Department staff with training regarding assessment and evaluation in Higher Education. At the beginning of the student assessment period, we arrange Department meetings, where we randomly choose a sample of assignments/final exam papers, and we ask the team to mark and provide feedback in order to cross reference our grading procedures. This enhances the quality and seamless marking process. We also mark the student's assignments against a clear and detailed assessment rubric, to monitor and assess the students' performance. See in **Annex 7** some examples of rubrics we are using for our programmes.

- 8. While student, employer, and market demands are important to consider, we would like the Department to also think beyond these demands by developing their strategies distinctly with regard to frontline research, stating more clearly the contribution that the Department wishes to make to the research community. Groundbreaking contributions will create their own markets.**

We fully agree that it is essential for the Department to not only respond to student, employer, and market demands but also to proactively shape the field through frontline research. A strong research identity establishes the Department as a leader in education, driving innovation and influences in both academia and practice. We manage this by doing the following:

- Define a clear research vision and priorities and we have developed a specific long-term strategic plan, identifying key research themes that align with the Department's expertise while addressing global and local educational challenges (see **Annex 2**, pages 29-33).
 - Promote interdisciplinary research, where we encourage interdisciplinary collaboration with fields such as psychology and technology. We have a close collaboration with the University's research center focusing on developing innovative research proposals such as AI in education, equity and inclusion in different funding agencies.
 - Encourage open science and knowledge dissemination by developing open-access publishing initiatives to make research widely accessible and impactful, and hosting public research seminars and policy briefings to bridge the gap between research, practice, and policy. We have agreement with SAGE and Taylor & Francis and now we are in the process for a package arrangement with Springer.
- 9. While it is clear that the current premises are only preliminary, more could be done until the final premises are established. For example, the design of the interior including walls etc. could reflect more the fact that this is an educational institution, for example by showing works of students and making some fitting visual decorations that make it an educational place. Moreover, the library, even though it is quite limited in space, should be made more inviting for students, responding to the students' needs. Ideally, this could be designed together with the students.**

Thank you for the suggestion, we are planning to make these changes, so our current premises are more student-friendly and respond to the students' needs. We have invited the Student Union to support us with ideas in this process. It's also important to mention that the University is on the final stage to locate a third building in Limassol (4 in total), while we are on the process of obtaining the master plan planning permit for our Campus in Palodia.



3. Administration

No further recommendations were made by the EEC.



4. Learning and Teaching

Sub-areas

- 4.1 Planning the programmes of study
- 4.2 Organisation of teaching

No further recommendations were made by the EEC.

5. Teaching Staff

1. However, according to the information the EEC received, there is a slight mismatch between the numbers of student intake for each programme, especially concerning the new programmes. In the department application, the number of students expected to register, for example for MEd in Special Education and New Technologies, for fall semester 2025-26 is 100 and for spring semester 2025-26 is 50. In contrast, in the application of MEd in Special Education and New Technologies, it is expected that 20-25 students will enroll in the programme in the first year. Further, if there will be intake both in autumn and spring, we wonder how this is taken into consideration in the plan of studies and teaching of courses. Evidently, the number of students taken for the program will affect the resources needed in teaching, as well as have consequences for budgeting.

Thank you for raising this inconsistency from our end. This was indeed a typo and here is the plan for the MEd in Special Education and New Technologies:

- 100 students for the Fall Semester (30 students maximum per teaching group).
 - No student intake will happen in the Spring semester if numbers are as above, however if the intake is low for the Fall Semester, we will consider accepting applications for the Spring Semester. This will be decided after taking into consideration the resources needed for teaching as well as the Department's budget.
2. We would like the Department to consider the intake of students for new two planned programmes, especially from the viewpoints of needed teaching resources and budgeting, so that those are in balance and realistic to perform.

Teaching resources and budgeting will solely depend on the student intake to ensure that those are in balance and realistic to perform. It's important to mention that we are in the process of recruitment of new faculty members, and we have already scheduled the interviews in the next few weeks. Please see the link of available vacancies in our Department: <https://www.uol.ac.cy/en/career/theseis-kathigiton-sto-tmima-epistimon-tis-agogis-sto-panepistimio-lemesou/>

3. The EEC would like to encourage the new Department to have some visiting professors in the future, who could bring their expertise on specific areas of the programmes (e.g., supervision and teaching activities), as well as broaden the national/international research collaboration.

This is a great idea, thank you, and this is part of our strategic plan for the Department for the next three years. We have already invited experts and professors in the field to share their expertise with our students and faculty. Students are also presented with learning resources and websites from other countries, so an inclusive and multicultural and multilingual classroom to be promoted.

6. Research

- 1. We found partial information about the OA policy. It is listed in the long-term plans to have the Institutional Repository operate as an open space that hosts and promotes open access research projects and papers authored by academic community members.**

This is under development, as the University has purchased an open online space to upload the faculty's and students' research papers, Thesis and publications, to be available to all other students and the community. Please see below: <https://noesis.uol.ac.cy/>

- 2. The Department should make its Open Access policy available. The list of journals and the annual quotas based on the University's agreement should be made accessible and transparent.**

This is available on the library's website (via Moodle). Current students can use their university's credentials to access this (e.g. Taylor & Francis, SAGE). The UoL is entering into discussions with Springer for a package arrangement for open access publications. In **Annex 8** you can find the credentials to enter our Moodle platform.

- 3. It would be highly beneficial if the Library could provide proof-reading services and would aid the scholars in choosing the right journal for their manuscripts.**

Training sessions have been already offered on our current students (e.g. referencing systems, the use of the UoL library, proofreading services, tools for presenting the bibliography list of their assignments, choosing the right literature for the topic of their assignments, and publishing opportunities). Each semester has a specific training focus, and the sessions are delivered by our librarian (e.g. this semester we are running a training and information session on AI).

- 4. To enhance the introduction of research to students and to facilitate the training/education of future researchers, a bigger emphasis could be laid on the encouragement of students to undertake their bachelor's or master's thesis, even in instances where such a requirement is not currently stipulated within specific academic programs.**

Even though a bachelor 's or master's thesis is not compulsory in all programmes of study in the Education Department (e.g. MSc in Education, Leadership and Management the Thesis is compulsory), we will still encourage our students to undertake a thesis by motivating and supporting them and showcase the benefits of research.

Some of the strategies we implement are the following:



1. Highlight the benefits of a thesis by emphasising on their career advancement skills, critical thinking and expertise, and show how completing a thesis will prepare them for postgraduate or doctoral studies.
2. Offer strong research support and guidance. For example, we offer our students structured research seminars where we focus on research methodology, academic writing, and thesis structuring. Our expertise in different areas in the faculty will enhance collaboration between students and supervisors who will provide regular feedback and guidance.
3. Provide flexibility and incentives, by helping students to choose between a traditional thesis, or project-based research or a publication-oriented thesis. We aim to offer scholarships and funding to provide students with financial support, research grants, or travel stipends for thesis-related conferences. We will also have a recognition and award ceremony for outstanding thesis to celebrate student achievements.
4. Create a research-oriented academic culture to showcase success stories and allow students to contribute to ongoing research projects to make the process more engaging. For example, our students in collaboration with some of our faculty plan to participate at the Panhellenic Student Conference on (Pre)School Pedagogy (<https://1synped.conf.uoi.gr/>).



7. Resources



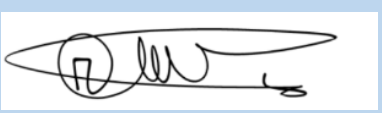
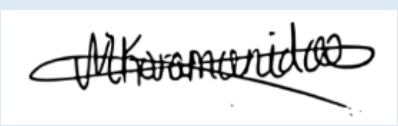
No further recommendations were made by the EEC.



B. Conclusions and final remarks

No further recommendations were made by the EEC.

C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

Name	Position	Signature
Prof. Theodore Panayotou	Rector	
Prof. Doron Sonsino	Dean of the School of Social Sciences and Humanities	
Dr. Panagiotis Kosmas	Acting Head of the Department of Education	
Dr. Maria Karamanidou	Vice-Chair of the Department of Education	

Date: 13.03.2025

