

Doc. 300.1.2

Date: 04/06/2025

Higher Education Institution's Response

- **Higher Education Institution:**
The Cyprus Institute of Neurology & Genetics

- **Town:** Nicosia

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

In Greek:

Διδακτορικό στην Ιατρική Γενετική, 240 ECTS

In English:

Doctor of Philosophy in Medical Genetics, 240 ECTS

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

In Greek: N/A

In English: N/A



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.300.1.1 or 300.1.1/1 or 300.1.1/2 or 300.1.1/3 or 300.1.1/4) must justify whether actions have been taken in improving the quality of the programme of study in each assessment area. The answers' documentation should be brief and accurate and supported by the relevant documentation. Referral to annexes should be made only when necessary.*
- *In particular, under each assessment area and by using the 2nd column of each table, the HEI must respond on the following:*
 - *the areas of improvement and recommendations of the EEC*
 - *the conclusions and final remarks noted by the EEC*
- *The institution should respond to the EEC comments, in the designated area next each comment. The comments of the EEC should be copied from the EEC report **without any interference** in the content.*
- *In case of annexes, those should be attached and sent on separate document(s). Each document should be in *.pdf format and named as annex1, annex2, etc.*

1. Study programme and study programme's design and development (ESG 1.1, 1.2, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9)

| Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC | Actions Taken by the Institution | For Official Use ONLY |
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| The EEC noticed that a few relevant topics are well represented in the program but in a rather fragmented way, and across different courses. To address this, the program could benefit from a modest revision attempting at making it more structured. For example, separate modules could be offered for the following topics: 1) forensic genetics; 2) personalized medicine; 3) stem cell biology and related models; 4) epidemiology; 5) AI applications (this is already considered but could be further expanded and formally included in the program). The EEC believes that these changes can make the program more appealing for prospective students and to be recruited staff. | We thank the EEC for its constructive comments. As discussed during the on-site visit, we acknowledge the benefit of revising and adding new courses to the program. As the School is currently undergoing a transition period which includes relocation to new premises with increased capacity for student admissions, we will consider practical measures to implement the specific suggestions in view of the expansion of CING. With the current (2025) overall capacity of the School, addition of further modules would lead to cancellation of courses owing to low student numbers. In the meantime, the topic of <i>Personalized Medicine</i> is already represented in dedicated lectures, while <i>Epidemiology Stem Cell Biology and Related Models</i> as well as <i>AI Applications</i> or similar topics, will be considered for new dedicated lectures in existing courses. | Choose level of compliance: |

2. Student – centred learning, teaching and assessment (ESG 1.3)

| Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC | Actions Taken by the Institution | For Official Use ONLY |
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| By discussing with students, the EEC noted that they would like to receive their research project and be exposed to the laboratory environment from the very beginning of the program, with optional courses to be attended during the whole duration of the program. The EEC feels that addressing this topic would benefit from a discussion with the students. | PhD students select their research project during the admissions period. In the first year of the PhD program, students attend courses (mandatory and elective) in parallel with the initiation of their research. From the second year onwards, and throughout the remainder of their studies, students focus exclusively on their laboratory research. With the current accreditation of PhD programs, registration exclusively with optional courses is not possible. However, we acknowledge the need for an additional PhD program that is open to students with pre-existing postgraduate education and does not include mandatory course programs. See point 6 for the new PhD program that is currently under development and will address this issue. | Choose level of compliance: |

3. Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

| Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC | Actions Taken by the Institution | For Official Use ONLY |
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| The EEC noted variability in attending the “teach the teacher” courses and in the employment of digital tools across the faculty. It would be useful to plan regular meetings among the teaching staff to discuss innovation in teaching methodologies and promote direct interaction with students (e.g. through more practical examples). | Several faculty members were trained and certified as “Train the Trainers” by the Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus at the beginning of the CING postgraduate program. Recognizing the importance of academic staff development, the CING has set a strategic objective in the current CING strategy (2024-2027) to implement training programs for continued education of all academic staff. Training programs in areas such as problem-based learning approach, AI tools and applications, Communication/Presentation Skills, have already been included as future events, and we will add Teaching Methodologies as additional priority. The latter is also considered to be incorporated in the faculty meetings’ agenda for harmonization. | Choose level of compliance: |
| The EEC also noted a lack of involvement of industry and policymakers in the program. This problem could be addressed by organizing guest lectures from industry professionals and policymakers. | We acknowledge the limited involvement of stakeholders and will take measures to increase the engagement of industry professionals/policymakers in the program, e.g., as invited guest lecturers. | Choose level of compliance: |
| As a minor suggestion, the EEC proposes to introduce a “best teacher award” to be nominated by the students. | Despite the small size of the audience, we will reconsider this suggestion in the near future. | Choose level of compliance: |

4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification (ESG 1.4)

| Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC | Actions Taken by the Institution | For Official Use ONLY |
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| The EEC was very satisfied with the setup of the program and the admin procedures. As a minor suggestion, the EEC proposes to introduce awards such as “best thesis”, “best research project”, “best publication”. For instance, the EEC really liked the fact that laboratories were named after prestigious former members of the Institute. | We will consider the EEC’s suggestion to introduce a “Best Thesis/ Best Publication” award in future years, that could be granted annually on the basis of the highest Journal Impact Factor or combined impact factor for a body of work by a student. | Choose level of compliance: |

5. Learning resources and student support (ESG 1.6)

| Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC | Actions Taken by the Institution | For Official Use ONLY |
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| The EEC noted the big need to expand the storage and computing capacity for working with large sequencing data, and it was pleased to note that the institute is addressing this challenge by investing in new servers. | The suggestion has already been partly implemented by existing financial commitments and planning, and will be addressed by additional future investments. | Choose level of compliance: |

6. Additional for doctoral programmes (ALL ESG)

| Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC | Actions Taken by the Institution | For Official Use ONLY |
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| The EEC, also based on comments from students, suggests to shorten the core PhD duration to three years and to make the first-year courses not mandatory but optional, throughout the course of the PhD. | This change cannot be implemented for the existing programs, as it would affect the accreditation of the degree of currently enrolled students. However, having acknowledged the feedback received from students as well as limitations related to the duration of external funding in support of PhD students, we are in the process of establishing a new PhD Program to address this suggestion. Attracting qualified candidates with pre-existing postgraduate education is an important strategic goal and would be facilitated with the additional PhD Program. Moreover, the need to coordinate efforts across institutions and international partners, e.g. for bilateral grants or MSCA Doctoral Network grants, to fully benefit from such funding and networking opportunities, creates further incentives. | Choose level of compliance: |

7. Eligibility (Joint programme) – Not Applicable (ALL ESG)

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B. Conclusions and final remarks

| Conclusions and final remarks by EEC | Actions Taken by the Institution | For Official Use ONLY |
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| <p>The EEC strongly recommends:</p> <p>a much more compact and straightforward format for the 5-year evaluation report prepared by the Institute (e.g. based on the slide presentations). Additional material can be provided, but it should not be part of the core document.</p> | <p>We fully agree with all these suggestions, which would streamline both, the report composition and the review process. We encourage the CYQAA to consider and implement these points for future accreditations.</p> | <p>Choose level of compliance:</p> |
| <p>a team-based (instead of individual-based) presentation of research output</p> | | |
| <p>a standardized one-page CV of the PI of each team, including the five best publications (past 5 years) with metrics (e.g. h-index, citation index), and a list of team members with very short profiles (one paragraph).</p> | | |
| <p>Additional general remarks are:</p> <p>The EEC noted that the report lacked a description of the academic landscape in Cyprus, including other universities and institutes, in particular focusing on life sciences and addressing financial accessibility. This would help highlight the special position of CING.</p> | <p>We believe that CYQAA and possibly the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth (MESY) will be more suitable and qualified to provide this information centrally across organizations of higher education. Such compilation by individual organizations, such as ours, would otherwise lead to a duplication of efforts across Cyprus. Of note, the corresponding information is also provided through MESY's website. (https://www.highereducation.ac.cy/index.php/en/).</p> | <p>Choose level of compliance:</p> |

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| <p>The EEC noted a shortage of information on filed or approved patents, IP and copyright protection measures , technology transfer (e.g. spin-offs, research incubators) and valorization of results in general. This might be an area of potential benefit deserving increased attention.</p> | <p>We will ensure that this information is included in future applications.</p> | <p>Choose level of compliance:</p> |
| <p>The EEC highly appreciate the exchange of students from the occupied territory, and hopes that this will possibly contribute to better political conditions for Cyprus.</p> | <p>CING is a private, non-profit, bi-communal medical, research, and academic centre and all its activities (services, research and education) are accessible to both the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities. Likewise, CING's postgraduate programs are open to anyone who fulfils the minimum entry criteria and has a passion for advancing knowledge and research skills in the fields of molecular medicine, medical genetics, neuroscience, and biotechnology.</p> | <p>Choose level of compliance:</p> |

C.

D. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

| <i>Name</i> | <i>Position</i> | <i>Signature</i> |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| Prof Leonidas A. Phylactou | Provost | |
| Dr Petros Petrou | Dean | |
| Prof Carolina Sismani | Programme Coordinator | |

Date: 04/06/2025

