

Doc. 300.1.2

Higher Education Institution's Response

Date: 26/04/2021

- **Higher Education Institution:**
Neapolis University Pafos (NUP) /University of
Western Macedonia (UOWM)

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

In Greek:

Διδακτορικό Πρόγραμμα εκπόνησης Διατριβών σε
συνεπίβλεψη με το Πανεπιστήμιο Δυτ. Μακεδονίας (3
έτη, Διδακτορικό Δίπλωμα , 180 ECTS)

In English:

PhD Programme with University of Western Macedonia
co-supervision (3 years, Doctorate Diploma, 180 ECTS)

- **Language(s) of instruction:** Greek and English
- **Programme's status:** New
- **Concentrations (if any):**

In Greek: Concentrations

In English: Concentrations

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 2019” [N. 136 (I)/2015 to N. 35(I)/2019].

A. Guidelines on content and structure of the report

1. Study programme and study programme's design and development

(ESG 1.1, 1.2, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9)

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 focus here will be the institutions' quality assurance procedures – a detailed focus on the programme's structure and quality will follow in the next sections.

Following the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance Guidelines, NUP has a quality assurance committee (QAC) that evaluates and endorses documents to be used in quality assurance. The committee makes sure that both students and staff are surveyed and evaluated to ensure a continuous reflection and improvement. It lies in the realm of the committee to ensure that each programme is evaluated every 3-5 years and it provides stakeholders an overview of the programme's status. In particular, the QAC has responsibility for the following areas:

1. Design and Approval of programs
2. Student – centered learning, teaching and assessment
3. Student Admission, progression, recognition and certification
4. Teaching and Administrative staff
5. Learning resources and student support
6. Information Management
7. On – going monitoring and periodic review of programs

The findings from the QACs work are submitted to the Senate of the university and as such are publicly available. The EEC is convinced of its efficient functioning.

A similar QAC exists in the UWM and the presentations made during the onsite virtual visit has reassured the EEC of its efficient functioning.

Strengths

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

Both universities in the current collaboration are relatively new. As such, their governance structures are state of the art and there is a clear focus in making sure that their programmes are correctly monitored. Thus, while the programme is new and has never been under the QAC's scrutiny, there is nothing that indicates a potential problem – on the opposite, the fact that there are two QACs involved seems to be a strength.

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.

None

2. Student – centred learning, teaching and assessment

(ESG 1.3)

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.

As the programme under consideration is a co-supervised PhD programme, the student learning is focused on developing students' abilities to do research. Such an ability is secured through three main activities: the selection process, the coursework, and the supervision.

Since the programme is new and has not started yet, we had no practice to assess. Thus, the EEC focused on the material provided and the discussions with the faculty.

Regarding supervision, it was noted that the departments involved in this PhD programme have staff that are research active and thus can provide supervision. Moreover, the fact that students can access supervisors from two institutions was seen as an advantage. The lack of co-location in supervision could also be seen as a disadvantage and therefore the EEC tried explicitly to ask into that particular issue.

In our discussions with PhD students and graduates from a similar programme with the University of Peloponnese, Greece, there was no doubt that students were very happy about their experience. They had both access to specialised experts across two schools, and access to other students that they could share experiences and peer learning opportunities. The EEC was convinced that the co-location issue was negligible compared to the benefits that the two schools could harvest: while NUP was drawing on the expertise of an established Greek university with an innovative mindset, the UWM was drawing on the expertise of a Cypriot university that has expertise in attracting international students. Such benefits will lead to gains to both universities and to their students and thus should be encouraged. Potential problems should be dealt in different ways (more on this later).

Regarding coursework, it was noted that there will be a single obligatory course that all new PhD students will need to take, viz. Research Methods. Furthermore, the faculty reassured the EEC that more courses could be allocated to students if deemed necessary. However, it should be noted that both the Research Methods course and other potential courses were not designed to be at the PhD level and thus some attention is needed regarding students that already have had such units before. The possibility of 'course substitution' should be mentioned explicitly in the PhD programme description. Such substitution can happen when a student goes to another university for a visit and can be allowed to follow a course there instead of the NUP course. The EEC acknowledges that a full structured PhD coursework is not possible when cohorts are small and encouraged the two faculties to consider a more flexible structure, where students can take such courses in other universities. It is important that such courses are assessed in a "pass" or "fail" manner and are explicitly included in the final study overview.

Regarding selection, it was noted that the two institutions have experience with attracting PhD students. Attracting good PhD students from third countries in the region was mentioned several times as an opportunity for NUP. The general requirements regarding admission and selection are clearly spelled out in the PhD Programme description (see section 5 in the "PhD Programme and Co Supervision" document) and it will be discussed in more detail below.

It would be good if NUP could assure that the Research Methods course is based on student centred learning and teaching activities, as such activities play an important role in stimulating students'

motivation, self-reflection and engagement in the learning process. In particular, the student-centred learning and teaching process

- respects and attends to the diversity of students and their needs, enabling flexible learning paths;
- considers and uses different modes of delivery, where appropriate;
- flexibly uses a variety of pedagogical methods;
- regularly evaluates and adjusts the modes of delivery and pedagogical methods aiming at improvement
- regularly evaluates the quality and effectiveness of teaching, as documented especially through student surveys;
- reinforces the student's sense of autonomy, while ensuring adequate guidance and support from the teaching staff;
- promotes mutual respect in the student - teacher relationship;
- applies appropriate procedures for dealing with students' complaints.

In addition:

- the academic staff are familiar with the existing examination system and methods and are supported in developing their own skills in this field;
- the assessment criteria and methods are published in advance;
- the assessment allows students to demonstrate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved. Students are given feedback, which, if necessary is linked to advice on the learning process;
- student assessment is conducted by more than one examiner, where possible;
- the regulations for assessment take into account mitigating circumstances
- assessment is consistent, fairly applied to all students and carried out in accordance with the stated procedures;
- a formal procedure for student appeals is in place.

Strengths

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

The co-supervision design of the programme is a strength as students can be allowed to participate in a larger variety of courses if needed and draw upon more specialised supervision that exists across the two institutions.

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.

The EEC recommended that the programme was more explicit regarding coursework when students had done similar level courses prior to entering the programme. Such situations exist often, and it may be best that explicit reference to 'course substitution' needs to be included in the programme description. At the same time, one could also mention the uptake of more coursework if deemed necessary by the supervision team and the student. Taking PhD level courses in other universities or participating in short PhD Summer Schools around the world, can be an excellent alternative for universities with small cohorts of PhD students.

RESPONSE

Prospective students will be able to attend courses from other postgraduate students, if necessary.

3. Teaching staff

(ESG 1.5)

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.

Directly taken from the application, it is clear the existence of an advisory committee that has three members. From the material shared in google drive, there is a big list of members that can be part of this committee. It is assumed that the three members are chosen from this list.

With respect to the academic/teaching staff, in the team of NUP there is a list of 17 PhD-qualified researchers (the Dean of the School, 4 professors (1 Emeritus), 3 associate professors, 3 assistant professors and 7 lecturers), with a diversified number of research areas represented in the group. In the team of the UWM, there are 7 PhD-qualified members (5 professors, 3 assistants and 2 lecturers).

Strengths

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

The research staff is adequate in number and in experience. There are different research areas (education, political sciences, finance, public economics, business, tourism, law etc.) represented in the team, especially in the case of NUP. The participating list of members from UWM is smaller and more focused in the area of business and finance.

Although somehow heterogeneous in number and quality of the journals, the teaching staff is considered with enough experience in doing research so as to successfully achieve the goals of this application.

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.

From the information available, although it is clear the research experience of the members of the two teams, it is not possible to single out the experience in supervising PhD students. The EEC recommends that the CV of the individuals to be presented in a homogeneous format that allows for the inclusion of information about the PhD theses supervised and defended by each team member.

RESPONSE

Noted. A homogeneous CV format will be applied.

4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

(ESG 1.4)

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.

Since the programme is new and has not started yet, we had no practice to assess. Thus, the EEC has focused on the material provided and the discussions with the faculty.

In general terms, regulation concerning all sub-areas is pre-defined in the application. The EEC acknowledges that the application of the PhD programme includes a quite structured admission, progression, recognition, and certification. The NUP has the full responsibility for the management and administration of the program.

Regarding admission, the programme is open to all candidates in possession of a master's degree, without restriction with respect to profiles or research areas. The application proposal includes a list of relevant content, which is important in order to assure a careful and correct admission of the best candidates.

Regarding student progression, after admission takes place, there are several components that the application briefly describes: research methods course, internal seminars, research seminars and research output. The research output obligations before completion of the doctorate are specified: to present in scientific conferences (at least twice) and to have at least one scientific conference proceeding or a peer-reviewed scientific journal. However, no details are included with respect to differentiation among research areas or quality/IF levels of the publication. The application mentions an Annual Progress Report for the PhD student, but with no details about the procedure or the content of such report.

It was noted that the two institutions have experience with attracting PhD students. Attracting good PhD students from third countries in the region was mentioned several times as an opportunity for NUP.

Strengths

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

The two institutions involved have experience with attracting PhD students. This programme with co-supervision will be a good opportunity for NUP to attract PhD students from third countries.

The list of characteristics specified in the content of the application proposal is considered a good strategy to attract good candidates and to assure a good matching among students and supervisors.

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 recommend to:

- Specify whether there is a limited number of admitted candidates per year. In the debate of the visit this number was around 20, but it is not specified in the version of the application presented to the EEC.

RESPONSE: The maximum number of students registered in the program will not exceed 20.

- Specify whether the programme is open to specific research areas. In the text of the application, it seems to be open to any area, which it is not realistic, given the specific areas of specialization of the staff.

RESPONSE: Business Management; Accounting; Finance

- Introduce more details with respect to the extra formative courses required for the candidates whose background is not directly related to the areas of research of the programme. The application now is too open when stating that “admission is open to all candidates in possession of a master’s degree”.

RESPONSE: See Annex 1 on the Ph.D. Research Seminar already applied in NUP.

- In the application proposal, it should be required a “tentative” title of the dissertation, instead of what it seems to be a final title. In the list of the content, it would be better to ask for the opinion of the candidate with respect to the significance of the research proposal, instead of asking in so absolute terms.

Noted. A tentative title of the thesis will be applied at the initial stages of the thesis.

- Revise the text of the application with respect to the “Research Methods” course, since in a part of the text (pg. 6) it is said “Doctoral Candidates can attend...”, while in pg. 9 it is stated that “Doctoral Candidates have to attend...”. The EEC would like the applicants to consider the possibility of making this course obligatory but conditioned to each candidate’s background. The possibility of ‘course substitution’ should be mentioned explicitly.

We agree. The course is obligatory. A course substitution will be applied in case it deems necessary.

- Attracting good PhD students from third countries in the region was mentioned several times as an opportunity for NUP. However, although the languages of the programme are English and Greek, the web page of the UWM should offer the information not just in Greek but also in English.

NUP has the administrative and management responsibility of the program. Nevertheless, an English page will be developed in UWM web site.

- Regarding students’ progression, more elaborated steps as for the monitoring of the research course, internal and research seminars should be in place. For example, there needs to be more clarity regarding the role played by the internal and research seminars for the PhD students’ progression. The student should know the frequency of the seminars and what it is expected from his/her participation, also the consequences of not participating.

Submission of progress reports as well as presentation of progress in research seminars is on annual basis. In case the student does not participate, no progression is allowed.

- EEC agrees that the strong focus is maintained on quality research as proposed, and is concerned that having targets and minimum requirements in quantity of publications and quantity of conference presentations might distract from the focus on research quality. We recommend incorporating an acknowledgement that quality of publications is more important than quantity of publications and that such a prioritization should always be guiding the milestones put forward.

For the successful completion of the Ph.D. thesis the candidate must have at least one ABS list journal published paper and one presentation in a reputable scientific conference.

- Include any possibility for funding the PhDs. The EEC asked about this detail in the visit and it seems that there are possibilities for agreements with the private sector. The applicants should invest on this.

Noted. Links with industry is part of the overall NUP strategy and Ph.D. Theses are expected to attract funding.

5. Learning resources and student support

(ESG 1.6)

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.

Strengths

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

A doctoral program co-hosted by two universities allows leveraging resources and becoming international. The joint doctoral program with a Greek university may become a vehicle for initiating more international collaboration among researchers and doctoral students.

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.

The EEC learned that the graduation requirement includes presentations at two scientific conferences as well as a conference proceeding or a published article. These requirements would be reasonable in other fields of doctoral studies. The EEC expressed concerns that conference proceedings are uncommon in some academic fields within business studies, and that publication processes are long in leading academic journals and thus not likely within 3-5 years allotted without compromising quality of publication outlet. Given that publication frequency and outlets vary, the EEC recommends that graduation requirements be tailored to the fields of accounting, business, finance and economics.

RESPONSE: For the successful completion of the Ph.D. thesis the candidate must have at least one ABS list journal published paper and one presentation in a reputable scientific conference.

6. Additional for doctoral Programmes (ALL ESG)

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.

Selection criteria: The admissions process is flexible and requirements are tailored to students' prior experience. Students without economics/business background will be required to take other preparatory courses that are relevant for their chosen fields (for example, a PhD in the area of FinTech may require different coursework). One possibility is to attract doctoral students from African nations. This is exploiting the advantage of geographic location in the South-Eastern corner of EU to bring doctoral education to countries that may struggle to educate doctoral students. The existing doctoral programs (although in different fields) have had good first placements of some of its graduates in academia.

Proposals and dissertation: Doctoral students face formal milestones of writing an annual 2-page summary of their research that is submitted to an advisory committee. Clear guidelines are laid out for doctoral students including the use of Turnitin with a plagiarism threshold.

Supervision and committees: The stated goal is to have a doctoral program with 20-25 doctoral students across 3 years of study. This seems like a sensible size that is above critical mass for each cohort. The EEC learned that faculty from NUP (as well as UWM) are excited about the opportunity to supervise and work actively with doctoral students to promote joint research.

Strengths

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

The EEC agrees with permitting that dissertations need not be monothematic. Further, the required progress reports presented to a committee is great.

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.

Since many doctoral students may want to continue in academia upon graduation, it seems worthwhile to ensure that the doctoral students learn how to present their own research most effectively, thereby preparing them for a career that involves teaching in addition to research. In addition to the written form documenting their progress, doctoral students could also be required to present their own research regularly during the program.

RESPONSE: Submission of progress reports as well as presentation of progress in research seminars is on an annual basis. In case the student does not participate, no progression is allowed.

7. Eligibility (Joint Programme) (ALL ESG)

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 two institutions are perfectly situated for this joint programme. As mentioned previously, the strength of a well-established public Greek university can be enhanced by cooperating with a newly established private Cypriot university that shares same principles and academic ambitions. The ability of the Cypriot university to offer PhD studies in English will open a potential new market attracting good candidates from third countries. Such a market will provide both revenues to NUP and research experience and assistance to NUP and UWM staff members.

The EEC is convinced that this can be an interesting cooperation and has recommended a number of small adjustments in order to strengthen the programme.

Strengths

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

Innovation in delivering academic programmes and capturing new markets is always important and indeed very welcome. The proposed cooperation presents itself as a good idea and, with small adjustments, can really make a difference across both institutions. It may also become a model that other universities may want to copy.

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.

The EEC has made several recommendations that can improve the functioning of the programme and ensure a higher quality of candidates. These recommendations address both legal (e.g. the use of the English language in UWM's web material) and academic matters that can easily be met without constituting a hindrance for the realisation of this programme.

RESPONSE: The issues raised have been met.

B. Conclusions and final remarks


The EEC has provided several recommendations throughout this report that aim in improving the quality of this programme. In particular, the following list was mentioned under section 4 (repeated here for convenience): **RESPONSE: The issues, as mentioned have been raised and already responded to in Section 4.**

- Specify whether there is a limited number of admitted candidates per year. In the debate of the visit this number was around 20, but it is not specified in the version of the application presented to the EEC.
- Specify whether the programme is open to specific research areas. In the text of the application, it seems to be open to any area, which it is not realistic, given the specific areas of specialization of the staff.
- Introduce more details with respect to the extra formative courses required for the candidates whose background is related to the areas of research of the programme. The application now is too open when stating that “admission is open to all candidates in possession of a master’s degree”.
- In the application proposal, it should be required a “tentative” title of the dissertation, instead of what it seems to be a final title. In the list of the content, it would be better to ask for the opinion of the candidate with respect to the significance of the research proposal, instead of asking in so absolute terms.
- Revise the text of the application with respect to the “Research Methods” course, since in a part of the text (pg. 6) it is said “Doctoral Candidates can attend...”, while in pg. 9 it is stated that “Doctoral Candidates have to attend...”. The EEC would like the applicants to consider the possibility of making this course obligatory but conditioned to each candidate’s background. The possibility of ‘course substitution’ should be mentioned explicitly.
- Attracting good PhD students from third countries in the region was mentioned several times as an opportunity for NUP. However, although the languages of the programme are English and Greek, the web page of the UWM should offer the information not just in Greek but also in English.
- Regarding students’ progression, more elaborated steps as for the monitoring of the research course, internal and research seminars should be in place. For example, there needs to be more clarity regarding the role played by the internal and research seminars for the PhD students’ progression. The student should know the frequency of the seminars and what it is expected from his/her participation, also the consequences of not participating.
- EEC agrees that the strong focus is maintained on quality research as proposed, and is concerned that having targets and minimum requirements in quantity of publications and quantity of conference presentations might distract from the focus on research quality. We recommend incorporating an acknowledgement that quality of publications is more important than quantity of publications and that such a prioritization should always be guiding the milestones put forward.
- Include any possibility for funding the PhDs. The EEC asked about this detail in the visit and it seems that there are possibilities for agreements with the private sector. The applicants should invest on this.

Overall, we see this new co-supervision doctoral programme as an interesting innovation, and we would like to propose some small adjustments based on our experience. We are fully aware of the contextual reality of the two universities, and we hope that our recommendations will help enhancing the product they wish to offer.

RESPONSE: Thanks!

C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

Name	Position	Signature
Prof. Pantelis Sklias	NUP Rector	

Date: 26/04/2021