

Doc. 300.1.2

Date: 11 March 2024

Higher Education Institution's Response

- **Higher Education Institution:**
University of Cyprus
- **Town:** Nicosia
- **Programme of study**
Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)

In Greek:

Διδακτορικό στην Αγγλική Λογοτεχνία και τις Συγκριτικές Πολιτισμικές Σπουδές

In English:

PhD in English Literature and Comparative Cultural Studies (3-8 years/240 ECTS, Conventional)

- **Language(s) of instruction:** English
- **Programme's status:** Currently Operating
- **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 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
<p>The Department might consider more frequent supervisor reports, perhaps once per semester.</p>	<p>The Departmental Board discussed the Committee's recommendation at its February meeting (Wednesday 28th of February). Given the existing structure of the programme, important stages such as the comprehensive exams or the thesis proposal submission and defense cannot be completed within a semester. It is, therefore, more practical and sensible to preserve the annual report system.</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>
<p>Community building informs the quality of any educational programme. The Department would have more opportunities for community building for its PhD students once the new building on campus finally materializes. Housed in a peripheral building, the staff cannot do this at present.</p>	<p>The construction of a dedicated building that will house the Department of English Studies has indeed been long delayed. However, actions are currently being taken by the University towards this goal as the planning procedure has been initiated with the collection of data by the Technical Services of the University regarding the housing needs of the Department (as well as the other Departments, Schools and UCY entities that are going to be housed in the same building). Once this process is completed, the relevant data will be submitted to the Building Committee of the University for approval, with a view to announcing an architectural competition for the construction of the building in due course.</p> <p>Beyond the actions taken by the University, the Department has introduced a number of practices that contribute to the building and strengthening of an intellectual</p>	

	<p>community: a) The organization of a series of lectures in the context of the Departmental Forum. The lectures are given by members of staff, postdoctoral fellows, research collaborators or guests. The coordinator of the Departmental Forum will be Dr. James Little, the newly appointed Research Coordinator of the Department (see below); b) The organization of an annual graduate seminar where doctoral students can present their work-in-progress and receive feedback from peers and members of staff. c) The institution of the new administrative position of Research Coordinator. The aim of the Research Coordinator will be to organize seminars, workshops and other events that will boost and promote the research produced by members of the Department; d) The organization of a series of lectures on narrative and performativity in the context of the new Marie Curie project the Department is hosting (NETRePerform; September 2024-September 2026). The coordinator of the series will be Dr Nikos Soueltzis, the PI of the project.</p> <p>Finally, we anticipate that, with the launching of our new MA in English Studies, the graduate community will be enriched and there will be a lot more opportunities for graduate students to meet and collaborate.</p>	
<p>Prominent, effective, and strategically targeted marketing and promotion on the part of the University (e.g. by advertising in international markets where comparable programmes are not readily available) will be key to</p>	<p>The University’s promotion of the programme includes: targeted advertising in international markets (e.g. countries in Continental Europe and the Middle East) through promotional actions, such as international visits and</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>

<p>the programme achieving its full potential in terms of recruitment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More specifically, the committee sees lots of opportunity in more co-supervised projects with professors from universities in countries (such as in the Netherlands) without comparable PhD programmes in the humanities, ensuring the possibility of a more regular influx. For a number of excellent international RMA students, an online or onsite jointly supervised project with the UCY programme would be a welcome opportunity. Rather than marketing alone, interprofessional relations are evidently important to realizing such projects. 	<p>presentations, of the International Relations Office of the University; promotion of the programme on the Department of English Studies', the School of Humanities', and the University of Cyprus' social media platforms; the creation and publication of an advertising flyer that will be distributed widely (e.g. through social media platforms), shared with collaborators and collaborating institutions, as well as uploaded on the Department's website; advertising through the University of Cyprus alumni platform; promotion of the programme at the University of Cyprus Graduate School Open Day on 20/3/2024.</p> <p>The Department will also look into the possibility of establishing collaborations with interested departments in other European countries, such as the Netherlands, so as to attract potential doctoral students.</p>	
<p>Administrative staff carry a heavy responsibility in (technically) facilitating international online PhD defenses. The committee observes that UCY could have a central structure or office in place to manage these crucial tasks, or add a special team member or student assistant for such tasks.</p>	<p>An IT officer is always in charge of the technical aspects of international online PhD defenses. She or he is present throughout the process and deals with any problems that may come up.</p>	
<p>The committee considers the failure to host the ERC Consolidator Project MUTE in the Department a lost opportunity for the PhD programme. A project like this would have: - consolidated more international collaborations and added to the prestige of the PhD programme - created a fertile ground for the</p>	<p>Indeed, the Department regrets that, despite its own efforts, it was unable to continue hosting the ERC Consolidator Project MUTE, due to the existing UCY regulatory framework. We would like to thank the members of the Committee for highlighting this issue which remains an important concern for us. As per University of Cyprus</p>	

<p>successful application of more prestigious projects, as the PI could have helped PhD students in writing successful grants - created opportunities for more research activities at UCY (workshops and conferences organized as part of the ERC project) - created opportunities for community building and international networks for other PhD students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● The committee therefore strongly recommends that the University address weaknesses in its regulatory framework to host prestigious research projects and PI's.	<p>procedure, the report of the EEC will be submitted by the Department to the Board of the School of Humanities and from there to the Quality Assurance Committee, the Planning and Development Committee and the Rector's Council of the University. We hope that the Rector's Council will take the necessary steps to address existing weaknesses. On our part, we remain committed to attracting competitive research projects, as evidenced by the two new Marie Curie projects to be hosted by the Department starting in September 2024.</p>	
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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
<p>As mentioned elsewhere, the students would benefit from a more closely knit intellectual community at UCY. Such a community can only be created once the Department gets its promised building on campus.</p>	<p>Please see the relevant response on pp. 3-4.</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>
<p>The influx of students is modest. Seen from one perspective this is an advantage as students profit from the supervisor’s/advisor’s dedication to them. Seen from another perspective, more students allow for a community to grow. We have made recommendations under section 1 for such a higher influx.</p>	<p>Indeed, the modest number of students we admit in the PhD programme has allowed us to work closely with our students and preserve the competitive nature of the programme. In order for the programme to remain viable, however, we need to attract more potential doctoral students and increase our intake. For the actions we have taken (or plan to take) in this direction, please see the relevant response on pp. 4-5.</p>	

3. Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

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<p>The committee would like to express some concerns about staffing. To ensure the future viability of the PhD programme (and others too), and also to maintain the high quality of research and teaching in the department, staffing levels need to be adequate in all areas. The department would especially benefit from additional expertise in postcolonial studies (potentially combined with specialisms in modern poetry/poetics).</p>	<p>Once again, the Department would like to thank the EEC for expressing its concerns regarding staffing issues. As per University of Cyprus procedure, the report of the EEC will be submitted by the Department to the Board of the School of Humanities and from there to the Quality Assurance Committee, the Planning and Development Committee and the Rector’s Council of the University. While acknowledging that the availability of new faculty positions at the University of Cyprus depends on budgetary constraints, it is expected that this process will highlight the Department’s staffing needs and that these will be taken into account in the allocation of new faculty positions when these become available at the University.</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>

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
Students say they would appreciate having an academic community to push them, to stay in touch with each other and to learn from one another.	Please see the relevant response on pp. 3-4.	Choose level of compliance:
Students support moving the Department to the main campus.	Please see the relevant response on p. 3.	
A former student, who graduated in 2013, claimed that the teaching staff should stay more in touch with its students, in particular via the consistent provision of written feedback. This evaluation seems to be no longer applicable to present staff.	As the EEC also mentions, this evaluation is no longer applicable to present staff. We are all committed to giving our doctoral students detailed written feedback. Following departmental guidelines, all members of staff have regular meetings with their supervisees, at least once a month.	

5. Learning resources and student support (ESG 1.6)

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<p>The Department is housed in a building which is off-campus. This is less than ideal in terms of access to facilities such as the library. Despite having been promised a new building for a long time, this has not materialized yet.</p>	<p>See the relevant response on p. 3.</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>
<p>The University should consider hiring more administrative staff due to the current staff being overloaded.</p>	<p>The need for more effective administrative support of the Department has been brought to the attention of the University authorities and is currently being discussed by the Director of Administration and Finance and the University Human Resources Services with a view to providing an optimal solution that will best serve the Department.</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>
<p>It is concerning that the administrative staff does not get paid for its overtime work at the University.</p>	<p>As part of the wider public sector, the University of Cyprus has a clearly stipulated policy regarding overtime that follows the framework set by the relevant policy of the Ministry of Finance. This involves the possibility of monetary compensation in combination with free-time compensation (with up to 75% of monetary compensation) for overtime outside regular workhours (i.e. after 5pm).</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>
<p>Student support is not available after 14:30, although the University is open until 18:00. If technical difficulties occur, the administrative staff is obligated to take care of it.</p>	<p>The flexible work schedule recently introduced by the University of Cyprus for its administrative staff has helped with the provision of student support by various services of the University (e.g. by the personnel of the Academic Affairs and</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>

	<p>Student Welfare Service) beyond 14:30. For any technical problems that relate to the use of IT infrastructure, all members of the University, including students, may contact the University of Cyprus helpdesk, that may easily be accessed by phone (internally through extension 2222 and externally through number 22892222). The UCY helpdesk is available 24/7 with the provision of both on-campus and distant support by personnel of the IT Infrastructure Service from 8am till 6pm and with the provision of support by on-call personnel from 6pm until 8am every day as well as on weekends and during holidays.</p>	
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6. Additional for doctoral programmes (ALL ESG)

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<p>Given that it is relatively common for students to drop out of their PhD studies, typically owing to the pressures of paid work and/or caring responsibilities, any measures that can be introduced to encourage student retention would be very welcome (most obviously, additional studentships/stipends).</p>	<p>The Department is currently in a position to offer a limited number of stipends to doctoral students who have no other income and are interested in part-time employment. We hope, however, that the UCY Graduate School will introduce a competitive scholarship scheme that will attract excellent doctoral students to UCY and will prevent current students (especially, female students with families) from dropping out of their PhD studies.</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>
<p>Some students noted a degree of isolation during their studies, and the desirability of a greater sense of community among the postgraduate cohort. The growth in PhD student numbers that the department hopes to achieve would of course help to address this issue, though so too would centralization of the department's operations on the main campus. Activities such as the Department Research Forum and Graduate Research Seminar are also positive initiatives in this regard, and the department's commitment to continuing to develop activities that will foster community, inclusion, and belonging among PhD students is commendable.</p>	<p>Please see relevant response on pp. 3-4.</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>
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7. Eligibility (Joint programme) (ALL ESG)

N/a

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B. Conclusions and final remarks

Conclusions and final remarks by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
<p>Overall, the Committee was impressed by the quality and depth of the PhD programme at UCY. It is a programme with a clear vision on what comparison entails, with a deep commitment to research, and at the same time well-gearred towards the wishes and needs of professionals in, for instance, the educational sector. All students have landed well in the job market.</p>	<p>The Department would like to thank the EEC for the outstanding appraisal and will aim to maintain its excellent record in all respects.</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>
<p>The staff members have excellent profiles to meet the needs and interests of their PhD students and to train them towards becoming independent scholars with an international network. We were impressed by the strongly theoretical and interdisciplinary profiles of staff members, which evidently are conducive to the quality of the PhD programme. This programme has the best of both worlds: its training towards a comprehensive examination at once provides students a broad disciplinary grounding and equips them to specialize in a particularly scholarly area.</p>	<p>Once again, the Department would like to thank the EEC for its excellent evaluation.</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>
<p>The Committee again emphasizes the need for the University to host prestigious international projects in this respect.</p>	<p>Please see relevant response on p.5.</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>
<p>The Committee observed that the students' individual profiles feed into the quality of its overall</p>	<p>Indeed, we hope that, once our MA in English Studies is launched, PhD students will have the option to audit MA courses</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>



programme and, possibly, its MA programmes.	relevant to their research, thus enriching class discussion and strengthening the quality of the programme.	
The Committee would like to thank the faculty and the University for its hospitality.	The Department would also like to thank the members of the EEC for the time they devoted to reviewing the submitted documentation and carrying out the appraisal.	Choose level of compliance:

C.

D. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Maria Margaroni	Associate Professor, Vice-Chair of the Department of English Studies, coordinator of the PhD in English Literature and Comparative Cultural Studies	
Stella Achilleos	Associate Professor, Chair of the Department of English Studies and member of the PhD in English Literature and Comparative Cultural Studies Coordination Committee	

Date: 25/4/2024

