ΔΙΠΑΕ CYQAA
ΦΟΡΕΑΣ ΔΙΑΣΦΑΛΙΣΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΠΙΣΤΟΠΟΙΗΣΗΣ ΤΗΣ ΠΟΙΟΤΗΤΑΣ ΤΗΣ ΑΝΩΤΕΡΗΣ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗΣ
CYPRUS AGENCY OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Doc. 300.1.2

Date: 12/06/2025

Higher Education Institution's Response

- **Higher Education Institution:
  University of Cyprus**

- **Town: Nicosia**

- **Programme of study
  Name (1.5 years, 90 ECTS, MSc)**

  In Greek:

  Μάστερ στις Μοριακές και Κυτταρικές Επιστήμες Ζωής

  In English:

  MSc in Molecular and Cellular Life Sciences

- **Language(s) of instruction: English**

- **Programme's status:** Currently Operating

- **Concentrations (if any):**

  In Greek: Concentrations
  In English: Concentrations

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
Quality assurance (QA) is well embedded in the strategic management of the MSc programme, supported by formal structures and a clear commitment to academic integrity and inclusivity. The programme is aligned with institutional objectives, offers a modern and research-informed curriculum, and provides flexibility through student-driven course selection. Transparent approval processes and international opportunities further enhance its academic profile. The programme also demonstrates a strong openness to external evaluation.	We are delighted with the positive EEC assessment of our MSc programme's quality.	Choose level of compliance:
External stakeholder involvement can be improved in relation to defining skills requirements to be achieved in the programme.

Systematic input from employers, alumni, and broader stakeholders in QA processes could be expanded and formalised (e.g., through regular feedback loops).

Consider collecting information to allow explicit reference to employer surveys or alumni data as part of programme development and review (it may be too early to meaningfully do so at this early stage of the programme) | We thank the EEC for their recommendations. As discussed in the application and during the site visit, the programme has been updated recently (change of title and content) to be more inclusive to new departmental personnel (e.g., plant molecular biology) taking into serious consideration, the trends in student and market needs.

During the year-long departmental discussions that led to this update, the Postgraduate Studies Committee consulted with faculty, students, alumni, and employers (from the public and private sectors) to identify stakeholder needs.

To systematize stakeholder involvement in the programme, we will introduce in the seminar series each year starting in the fall semester 2025-26 (1) an alumnus lecture, where the speaker (e.g., researcher in academia, industry or other employment) will discuss their | Choose level of compliance: |

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	career path after graduating from our programme, or where possible (2) a local employer lecture, where the presenter will discuss their work-flow and skills required from potential employees. In addition, after the programme runs for a few cycles allowing its graduates to enter the job market (and before the next accreditation of the programme by the CYQAA), we will prepare a stakeholder survey to acquire meaningful feedback for its further development.	
Publicly accessible and comprehensive information (e.g., about thesis options, support services, learning outcomes, and career pathways) could be improved.	After accreditation, the programme website will be updated to include the new structure and information about thesis options, learning outcomes, career paths and support services.	Choose level of compliance:
Systematic data collection and analysis (e.g., on drop-out rates, graduate careers, or employer satisfaction) are not clearly documented or integrated into decision-making.	We agree that systematizing data collection will be an excellent tool for further development of the programme. Data on the numbers of entrants, graduates and drop-outs are readily available to the department. In fact, we have used these data during the restructuring of the programme to assess the trends in incoming applications and students. Information about our graduates' careers is available through the UCY alumni office. Unfortunately, not all graduates register as alumni, so the data we can extract from this database is somewhat fragmented. With regards to employer satisfaction, we have feedback for the quality of our students from the UCY "BeConnected" internship programme administrators (they are enthusiastic about our students!). Since internships are now formally integrated in the new curriculum as optional courses, we will use the	Choose level of compliance:

	opportunity to inquire about employer satisfaction: at the end of the internship, the employer will rate the student and their internship in an evaluation form, which can be used as feedback to the programme.	

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
The MSc programme in Cellular and Molecular Life Science at the University of Cyprus demonstrates strong commitment to student-centred learning through a well-balanced and in-depth curriculum, supported by diverse and engaging teaching methodologies. The programme actively promotes student development beyond the classroom, with opportunities to attend industry fairs and participate in optional placements. Transferable skills training has been thoughtfully restructured, drawing on the expertise of both faculty and local professionals. The alignment of faculty research profiles with the academic content further enriches the learning experience. Teaching is conducted in English, and students can benefit from access to international mobility programmes such ERASMUS within YUFE and beyond. The committee was impressed by the growth potentials of the MSc Programme offered by the expansion of the Campus. The arrival of the Medical school in particular offers remarkable possibilities of joint teaching and research	We agree with the EEC and we are glad that their evaluation of our teaching is so positive.	Choose level of compliance:
Consider introducing a student survey to assess if any transferable skill dimensions are not yet covered.	Soft skills (e.g., health and safety training, literature searching, etc.) were embedded in the old programme. As discussed in the application and during the site visit, the updated programme encompasses a distinct course on Soft Skills that includes training in lab safety, literature search and citation management, plagiarism, ethics in research conduct, effective	Choose level of compliance:

	communication, presentation and poster design, etc. This course will be offered for the first time in the fall semester 2025-26, after the accreditation of the programme. At the end of the course, the students will have the opportunity to submit an evaluation form in which they can express preferences for additional transferable skills/subjects to be covered.	
Communicate more clearly to students that course evaluation is crucial for feedback to improve course content. Introduce means to ensure that student evaluation responses will have impact on course content and delivery style (e.g. through critical reflection of sub-par evaluation results between respective lecturers and the dean, or by peer support.	Each instructor communicates to their audience the importance of feedback in the evaluation form. We will ensure that this continues. We will also discuss during the induction seminar at the beginning of the programme the significance of course evaluation and how it is used for course improvement. As per UCY rules, student evaluation responses are used for self-improvement and are seen by the instructor and the department chair only. If the average evaluation score for a particular course in two consecutive teaching semesters is <3 out of 5, the department chair will intervene to discuss the questionnaire outcome and student comments with the instructor and propose ways to rectify the raised concerns.	Choose level of compliance:
Improve clarity and transparency on research vs literature-based MSc thesis selection very early on in the program.	After accreditation, the programme website will be updated to also clearly describe the two thesis options. In addition, during the induction seminar offered to new entrants at the beginning of the first semester, the two thesis options will be discussed, as well as their advantages and disadvantages. At the seminar, we will inform the students that they can consult their Academic Advisor at any time during their studies to discuss their study programme and thesis options. In addition, the slides of the induction seminar presentation	Choose level of compliance:

	with all information and links to online resources (i.e., department website, postgraduate study rules, and postgraduate study guide) will become available to the students for future reference.	
Strong recommendation to mark whether the thesis was literature- or research-based on the certificate.	We have contacted the UCY Graduate School about this matter and confirmed that, based on UCY rules, we cannot mark the type of thesis on the certificate. However, as discussed during the site visit, the student's transcript clearly states whether the thesis is research-based or literature-based. Nevertheless, this EEC recommendation has been discussed by the UCY Internal Quality Assurance Committee and will be forwarded soon to the Graduate School for further actions.	Choose level of compliance:
Improve communication from the department - make it earlier, more transparent, consistently also in English not only Greek.	During the transition of the programme to the English language there has been a delay in establishing communication in English. However, in recent years, the communication towards postgraduate students has been established in English. We will ensure that communication in English with graduate students continues and is the standard for the department.	Choose level of compliance:
Provide clearer student information (e.g., a welcome booklet, better highlighting of support services or at least repeating information of these offers to students).	After the accreditations are final, we will update the department's website of the postgraduate programmes, highlighting the aims, course structure, student access to support services, mobility information, placement options and alumni testimonials. In addition, we will update the programme's information in the UCY Postgraduate Programmes Study Guide that is also readily available to students as an online document through the Graduate School website.	Choose level of compliance:

	The above resources will be brought to the attention of the students during the induction seminar offered at the beginning of the semester to new entrants.	
Courses in the old MSc programme were perceived as too basic - make sure specialisation and modernisation is achieved in the new programme and courses.	As discussed in the application and during the site visit, the endeavor to revamp the MSc programme addresses these concerns. Specifically, the updated programme includes several new courses, as well as updated old elective courses. The core course BIO 770 will be co-taught by all faculty participating in the programme and will cover the basics but also discuss the current trends in various aspects of molecular and cellular life sciences. Data analysis and computational biology courses (BIO 616, BIO 621) will enable specialization on highly sought-after skills for academic research but also the job market. Rotations in different departmental laboratories and placements outside the UCY will enhance the research experience and will provide networking opportunities. The departmental electives will also be updated and the students can opt to take those that interest them the most.	Choose level of compliance:
Ensure that students have ample lab rotation opportunities and PI exposure early on in the new program.	A major change in the updated MSc is the fact that the candidates enter the programme without the need to secure a laboratory position for their thesis upon acceptance. During the induction seminar, through the website and the Study Guide the students are constantly reminded of their thesis options. Importantly, during the fall semester (1st semester) the students will attend the compulsory BIO 770 Molecular and Cellular Life Sciences Core course, where they will have the chance to meet all the faculty participating in the programme. This is extremely useful	Choose level of compliance:

	especially for candidates that have not completed their previous undergraduate studies in the Department. In addition, all students will have the opportunity to get laboratory experience through 2-3 rotations before choosing a supervisor for their thesis. All the above will allow the students to get early exposure to the department faculty and ample laboratory experience, so that they can make informed decisions about their thesis.	

3. Teaching staff
(ESG 1.5)

Areas of improvement and recommendations **by EEC**	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
Teaching within the MSc programme benefits from a highly skilled and dedicated academic team, whose broad expertise ensures comprehensive subject coverage. The faculty's strong commitment to teaching is complemented by the excellence and reliability of the technical and administrative personnel. A collaborative spirit prevails, with evident motivation, open interdepartmental cooperation, and a supportive institutional environment - also from the Dean of the School of Pure and Applied Sciences.	We are proud of our teaching staff, and we are lucky to be supported by exceptional administrative and technical professionals.	Choose level of compliance:
Address lack of lower-career stage lecturers (consequence of post-crisis hiring freeze).	We agree with the EEC comments. In fact, this is an issue that the UCY would like to address overall and therefore all departmental new faculty position openings are announced at the level of "Lecturer" or "Assistant Professor". For example, currently we have an open call for a position at the rank of Lecturer/Assistant Professor in the field of "Plant Biodiversity".	Choose level of compliance:
Explore joint initiatives with medical school (e.g., joint courses and research programs)	Some members of the faculty are already collaborating with colleagues at the Medical School through co-submitting research grant applications, and co-supervising undergraduate thesis students, as well as postgraduate students. At the level of joint courses, we have recently included an undergraduate course offered by the Medical School on quantitative data analysis (MED107) in our BSc curriculum. We expect that similar collaborations will be strengthened after the two departments move to	Choose level of compliance:

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	their new neighboring buildings in 2026.	
Tackle infrastructure/staffing limitations: more maintenance staff would be desirable (e.g., mouse facility, core equipment operations)	As a department that relies heavily on laboratory research, we need assistance from staff responsible for core facilities (e.g., mouse facility, imaging core). These positions are allocated centrally by the UCY administration. For example, we have already requested 2 positions for the new shared mouse facility, which will be established in our new building ensuring its smooth operation.	Choose level of compliance:
Consider recruiting more teaching and research staff if student numbers allow.	As discussed above, hiring of teaching and research staff is decided centrally. If the student numbers of the programme increase significantly, we will certainly request additional staff from the UCY administration.	Choose level of compliance:
Increase the number of core lab technicians to match growing departmental teaching needs, considering that the existing staff has responsibilities also in other MSc programs and the BSc program.	These positions are allocated by the UCY administration. We will request one additional technician for the teaching laboratories when we move to the new building in 2026.	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
The MSc programme demonstrates a strong commitment to academic excellence through its selective admission process, accepting fewer than half of its applicants. This has resulted in a highly motivated and capable student body. The programme is responsive to student interests, offering non-compulsory courses based on demand, which further supports individual academic development.	We agree with the EEC and we strive for academic excellence, training the new generation of highly skilled researchers.	Choose level of compliance:
Clarify how students are informed about decision-making regarding literature- or research-based thesis.	The students are informed (1) through the programme's website, (2) through the postgraduate study guide, (3) during the induction seminar at the beginning of their studies where both options will be described and discussed along with their pros and cons, and (4) by discussing with their academic advisor at any point of their studies. On note, in the updated programme structure, the students decide on their thesis (type, supervisor) by the end of the second semester. This allows them plenty of time to interact with all faculty during the core course BIO 770 and to experience laboratory work through research rotations.	Choose level of compliance:
Inform and discuss with the students the pros and cons of literature- versus research-based thesis in relation to their career expectations.	During the induction seminar and through discussions with their academic advisors, the students can make informed decisions about their thesis. As discussed during the site visit, since the research-based thesis in life sciences requires significant amount of time commitment to laboratory work, often with variable working schedule, some of the students prefer to take the	Choose level of compliance:

	literature-based thesis option because it provides them more flexibility when they have other commitments (i.e., due to employment or family constraints).	
Consider revisiting the process of matching students and PIs for research thesis opportunities so that all interested students can explore opportunities for a research-based thesis (the current possibility that talented students might be denied a research-based thesis seems somewhat inappropriate considering the low number of students and creates a sense of literature-based thesis being the option for poor performers).	As discussed above, the updated programme structure does not require a pre-matching of the student with a faculty member. The laboratory rotations will allow the students and faculty to interact more frequently from the beginning of the programme and, thus, help them make informed mutually agreed decisions about research-based theses.	Choose level of compliance:
Formalise consultation with stakeholders regarding definition of skill requirements in the programme.	The updated programme will start running soon after its accreditation. Once the programme runs for 2-3 years, we will prepare a stakeholder survey to acquire meaningful feedback for its further development.	Choose level of compliance:
Explore ways to improve international advertising and even more importantly the recruitment of foreign students to the programme.	For international advertising we rely on the UCY international relations/ promotion office, which is becoming increasingly active in recruiting new students upon yearly consultation with all departments running English-taught programmes of study. Specifically, our MSc programmes are advertised internationally in the Greek eduguide.gr, the Keystone Academic Solutions, and the Study Portals. In addition, a large social media (Facebook, Instagram and X) advertising campaign is underway by the UCY international relations office. These efforts have significantly increased the visibility of the programme and have attracted more applications from Asia and Africa during the last call. We will continue discussing with the UCY international relations office	Choose level of compliance:

	about the desired target countries for our programme.	
Investigate options for including more in-depth bioinformatics/data science training (as a stakeholder suggested).	It may have been missed during the onsite visit discussion and by the stakeholders who haven't yet seen the updated curriculum, but our revamped programme in Molecular and Cellular Life Sciences includes two courses on data analysis and bioinformatics/systems biology. Specifically, BIO 616 Biological Data analysis and BIO 621 Computational and Systems Biology will be offered as compulsory courses to students undertaking research-based MSc and PhD degrees. In addition, BIO 650 Special Topics in Bioinformatics will be offered as an elective course.	Choose level of compliance:
Offer clearer information on the MSc structure for students joining from other universities; the old programme lacked an easy orientation for new starters.	The updated curriculum has taken this into consideration. The addition of the co-taught course BIO 770 and the laboratory rotations will allow all students and those coming from other universities to be better informed on the structure of the programme. In addition, the induction seminar will be a great opportunity for new entrants' orientation about the university, the department and all aspects of the programme of study.	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
The MSc programme benefits from being situated on a large, modern campus with ongoing infrastructure development that enhances both the learning environment and opportunities for interdisciplinary interaction. The emerging vision for centralised, shared core equipment across faculties supports resource efficiency and accessibility. Students are well supported by a motivated and well-organised administrative team, which can also benefit from relevant training opportunities (e.g. training or ERASMUS+ for mobility). The impressive new facilities underscore the university's commitment to long-term growth and academic excellence.	We agree with the comments of the EEC and we are looking forward to moving to our new premises.	Choose level of compliance:
Adress low number of core laboratory technicians to support laboratory training courses.	As mentioned in Section 3 of this document, these positions are allocated centrally by the UCY administration. We will request one technician to support laboratory training courses, when we move to the new building.	Choose level of compliance:
Inform about access to support services by more proactive communication.	As discussed in Section 2 of this document, we routinely organize an induction seminar in English for the new postgraduate entrants at the beginning of the academic year. During this seminar we present the programme structure, courses, research, placement and mobility opportunities to the students. We will ensure that the support services will also be discussed during the seminar. The same information will be included in updated department website after the accreditation of the new programmes. We ensure the EEC that all the departmental communication with and about the	Choose level of compliance:

	postgraduate student cohort takes place in English.	
Allow or support cross-listing of graduate-level courses between departments.	Although graduate level course cross-listing is not embedded in our programmes and is not common practice at the UCY, we recognize the importance of interdisciplinary learning. We agree that providing graduate students with greater access to relevant courses in other fields, such as chemistry or computer science, can significantly enhance their skills. We will ensure that students are informed about the possibility of registering in specific courses of interest from other departments and the BioYUFE initiative during the information sessions organised at the beginning of each academic year. We will also encourage supervisors to discuss such opportunities with students during their regular meetings, ensuring that they are aware of how such courses can complement their research.	Choose level of compliance:
Design career advancement pathways for talented administrative staff to retain them and further improve their motivation.	We would be thrilled if we could do this for our talented administrative staff and in fact all acting Department Chairs have made previously such requests to the UCY when discussing career development of administrative staff. Unfortunately, promotion of administrative staff follows UCY/ public sector rules. We will keep advocating to change this and will communicate the EEC comments on this issue to the UCY administration.	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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7. Eligibility (Joint programme)
(ALL ESG)

Areas of improvement and recommendations **by EEC**	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
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B. Conclusions and final remarks

Conclusions and final remarks by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
The evaluation committee extends its sincere congratulations to the department for the successful implementation of the MSc programme in Cellular and Molecular Life Science. The programme demonstrates a high level of academic quality, is driven by a clearly articulated vision, and benefits from an excellently motivated team of academic, technical, and administrative staff, as well as a highly engaged student cohort. The committee recognises the programme's strong potential for further development and international recognition and visibility. Despite certain limitations resulting from constraints in staffing and resources, the programme is well managed and already exhibits many features of a high-performing MSc programme.	We share the EEC's enthusiasm about the quality of our programme and we thank them for their suggestions. We are also glad that the EEC found the programme compliant with all the CYQAA requirements.	Choose level of compliance:
The committee strongly encourages the department to maintain its strategic focus on quality assurance and vision towards internationalisation as part of the programme. These efforts will not only ensure the programme's sustainability but also position it to compete successfully with the growing number of private institutions. Nationally, the programme offers significant added value in the areas of fundamental and applied biosciences. The committee is confident that with continued institutional support, the programme will further grow and can serve as a model of excellence in higher education.	We hope that the implementation of our updated programme will be even more attractive to local and especially international students who will subsequently act as the programme's ambassadors by further advertising it upon graduation, ensuring its further growth and sustainability.	Choose level of compliance:

C.

D. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

Name	Position	Signature
Chrysoula Pitsouli	Associate Professor, Postgraduate Committee Coordinator	
Antonis Kirmizis	Professor, Postgraduate Committee Member	
Anna Papadopoulou	Associate Professor, Postgraduate Committee Member	
Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	
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Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	

Date: 12/06/2025