

Doc. 300.1.2

Date: 20/5/2021

# Higher Education Institution's Response

- Higher Education Institution: University of Cyprus

- Town: Nicosia

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

In Greek:

Μεταπτυχιακό στις Σπουδές Ειρήνης, Συγκρούσεων και Δημοκρατίας

In English:

- Peace, Conflict & Democracy (1,5 years, 90 ECTS, MA)

- Language(s) of instruction: English

- Programme's status: New

- Concentrations (if any): N/A

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

- *The Higher Education Institution (HEI) based on the External Evaluation Committee's (EEC's) evaluation report (Doc.300.1.1 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.*
- *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 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.300.1.1 or 300.1.1/2 or 300.1.1/3 or 300.1.1/4).*
- *In case of annexes, those should be attached and sent on a separate document.*

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

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

We gladly note the Committee's overall view that "The MA programme in Peace, Conflict, and Democracy exhibits tremendous potential." We are delighted with the comment that "The MA programme builds nicely on the Department's research strengths and interdisciplinary nature."

Overall, the committee expressed 'no major concerns about the MA programme proposed. Our suggestions should be regarded as constructive recommendations that we think may help the MA programme'. Please find below our responses to all suggestions and recommendations included in the Report.

### Recommendation:

Ensuring core knowledge in theory and methods. The committee praises the interdisciplinary and international orientation of the programme, but it rightly highlights potential challenges that students of diverse backgrounds may experience, particularly in completing their dissertation. To that end the committee highlights three issues:

- a) A more explicit focus of the core (theory) course on issues related to the study of Democracy.
- b) Offering new course(s) on methods to develop further students' methodological skillset coupled with support structures to ensure successful completion of their dissertation.
- c) An integrated approach to issues pertaining to research ethics in the study of Peace, Conflict and Democracy.

### Response:

The Department welcomes the committee's recommendation to strengthen further its support structures in ensuring successful completion and more broadly optimizing the learning experience for students.

- a) We revised the title and content of the core (theory) module to better reflect all three themes covered in the programme. The revised title is 'Fundamentals of Peace, Conflict & Democratic Transformations' instead of the original 'Fundamentals of Peace & Conflict Transformation'. Moreover, its content is divided in three parts, each representing a key theme of the program: (i) Violence & Conflict; (ii) Democratic Transitions & Democratization; and (iii) Peacebuilding & Reconciliation. In this way, the core module ensures that all three themes are effectively covered in the program (please find attached the revised course description).
- b) The Department would consider the possibility of offering an additional core course on methods training in the future once the program is consolidated (pending availability of resources/academic staff). Still, taking on board the committee's suggestion, we plan to immediately introduce two workshops geared towards supporting students' research methodology skills, research ethics training and learning experience. These will be integral to the thesis research and writing process.
  1. The first workshop ("Research Proposal" Workshop) will be scheduled at the beginning of term 3 and student participation will be mandatory. Students will present a fully developed research proposal, which is expected to also explicitly cover issues related to research methodology and ethics. They will receive feedback both from their peers and academic/teaching staff that will help them proceed with their research project.

2. The second mandatory workshop (“Research in Progress” Workshop) will give the opportunity to students to present their work in progress and receive constructive feedback in finalizing their dissertation. This will also contain a mandatory part of reflection on methodological and ethical issues.

All in all, these workshops coupled with regular meetings with supervisors, are expected to provide multiple feedback points and help socialize students to a culture of giving and receiving constructive criticism to scholarly work in progress.

- c) As we discussed at our meetings, the Methods module includes an extensive research ethics component. As faculty members participating in the programme also noted, their modules also include a significant reflection on research ethics (e.g. research on convicted radicals; interviewing vulnerable victims’ groups or participants with precarious legal status etc.) Further reflecting on our discussion, we have also added a research ethics component to both workshops. As explained above both workshops will cover explicitly issues related to research ethics, with particular focus on ethical issues stemming from students’ independent research projects, practical ways to address these challenges on the field and reflections on the challenges encountered. A substantial ethics component was already included in the compulsory Research Methods module.

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

### **Recommendation**

The programme should be clear in its focus in providing clear qualifications making the graduates attractive hires.

### **Response**

We are grateful to the committee for praising the strong employability component of the programme. The (elective) module ‘Internship’ is geared to develop students’ employability skills; this coupled with a placement in a relevant policy or research organization is expected to make graduates of this programme more attractive hires. As part of its existing and extensive departmental ‘internship program’, the department has established an extensive network of contacts with dozens of prospective employers (NGOs and local policy organizations), thereby increasing the prospects of securing employment for its graduates. Better signposting these postgraduate career pathways in the curriculum and promotional material will benefit students of the programme.

It is also worth noting that the Department has accumulated significant experience in running its internship programme. It has already set up an effective internal administrative structure, enabling the successfully offering of the internship scheme to all interested undergraduate students of the Department.

## **3. Teaching staff** (ESG 1.5)

### **Recommendation**

The committee recommended some central administrative support to help the department manage the programme effectively and maintaining a healthy staff-student ratio.

### **Response:**

The Department welcomes the suggestion for investing further resources to support the internationalization of the programme, while also noting that ‘resource limitations have the potential to impact upon the quality of teaching...in light of the additional administrative burden that a new Master’s programme may bring’.

The Department has already made a request for additional administrative support to support its ambitious Internship program and the new MA in Peace, Conflict and Democracy. The new Program aims to have dedicated administrative support for incoming applications and students, especially in effectively dealing with information requests about life in Cyprus but also, once students are here, in providing the necessary pastoral care. Mindful of the central role and the range of activities required to effectively launch/manage a new international programme, the department has recognized the role of the MA coordinator as a standalone admin duty.



## **Recommendation**

Expanding the existing scholarship opportunities to attract international students from different parts of the world.

## **Response**

Once the program is approved and eligible to be advertised, the department will contact a number of professional organizations, charitable foundations and other bodies to maximize the prospect of securing more scholarships for students admitted to the programme. This is expected to help attract excellent applicants but also increase internationalization and diversity of the student body. Once the programme starts to run, then part of the income will definitely be used to offer scholarships aiming to boost further student diversity, both within the different communities of Cyprus and beyond.

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

##### **Recommendation**

Establishing clear sets of criteria for selection and retention of the best international students. In particular, the committee recommended the use of clear, consistent and transparent procedures to evaluate international applicants. Specific reference was made to expanding the proficiency tests used to demonstrate proficiency of English.

##### **Response:**

The English language requirement for admission in any postgraduate programme offered by the University of Cyprus (UCY) is set by the Graduate School of the University, following the broad guidelines of the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education (CYQAA). Applicants can demonstrate proficiency in English using any of the internationally recognized tests, including TOEFL, IELTS, University of Cambridge Exams, as results are matched with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Where there are doubts about the language proficiency of applicants, the Language Center of the University of Cyprus becomes involved in the process, by specifying the level of English proficiency various exams correspond to.

The Graduate Committee of the Department has a standardized procedure in reviewing applications. It is this often arbitrary conversion of grades of applicants coming from different educational systems, that makes the committee's holistic approach to reviewing the broader outlook of applicants so valuable (i.e. previous experience, excellence according to national standards of each applicants, motivation letter etc).

We gladly note that the Evaluation Report recognizes that Department faculty members have studied and/or worked in different international higher educational systems abroad in the past, so they are mindful of these nuances.

Providing support structures to ensure progression of students coming from different (educational) backgrounds was also recommended. As explained above (please see section 1 response 1.b) the set of workshops will ensure that students receive ongoing support to successfully complete the programme. Also, the rules for graduate studies state that students can only proceed to the final stage of the programme (dissertation) or be assigned a supervisor, only once they have successfully completed the taught courses. Usually this is clearly communicated in the induction day and the useful information to be added in the student handbook/department's website.



## 5. Learning resources and student support

(ESG 1.6)

### Recommendation

Clarification of the role of the academic advisor to all the students.

### Response

In recent years and in response to external regulatory evaluations from DIPAE, the Department has taken significant steps to enhance and clarify the role of the Academic advisors. It has instituted an advising week prior to each semester, albeit with mixed response from students.

To further enhance and specify the role of the Academic Advisor, the department will organize an induction event at the beginning of the semester to ensure that students are familiar with university and departmental rules. As part of the induction day the coordinator will clarify the remit of activities of the academic advisor, while this information will be available to their student handbook and/or department's website.



## 6. Additional for doctoral programmes (ALL ESG)

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## 7. Eligibility (Joint programme) (ALL ESG)

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## B. Conclusions and final remarks

### Recommendation

Develop coherent marketing strategy to attract international students.

### Response:

We very much welcome the push to launch a proactive marketing strategy to increase the international visibility of the new programme. The department has devised a concrete marketing strategy, including (a) advertising the programme to most relevant professional associations and websites promoting postgraduate studies; (b) preparing short promotion videos of the programme and possibly for selected courses offered as part of the programme; (c) advertising studentships offered by the department to attract high quality students and (d) preparing professional flyers and other ‘keep warm’ material to prospective applicants; (e) a number of (online) promotional events, including but not limited to virtual open days; and (f) series of guest lectures with prominent scholars in the field of peace, conflict and democracy in the lead up to the launch of the program (2021-2022); The Department has also recently developed active social media channels with substantial number of followers which it will, of course, utilize. Building on its established expertise in journalism, the Department has produced its own video for advertising purposes.

#### *A. Advertising the programme through relevant networks*

Based on past experience and using international networks, the Department aims to advertise the program through the relevant professional associations’ channels including ECPR, ISA, Peace Science Society, etc. We also plan to build on our established network with modern Greek studies associations in the US and the Greek Politics Specialist branch of the Political Studies Association (UK), to increase the visibility of the program to Cypriot and Greek students aboard

#### *B. Video promotion*

The Department already has the experience of creating an in-house promotional video, using the excellent infrastructure and know-how of our Journalism program and colleagues: <http://www.ucy.ac.cy/sap/el/>

We plan to create similar videos to promote the excellent infrastructure of the University, the unique features of the program, specific courses offered as part of the programme and, of course, its location.

#### *C. Studentships*

Upon approval of the Programme, the Department plans to approach various funding agencies and charitable foundations abroad to secure multiple studentships for foreign students as well as for local students, particularly Turkish-Cypriots.

#### *D. Promotional material*

The Department plans to create a bespoke website, as well as promotional flyers, where applicants will find easily accessible information relevant to the program, their studies at the University and student life in Nicosia. The promotional material will also be publicly accessible through social media channels of the department.

#### *E. Promotional events & ongoing communication with applicants*

As part of our marketing strategy, we will organize a number of virtual events geared towards providing further information about the programme to potential applicants. First, online ‘open days’ will give the opportunity to international prospective applicants to receive more general information about the program (structure, content, courses), the university and student life in Cyprus. Second, online ‘offer holders’ events will give the opportunity to applicants who have already received an offer to meet faculty members who will address specific questions that prospective students may have. Third, ‘keep warm’ emails/messages will be sent to offer holders with updates about activities of the faculty/Department, including major publications and/or media appearances on issues related to the programme.

#### *F. Major public talks*

We plan to organize a series of guest lectures with prominent scholars in the fields of Peace, Conflict and Democracy in the academic year 2021-2022. The talks will be available for online streaming and are expected to increase the international visibility of the programme. The talks will be followed by short promotional events of the programme, so prospective applicants can receive useful information about postgraduate studies in the Department.

### C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Signature</i>
<b>Dr. Antonis Ellinas</b>	Head of Department	
<b>Prof. Yiannis Papadakis</b>	Deputy Head of Department	
<b>Dr. Iosif Kovras</b>	Programme Coordinator	
Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	
Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	
Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	

**Date:** 20/5/2021

