

Doc. 300.3.2

Date: 22/05/2020

# Higher Education Institution's Response (Departmental)

- Higher Education Institution: UNIVERSITY OF CYPRUS
- Town: NICOSIA
- School/Faculty: FACULTY OF LETTERS
- Department: DEPARTMENT OF BYZANTINE AND MODERN GREEK STUDIES
- Programme(s) of study under evaluation  
Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)

## Programme 1

### In Greek:

Προπτυχιακό Πρόγραμμα Βυζαντινών και Νεοελληνικών Σπουδών

### In English:

Undergraduate Programme in Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies (B.A)

## Programme 2

### In Greek:

Μεταπτυχιακό Πρόγραμμα Μάστερ στην Νεοελληνική Φιλολογία

### In English:

Master's Programme in Modern Greek Studies (M.A.)

**In Greek:**

Διδακτορικό Πρόγραμμα στην Νεοελληνική Φιλολογία

**In English:**

Doctoral Programme in Modern Greek Studies (Ph.D.)

- **Department's Status: Currently Operating**

**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.300.3.1) must justify whether actions have been taken in improving the quality of the department 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 deficiencies noted under the quality indicators (criteria)*
  - *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. 300.3.1).*
- *In case of annexes, those should be attached and sent on a separate document.*

## 1. Department's academic profile and orientation

### Sub-areas

- 1.1 Mission and strategic planning
- 1.2 Connecting with society
- 1.3 Development processes

**ECC COMMENT:** The EEC recommends that an effort be made to tailor the courses of other Departments offered in the framework of the Undergraduate Programme in Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies to meet the particular needs of the students of the Department under review (e.g. by focusing on ancient authors that have influenced more heavily Modern Greek literature such as Plutarch, Lucian, Aristophanes, Aesop, etc.).

**RESPONSE:** The Department has contacted the Classics Department and has requested that more tailored courses are offered for students of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies. In addition, the Faculty of Letters' Dean has informed all Departments that curriculum coordinators must arrange meetings every semester to discuss the needs of students, prior to the submission of the schedule of classes. This initiative has already been implemented successfully for the Fall 2020 schedule of classes. We plan to continue with this coordination in order to address any issues that may arise in a timely manner.

### **1.2.4 The Department has an effective communication mechanism with its graduates.**

**ECC COMMENT:** The central administration should pursue more effective ways of communication between the Department or the University at large on the one hand, and its alumni on the other. The University should make a concerted effort to make the web presence of the various Departments and programmes far more user-friendly and easier to navigate (currently important information hides at the bottom of the screen that many users will no doubt fail to find).

**RESPONSE:** We have communicated these concerns to the University Administration and it is our understanding that both are being addressed centrally by them. In regard to the web-presence of the Department, the committee has correctly identified an important issue. The University is already working to change the structure of all Departmental websites. Our secretary has been notified that she will undergo training in order to be able to implement all the changes. Based on this new initiative, we hope that, by the end of the year, the Department's new webpage will be ready.

### **1.3.3 The Department applies an effective strategy of attracting high-level students from Cyprus and abroad.**

**ECC COMMENT:** The EEC recommends that the Department make a concerted effort to attract high level students from abroad, especially Greece, e.g. by advertising its ideal student-faculty ratio more strongly. The University should assist in this effort by offering competitive funding packages and a wider variety of affordable housing provisions.

**RESPONSE:** In regard to the attraction of high-calibre students, a number of measures have been implemented: a) we have arranged meetings with students who excel in the Undergraduate Program, to inform them about our Graduate level Programs, b) We have participated in the Open Day initiatives organised by

the Graduate School, and c) in collaboration with the Department of History, we will soon be in a position to offer an «Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree» in Byzantine Studies with the University of Mainz and other European Universities. In addition to these, the following suggestions were submitted to the Dean of Graduate School: a) in collaboration with the Faculty of Letters invite high school students who are interested in the humanities to attend presentations of our Programs of study, b) target secondary education teachers as prospective graduate students (in collaboration with the Ministry of Education), c) organise recruiting events at the “House of Cyprus” in Athens and elsewhere, where our current graduate students could present their research. These presentations would provide an ideal medium to showcase the Department’s strongest qualities, such as the ideal student-teacher ratio. d) Continue to promote the Graduate School’s scholarships and, potentially, associate these scholarships with graduate teaching (both the scholarship and the possibility of teaching might be appealing to prospective high-calibre students). The Graduate School’s scholarships might be limited in number, but they are also some of the most competitive funding packages in our field at an international level. We should clarify that the designation of any teaching responsibilities in connection with the Graduate School’s scholarships needs to be approved by the Graduate School first, before implementation.

#### **1.3.4 The funding processes for the operation of the Department and the continuous improvement of the quality of its programmes of study are adequate and transparent.**

ECC COMMENT: [The EEC thinks that with a few adjustments, the Department has considerable potential to recruit both Greek-speaking and English-speaking students from abroad (see our final recommendations)]

RESPONSE: The Department welcomed a recent initiative by the Faculty of Letters to offer English-Language Programs in Greek Studies at both the B.A. and the MA levels. The proposed Programs require a collaboration between three Departments: Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, Classics and Philosophy, and History and Archaeology. Apart from courses in English, the proposed B.A. Program requires the attendance of intensive Greek language courses. This would enable students to attend courses taught exclusively in Greek at the final stage of their studies. It would also prepare them for a potential transition to the M.A. and/or Ph.D. levels, in one of the three Departments (should they be interested). The proposed Programs have already been discussed between faculty in the three Departments and preliminary drafts of proposed courses have been submitted to the Faculty of Letters’ Dean. For a more efficient management of time and resources, it has been agreed that discussions on these Programs will resume once the evaluation of all existing Programs of study—by the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education—is completed.

## 2. Quality Assurance

### Sub-areas

#### **2.1 System and quality assurance strategy**

#### **2.2 Quality assurance for the programmes of study**

#### **2.2.1 The responsibility for decision-making and monitoring the implementation of the programmes of study offered by the Department lies with the teaching staff.**

ECC COMMENT: In view of the dense web of legal and university regulations, the Department's autonomy in implementing its degree programmes is limited. Some of these rules seem to restrict the Department in delivering an education in line with its full potential, e.g., by insisting on higher minimum class sizes (both at UG and MA levels) than in comparable European institutions. / Re 2.2.12.1: The EEC considers the Department building inadequate. Professors should be provided with larger offices and relocation of the faculty offices and the secretariat in the main campus is highly recommended. Classes should be held exclusively in the main campus.

RESPONSE: We share the committee's opinion that certain regulations, such as the implementation of a "higher minimum class size," severely restrict our ability to offer an uninterrupted, autonomous and high-quality education to our students. Contrary to the business-like University model, we firmly believe that small-size classes provide a unique opportunity for a close collaboration between faculty and students. The low student-teacher ratio is, in fact, considered an advantage in many universities abroad. However, we understand the Administration's need to secure the viability of the Programs in each Department. Recently, several positive changes have been implemented by the current Administration, such as a regulation that allows departments to offer 10% of their courses below the required number of registered students (10 for undergraduate courses and 5 for graduate courses).

#### **2.2.12 The Department ensures adequate and appropriate learning resources in line with European and international standards and/or international practices, particularly:**

##### **2.2.12.1 Building facilities**

ECC COMMENT: The EEC considers the Department building inadequate. Professors should be provided with larger offices and relocation of the faculty offices and the secretariat in the main campus is highly recommended. Classes should be held exclusively in the main campus. The quality of the department building leaves a lot to be desired, and the spatial distance to the new main campus is a burden especially on the students.

RESPONSE: We are in full agreement with the EEC. At this point, the main Campus does not have enough space to house all Departments. All three Departments in the Faculty of Letters, including the Department of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, are housed off campus. We have communicated our desire to leave our current premises (i.e. the "Apostolides Building") to the University Administration and we sincerely hope that we will soon be able to move to another, more adequate location, preferably near the central campus. In our current facilities, several faculty offices are too small, there is no conference space for faculty meetings and, in general, the building is in bad shape. To alleviate the situation, we temporarily hold our faculty meetings at the Kallipoleos Campus and we have renovated an adjacent space, within the

Apostolides Building, in order to house researchers who work in the Faculty's research programs. At the same time, we make every effort to offer all our classes at the Main Campus. The vast majority of classes are currently held in the Main Campus unless the scheduling office informs us that there is no available space. As the committee recommends, the Department has communicated its desire to hold all classes exclusively at the main campus.

Relocating our offices to the Main Campus will bring us closer to the University Library, which will make teaching our students, as well as guiding them in their research, much more effective and efficient. In order to foster the feeling of an academic community, as the committee correctly suggests, it is important to ensure that faculty and students are housed under the same premises and near the University Library.



### 3. Administration

#### 3.3 The administrative staff adequately supports the operation of the Department.

ECC COMMENT: We explicitly emphasise that this grade is NOT in any way referring to the stellar performance of the Department's one and only administrative staff member but expresses the urgent need for additional secretarial assistance. The current departmental secretary, Ms Sophocleous, puts in far more working hours than her contract requires to be able to keep up with the workload: this is not a sustainable situation.

RESPONSE: We have repeatedly emphasized our need for a second secretary to the Administration. The faculty undertakes too many administrative duties in order to compensate for this need. Recently, the Department has been informed that there are no available secretarial positions, but a single extra secretary will be allocated to all three Departments in the Faculty of Letters. In other words, apart from our main secretary, we will be assisted by a secretary who will also assist the Faculty of Letters, the Department of History and Archaeology, and the Department of Classics and Philosophy. We hope that this arrangement will temporarily solve our dire need for a second secretary. In addition to this, we have requested the hiring of students to assist our secretary. The use of student-assistance requires that the Department pays 30% of their salary while the University pays 70% from central funds.

## 4. Learning and Teaching

### Sub-areas

- 4.1 Planning the programmes of study
- 4.2 Organisation of teaching

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## 5. Teaching Staff

### 5.7 The ratio of the number of students to the total number of teaching staff is sufficient to support and ensure the quality of the programme of study.

ECC COMMENT: In view of recent and imminent retirements of senior staff members, we recommend that the Department be awarded two new faculty positions, e.g. in areas such as ‘Literature and the Visual Arts / Theatre and Film Studies’ or, perhaps as a joint appointment with the Department of History, ‘Greek Literature and History’. It is important to have these positions filled before outgoing postholders retire so as to ensure a smooth transition. The University should also consider to fill positions left vacant by prolonged leaves of absence by appointing a visiting professor (ειδικός επιστήμονας).

RESPONSE: As the EEC notes, one Faculty member (Prof. Michalis Pieris) has recently retired. Another Faculty member has recently submitted a request for early retirement (Prof. Panagiotis Agapitos) and is not expected to return to the Department. A third colleague (Prof. Pantelis Voutouris) will be retiring in 2½ years. We share the committee’s emphasis on filling allocated positions as early as possible. The Department will discuss the subject of new faculty positions in a forthcoming Departmental meeting and it will take the committee’s suggestions under serious consideration.

## 6. Research

ECC COMMENT: The EEC has no insight whether an internal peer review procedure is already in place: if not, receiving feedback – both more general by non-specialists and more detailed by specialists – ahead of grant applications might increase the chances of those colleagues who are about to submit a project application. In view of the funding successes already achieved and the Department’s proven research strength, we would encourage its academic staff members to think even more ambitiously about applying to major European funding agencies.

RESPONSE: The University has an excellent structure in place, which offers assistance to faculty interested in applying for European grants. The University’s “Research Support Service” is tasked with the following (see <http://www.ucy.ac.cy/rss/en/mission>):

- support to the academic community to identify research funding opportunities and to prepare and submit funding proposals
- financial management of funded research projects with a view to their successful completion and maximum budget utilisation
- optimal allocation of internal research and innovation funds to the members of the academic community through the design and implementation of competitive processes and programmes
- exploitation of research results through know-how transfer and innovation management activities

A specific staff member of the “Research Support Service” is tasked with helping the Faculty of Letters’ researchers with research proposals.

Concerning the EEC’S recommendation to the staff members to apply for major European projects, the Department has been very recently informed that a member of the staff has successfully secured a competitive European grant within the Twinning topic of the H2020 Widespread programme managed by the Research Executive Agency of the European Commission. Within the framework of the Department’s successful project proposal entitled “Network for Medieval Arts and Rituals”, members of our Department and the Department of History and Archaeology will closely collaborate with members from two European Centres of Excellence, the Centre for Medieval Literature (University of Southern Denmark) and the Centre for Medieval Studies (Bamberg University) in order to establish a Research Unit and a peer-review online journal on the interaction of Medieval arts (literary, visual and performative) and rituals.

## 7. Resources

7.1 The Department has sufficient financial resources to support its functions, managed by the Institutional and Departmental bodies.

ECC COMMENT: An increased number of graduate-level stipends would greatly benefit the Department in recruiting and retaining the best possible students to its degree programmes.

If these funds could be increased at University level, this would certainly be to the benefit of both the Department and the University as a whole.

RESPONSE: The Graduate School's scholarships are a crucial tool in the Department's continuing efforts attract the best possible students to our Programs. Recently, the calculation of the number of scholarships awarded to each Department has changed and now the number of awarded scholarships depends on the total number of graduate students enrolled in the Department. We don't believe that this change will greatly affect the number of scholarships awarded to our Department (which is around 3 full scholarships and 1 partial scholarship at the Doctoral level and 2 partial scholarships at the Masters' level). We appreciate the support we have been receiving by the Graduate School and we hope that the University continues to secure funds for these scholarships. We also hope to see an increase in the scholarships awarded at the Masters' level since all graduate seminars are offered at that level.

## B. Conclusions and final remarks

### D. Conclusions and final remarks

Please provide constructive conclusions and final remarks, which may form the basis upon which improvements of the quality of the Department under review may be achieved.

EEC COMMENT: The EEC found the Department to be very welcoming. All academic staff members have put an enormous amount of work in composing the voluminous internal reports and preparing the slide representations and the summaries which were highly informative. We felt that our questions were answered with sincerity, full clarity, and thorough coverage of all aspects of the issues involved. The Department Chair generously made himself available for additional clarifications.

Explicit and detailed suggestions have already been submitted in the relevant sections of this report. In addition to them we would like to recommend the following:

We see two international markets for potential expansion in terms of student recruitment – Greece and the English-speaking international higher education sector.

We strongly recommend that the Department revises its undergraduate programme to ensure compatibility with Greek and EU ECTS requirements.

Given the proven record of achievement in the present, fully compliant M.A. and Ph.D. programmes, the committee sees additional potential in the possible development of a cross-departmental one-year English-language M.A. programme, offering wide flexibility for the students to design their individual curricula.

In conclusion, the committee declares the Department fully – and in one area partially – compliant in all areas of assessment.

RESPONSE: We wish to thank the members of the committee for their thorough examination of the Department's application and for their constructive comments. We have learned a lot through the process and we appreciate the feedback we have received. Most of the points outlined in the conclusions have been answered in the sections above. Below, we respond to the comments that have not been addressed in the relevant sections:

#### 1. Expansion

We agree with the committee's conclusion that there are two international markets for potential expansion: Greece and the English-speaking higher education sector. As outlined above we have taken several steps to ensure that our presence is much stronger in the Greek-speaking world (see response in section 1.3.3). For an increase in the recruitment of English-speaking students see below.

#### 2. English language M.A. Program

Offering an M.A. Program for English Speakers will certainly increase our chances of recruiting students from the international market. As outlined in section 1.3.4, the Faculty of Letters is already coordinating efforts to prepare cross-departmental Programs in both the BA and MA Levels. All three Departments in the Faculty of Letters are involved in this effort.

#### 3. Compatibility with Greek and EU ECTS requirements

The University's Administration is in communication with N.A.R.I.C. (Δ.Ο.Α.Τ.Α.Π.), in Greece, to ensure that any ECTS issues are resolved. This is an issue that the University Administration is coordinating centrally. At this point, we do not have any specific instructions to alter our curriculum in order to ensure compatibility with N.A.R.I.C. If any issues arise, we will be informed by the Administration and we will proceed to implement any necessary changes.



### C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

| <i>Name</i>                              | <i>Position</i>                | <i>Signature</i> |
|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------|
| <b>Marinos Pourgouris</b>                | Associate Professor<br>(Chair) |                  |
| <b>Alexandra Samuel</b>                  | Professor (Vice-Chair)         |                  |
| <b>Panayiotis Agapitos</b>               | Professors                     |                  |
| <b>Julia Chatzipanagioti-Sangmeister</b> |                                |                  |
| <b>Martin Hinterberger</b>               |                                |                  |
| <b>Pantelis Voutouris</b>                |                                |                  |
| <b>Yorgia Agouraki</b>                   | Associate Professors           |                  |
| <b>Stavroula Constantinou</b>            |                                |                  |
| <b>Antonia Giannouli</b>                 |                                |                  |
| <b>Marilena Karyolemou</b>               |                                |                  |
| <b>Marianna Katsoyiannou</b>             |                                |                  |
| <b>Irini Papadaki</b>                    |                                |                  |
| <b>Afroditi Athanasopoulou</b>           | Assistant Professors           |                  |
| <b>Eleftherios Papaleontiou</b>          |                                |                  |
| <b>FullName</b>                          | <b>Position</b>                |                  |

Date: 22.05.2020



