

Doc. 300.1.2

Date: 16.04.2021

Higher Education Institution's Response

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

- **Town:** Nicosia

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

In Greek:

Διδακτορικό στη Γλώσσα, Γραμματισμό και
Εκπαίδευση

In English:

PhD in Language, Literacy, and Education

- **Language(s) of instruction:** Greek
- **Programme's status:** Currently Operating
- **Concentrations (if any):**

In Greek: Concentrations

In English: Concentrations

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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)

Findings

The programme is well positioned to compete with similar international endeavours and demonstrates specific strengths in sociolinguistics. There is a need to explicitly develop a backbone of research methods and embed within the programme content reflecting learning and development. These aspects need to be monitored through an explicit QA framework.

Strengths

- An inspiring research informed degree
- A strong and distinctive sociolinguistic emphasis
- Engagement with literacy in and beyond the classroom
- Taught within a strong and internationally oriented research programme

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Development of explicit quality assurance mechanisms which are monitored within a regular cycle
- Inclusion of core topics such as language development, literacy *learning* in the Objectives and Outcomes at Programme and Course level
- The development of a coherent and structured progression in the Research Methods courses covering both compulsory and optional aspects of qualitative and quantitative research.

RESPONSE

The following actions have been taken in order to improve the quality of the program in this area:

1. The UCY framework includes various provisions for the programs' external and internal recurring evaluation and quality assurance. Departmental councils have been responsible for ensuring the regular monitoring of the quality, as well as for allocating responsibilities for the design and implementation of distinct programs of study, with many – the Department of Education, included—utilizing external evaluations towards these ends. Specific guidelines, procedures and regulations, specifications, and quality assurance on issues relating to postgraduate studies are publicly available in the website of the Graduate School (<https://ucy.ac.cy/graduateschool/en/phd-students/rules-regulations>) and accessible through the Department of Education website (<https://www.ucy.ac.cy/edu/en/admission/postgraduate>). The University has further codified into a comprehensive policy document all existing sets of criteria for program quality assurance, mechanisms of control, and framing policies and procedures. The document includes specific tools for internal evaluation and specifies terms of recurrence as per evaluation tool (e.g., program evaluation by graduating students at a yearly basis). It is expected to be approved and implemented in the Fall 2021 semester.
2. We appreciated the committee's recommendations, to expand or make more visible the scope of the program and of particular courses by including topics relating to language development, literacy development, and literacy learning. Towards this end, these areas
 - 2.1. were incorporated in the program purpose and learning outcomes (see Annex A),

- 2.2. were added or marked in more visible manner in the description and content of the two core courses (EDU 521 & EDU 522 – see Annex B)
 - 2.3. will, at times, be approached through the topical seminar EDU 696 Seminar: Language, Literacy, and Education (offered as a compulsory course in the Masters' program) which PhD students will be strongly encouraged to attend.
3. PhD candidates are expected to choose between an advanced quantitative or qualitative research methods course (EDU 520 Discourse Analysis or EDU 788 Advanced Research Methods) to expand their research methodological expertise beyond research courses they might have taken in the masters' studies. Depending on a PhD candidate's profile and educational background, students will be encouraged to replace content courses with and or audit additional research methods ones, which are offered by our Department or other Departments at the University.

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

Findings

The programme is supported by engaged and proactive staff who utilise a range of innovative methods of teaching and assessment. There was little evidence of moderation of assessments. Graduate students would benefit from wider opportunities to present their preliminary research findings in English.

Strengths

- Dedicated and engaged teaching staff who are clearly committed to and respected by their students.
- Varied delivery of course materials and assessments, and sensitivity to needs of students with varied academic backgrounds.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

1. Provide additional opportunities for students to practice presentations in English.
2. Consider whether 3 hour blocks of teaching are optimal for staff or students.
3. Consider providing an external route by which students can raise concerns/complaints (i.e. without routing through staff members in the department).
4. Consider introducing light-touch methods for moderating marks on assessed work to ensure consistency and equity.
5. If possible, reinstate budget for visiting speaker programmes.
6. If possible, address the issue of accommodation on the main campus for staff and students associated with this programme.

RESPONSE

The following actions have been and will be taken, as the recommendations of the EEC:

1. We consider doctoral students' involvement in academic activities crucial for their development, and thus agree that they should be provided varied opportunities for presenting their work not only in Greek but also in English (or other languages). As a program and department, we will continue to support them – academically and financially – to participate in international conferences organized in Cyprus and abroad. Funds from departmental and program budgets (item 311) have been and will be utilized toward that end. Doctoral students will be strongly encouraged to present their work at conferences and or participate in topical seminars, institutes, and summer schools at different points of their studies. Additional funding will be sought for the organization of consortia and or summer schools for students from across departments and universities, to advance collaboration with non-Greek speaking scholars and peers.
2. We understand that the 3-hour block of teaching might appear cumbersome for students' learning, and will regularly seek students' feedback to ensure that the issue is considered, if and when it arises. Up to the present, we have found the 3-hour block to work sufficiently given that learning relies much on students' active engagement through workshop-like activities, student presentation of allocated course content, discussions, and group work rather than lecturing and delivery. Instructors and program coordinators regularly exchange ideas on particular teaching practices to secure this type of learning, while this is communicated to students in information sessions that are organized yearly for incoming students as well as in opening course sessions each semester. Relevant information,

including the UCY's policy for quality assurance in teaching, is publicly available in the website of the Department of Education (<https://www.ucy.ac.cy/edu/en/admission/postgraduate>).

3. The University has developed a formal policy that describes specific steps and stages to be followed in the case of student concerns and complaints, including procedures for submitting oral and written reports initially to department chairs and or directors of university services, and then to the office of the Vice-Rector of Academic Affairs. The policy was submitted for approval to the next meeting of the Senate in May 2021.
4. The two coordinators of the program have been meeting throughout the semester to exchange ideas and monitor student progression and assessment. Joint and separate meetings were also held with students to discuss their progress in the program of study, while student evaluation in each course relied on a multiplicity of methods and resources. Broader issues of student evaluation and assessment have also been and is planned to be discussed in focused departmental meetings.
5. As program coordinators, we value the presence of visiting scholars in our program, both for students' learning and for our own professional development. We will continue to apply for funding to host visiting scholars to teach full courses (long visits) or to lead an EDU 696 Seminar in Language, Literacy, and Education (short visits). With the relaxation of measures, we will also reinstate participation in the Erasmus+ Exchange Program for Academics, which has been utilized at large in the past (hosting 1-2 scholars/year) and has been discontinued due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
6. We agree that the accommodation of the Department on the Main University Campus is critical for students' and staff's access to available resources and development of a sense of community. It is expected that this will occur upon the completion of the building to house the School of Social Sciences and Sciences of Education according to the institutional planning. Hitherto, our Department (via an ad hoc committee) in collaboration with the Dean of the School, have worked with the Rectorship to find a suitable building for rent closer to the main campus.

3. Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

Findings

Staff demonstrated a positive, creative and engaged approach to teaching and research. This is particularly laudable for the two course coordinators who carry significant teaching responsibilities. The staff on the current programme teach and research in their respective areas of expertise. This is done to a high standard with professionalism. This limits the breadth of the curriculum and restricts the skill base of the doctoral students. Staff who support the programme have a strong grounding in education studies, sociolinguistics, ethnography approaches to education, literacy and languages. Research methods are mainly qualitative again reflecting staff expertise. Students benefit from the synergies between teaching and research.

Strengths

- Staff provide excellent role models for students at this level demonstrating critical engagement in research and practice.
- There is active engagement by students with staff research topics in developing their own knowledge and expertise.
- Student activities are embedded in the local community with a focus on action research.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

1. Extending staff to reflect a breadth and depth of the curriculum to include for example psycholinguistics, psychological approaches to language and literacy or critiques of evidence based practice.
2. Collaboration with other sectors within the university e.g. psychology to improve multi/interdisciplinarity
3. Reinstating visiting scholars. The latter would provide the added advantage of providing department wide CPD and research expertise.

RESPONSE

1. The program coordinators will take any future opportunity to request additional tenure-track positions upon budgetary allowance and as per the needs and priorities of the Department.
2. Collaboration with other departments will be sought through the co-organization of events and consortia, as well as by encouraging students to take or audit courses outside the program and Department as per their research interests and needs.
3. The program coordinators will continue to apply for funding to host visiting scholars to teach full courses (long-term visits) or lead an EDU 696 Seminar in Language, Literacy, and Education (short-term visits). With the relaxation of measures, they will also reinstate participation in the Erasmus+ Exchange Program for Academics, which has been utilized at large in the past (hosting 1-2 scholars/year) and has been discontinued due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

Findings

The Programme follows the Cyprus council of Higher Education Qualifications. Doctoral level work is appropriately supervised. Numbers as would be expected are small. See section 7 for further details of doctoral programme.

Strengths

1. Appropriate processes of admission are in operation.
2. Prospective students receive full and clear information about admission criteria and procedures.
3. Students are extremely satisfied with the support they receive from programme staff.
4. Academic qualifications held by candidates are appropriately recognised by the Cyprus NARIC authority.
5. Student certification is appropriately organized and implemented and monitoring of progress throughout the doctorate clearly articulated...

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The knowledge of English does not appear to be formally set to a CEFR level. We would recommend that it is set to a minimum of B2.

RESPONSE

In accordance with CYQAA recommendations, the University specifies required levels of English proficiency for candidates in postgraduate programs, including the following:

University of Cambridge Exams	IELTS	TOEFL(IBT)	Common European Framework
CPE Certificate of Proficiency in English	8.5 – 9	88-120	C2
CAE Certificate in Advanced English	7 – 8	70-88	C1
FCE First Certificate in English	5.5 – 6.5	50-70	B2
PET Preliminary English Test	4.0-5.0	10-50	B1

These are publicly available in the website of the Graduate School ([Admission Requirements \(ucy.ac.cy\)](https://www.ucy.ac.cy)) and accessible through the website of the Department of Education (<https://www.ucy.ac.cy/edu/en/admission/postgraduate>).

5. Learning resources and student support (ESG 1.6)

Findings

Appropriate teaching and learning resources with some excellent opportunities for knowledge and skill development. World class facilities on the main campus.

Strengths

- An excellent combination of theoretical materials with practical data analysis, fostering a critical and investigative orientation
- State of the art facilities including library and learning centre
- A dedicated administrative and academic staff who provide support for students
- Access to the resources of the university for student support

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Distance from main campus may hinder access to resources on the main campus

RESPONSE

We agree that the accommodation of the Department on the main campus is critical for students' and staff's access to available resources and development of a sense of community. It is expected that this will occur upon the completion of the building to house the School of Social Sciences and Sciences of Education according to the institutional planning. Up to the present, our Department (via an ad hoc committee) in collaboration with the Dean of the School, have worked with the Rectorship to find a suitable building for rent closer to the main campus.

6. Additional for doctoral programmes (ALL ESG)

Findings

The doctoral programme provides students with a rich opportunity to develop their skills as researchers and potential academics. The department provides excellent support for their students with a responsive mentoring program.

Strengths

- Dedicated and engaged teaching staff who are clearly committed to and respected by their students.
- Excellent support for students through research seminars, support for conference attendance

Areas of improvement and recommendations

1. Ensure that staff time invested in supporting research seminars for PhD students is recognized in their work load, to avoid over-burdening those staff.
2. Provide additional opportunities for PhD students to practice presenting in English, particularly relevant to PhD students who are likely to have opportunities to present at international conferences.
3. Consider whether teaching and research facilities available to PhD students meet their needs.

RESPONSE

1. The program coordinators continued to organize research seminars - meetings over the semester, where doctoral students presented their work and got acquainted with peers. A suggestion will be transferred to the departmental council to establish research seminars for doctoral students from across post-graduate programs and recognize such service as part of staff's teaching load.
2. We consider doctoral students' involvement in academic activities and communities of practice crucial for their development, and thus agree that they should be provided varied opportunities for presenting their work not only in Greek but also in English (or other languages). As a program and Department, we will continue to support them – academically and financially – to participate in international conferences organized in Cyprus and abroad. Funds from the departmental and program budget (item 311) have been and will be utilized toward that end, and doctoral students will be strongly encouraged to present their work at conferences and or participate in topical seminars, institutes, and summer schools at different points of their studies. Additional funding will be sought for the organization of consortia and or summer schools from across departments and universities, to advance collaboration with non-Greek speaking scholars and peers.
3. In-coming PhD students were equipped with personal computers (laptops). As per availability, program coordinators will request office space for doctoral students in the current office building of the Department or other available spaces. Access to teaching and research facilities will be considerably enhanced with the relocation of the Department to the Main University Campus. As noted at other points of the report, it is expected that this will occur upon the completion of the building to house the School of Social Sciences and Sciences of Education according to the



institutional planning. Up to the present, our Department (via an ad hoc committee) in collaboration with the School Dean, have worked with the Rectorship to find a suitable building for rent closer to the main campus.



7. Eligibility (Joint programme) (ALL ESG)

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B. Conclusions and final remarks

The evaluation panel were impressed by the professional and dynamic approach of the two course coordinators. Their efforts in combination with the other members of the course team have resulted in an exciting course that is well positioned in Cyprus and well received by the students.

Research was embedded within teaching and practice. Students clearly benefitted from the range of opportunities provided. Staff were aware of the strengths of the programme but also avenues for development. Potential developments have been outlined in the report but it is clear there is scope to supplement the core team with expertise in learning/cognition/psycholinguistics and quantitative research.

We would like to thank the members of the External Evaluation Committee for the time and effort invested in the evaluation of our program. We found their positive feedback and recommendations particularly useful for the improvement and further advancement of the evaluated program of study.

C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Elena Ioannidou	Associate Professor	
Stavroula Kontovourki	Assistant Professor	
Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	
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: 27 April 2021

