

Doc. 300.1.2

# Higher Education Institution's Response

Date: *Date.*

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

- **Town:** Nicosia

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

**In Greek:**

Αυτοχρηματοδοτούμενο Διατμηματικό Διεπιστημονικό  
Μεταπτυχιακό Πρόγραμμα «Διδακτορικό σε Σπουδές Φύλου»

**In English:**

Self-Financed Inter-Departmental Interdisciplinary Graduate  
Program "PhD in Gender Studies"

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

**In Greek:** Concentrations

**In English:** Concentrations



**The present document has been prepared within the framework of the authority and competencies of the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education, according to the provisions of the “Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education and the Establishment and Operation of an Agency on Related Matters Laws” of 2015 to 2021 [L.136(I)/2015 – L.132(I)/2021].**

## A. Guidelines on content and structure of the report

- *The Higher Education Institution (HEI) based on the External Evaluation Committee's (EEC's) evaluation report (Doc.300.1.1 or 300.1.1/2 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)

The interdisciplinary and interdepartmental qualities of the GS PhD Programme and prospects for developing these qualities structurally and academically have been discussed in our Response to the EEC's comments on the MA Programme. The achieved quality of the GS PhD Programme and the University Leadership's affirmed commitment to new, interdisciplinary fields of study provide leverage for securing institutional support for the interdisciplinary and interdepartmental character of the Programme. The recruitment of International PhD students is among our priorities and following up and supporting PhD graduates after the completion of the Programme is something we need to consider. Setting up a digital hub for academic job announcement and other career development opportunities is also something we need to consider.

Student evaluation at the University of Cyprus is conducted centrally by the Center for Teaching and its form, format and purpose are regulated by Senate decisions. Besides administering the standard University Student Evaluation Questionnaire, we have established in the Programme informal channels for feedback from PhD students. This informal kind of student evaluation will be formalized based on the EEC's suggestions with particular emphasis on advising, writing progress and access to library material.

The effort to internationalize student enrollment in University Programs has been stumbling on legal constraints. The official languages of instruction at the University of Cyprus are designated at state level by The University Law according to which the official languages of instruction are Greek and Turkish. Turkish applies only to the Department of Turkish Studies and does not have a binding effect to the rest of the University due to the political situation. English and French are the languages of instruction in the departments of English and French and European Studies, correspondingly, based on the disciplinary character of these departments. Instruction in English has been introduced only at the graduate level and only in accordance with the Parliament's Amendment to the state University Law, according to which: a Programme can run in the English language as long as it also runs, in parallel or alternately, in the Greek language as well. The GS Programme has navigated around this mandate by offering courses in English where and when International students enroll and when courses are offered by English or French and European Studies Departments staff. Recent developments in the broader European area of Higher Education and the affirmed commitment of the University of Cyprus to promote and embrace internationalization have set in motion procedures for modifying state law and developing and offering graduate programs in English. Greek students admitted in the Programme are required to be highly competent in English, so once graduate programme instruction in English is institutionally approved, the GS Programme will most likely be offered exclusively in English.

Constraints on the language of instruction have not affected or constrained the range and quality of Dissertation writing. Doctorate students have the option to write, defend and submit their dissertation in the English language. The same applies to all writing assignments and projects. The EEC's suggestion to include translation as part of research methodology is valuable and we will consider how we proceed with that both at the level of framing research proposals and at the level of organizing advanced seminars for PhD students.

Childcare support for student parents, support for working students or students who need to commute from far are currently missing and need to be introduced at the University at large. Towards this direction, the Programme needs to take up a leading role. Currently, the University is developing a Gender Equality Action Plan and such structures of support are being promoted by staff members of the Programme who participate in the development of this Action Plan. Gender mainstreaming of UCY human personnel management, administration, student welfare and curricula is highly needed and the GS Programme's suggestions and interventions towards this direction are of crucial relevance.

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

The suggestion for strengthening the focus on sexuality, including in particular queer and transgender studies, is well received. Besides the mandatory course GRS 776, sexuality and queer theory are covered under the rubric of many electives, more importantly those cross-listed with the English Studies Department. The offer of these courses, however, remains contingent on the offer of these courses by the specific departments. Transgender Studies would be more extensively covered by a separate course. Developing and offering such a course is among the Coordination Committee's priorities. What we plan to do, beginning with next semester, is to dedicate one of the two 4 ECTS seminars to transgender studies and to host a series of invited international scholars to give lectures.

Content development towards other subjects and angles is a need that emerges also from below, through our students' work on research projects and dissertations. Research and writing challenges the limits of both knowledge and knowledge paradigms. Transgender Studies are not just a content package or a supplement to syllabi on sexuality. Transgender studies challenge the additive approach to LGBT and put in new perspective how we teach feminist theory. In her doctoral thesis, "Scraping off Melancholy: Queer Palimpsests in Modern Greek Literature", our graduate Katerina Symeou has challenged gay performativity's centrality in analyzing gender and performativity and has called for a trans paradigm shift in gender and sexuality studies: from gender trouble to body plasticity, from performativity to embodied spectrality. To quote from her work, "gender's remain is reclaimed as a perpetually deceased yet spectral body which has not been duly honoured. Its litany in theory and literature revives another pending due; namely, the enunciation of the silenced abject discourse and its multifaceted potentialities which can no longer be stifled and, thus, lay claim to vitality."

Digitalizing the profile of the Programme, creating digital forms of interface between the Programme and the Society as well as developing digital forms of knowledge diffusion (for example, online publication of student projects) are among our priorities, both for purposes of Programme outreach but also for purposes of recruiting new students. The publication (online and in print) of an annual volume of student works has already been planned and the first volume will be available by the end of this academic year. PhD students currently are working on coordinating this project. PhD students have also been encouraged and given resources to organize the presentation of the Volume to both academic and broader audiences in the society. With the easing of Covid-19 restrictions on mobility and assembly we will be able to resume some of the plans for activities that were suspended among which is the organization of an International Graduate Conference on Sexuality and Legal Reform. This was proposed by PhD students who are also expected to be the major actors and coordinators of the event.

Though MA and PhD students enrol in the same courses, PhD student assignments are customized to the needs of the individual students and are research-oriented. The EEC's recommendations for diversifying reading lists beyond their current Eurocentric and Anglo-American focus, including more readings from the global South and postcolonial world and broadening theorisations of feminisms and queer are thoughtfully received and will be discussed and taken into consideration.

We agree with the EEC's suggestion to outline formally the frequency and structuring of doctoral supervision/support. Supervisor feedback to advisee is currently not outlined, either in terms of frequency or in terms of forms/templates of feedback. Advisor-student meetings are mapped and mutually archived usually though the use of journal logs, emails, or other means of recording-and-retrieval. The form, format and possible standardized structures of feedback could be the subject of a staff development meeting.

Structure of the time between proposal review and completion of thesis usually follows the structure of Writing Stage I, Writing Stage II, and so on, as outlined in the Programme description. Writing for journal submission and deadlines for submitting chapter drafts, revising and completing chapters are significant temporal horizons and anchors for the period of dissertation writing.



Though participation in the project and thesis writing is not mandatory for PhD students, all PhD students enroll in the Seminar GRS 774. The EEC suggestion for post course completion writing workshops seems to be in line with what we currently do though in a non-formal way. During the course of teaching semester long courses, some additional voluntary meetings are supplemented where PhD students and instructor/s present chapter drafts and research writing.

Organizing writing groups for thesis writers is something we have not considered so far. We find the EEC's suggestion insightful and we will discuss this with our PhD students. A structured form of presenting and discussing in-process work in groups (perhaps once a month) would enhance student motivation, writer confidence and experimentation.

A Handbook for GS students is available. We do recognize though the significance of developing a Programme Handbook specifically for PhD studies and outlining in detail credit recognition and transfer procedures; clarifying thresholds and milestones; describing the steps of thesis work and supervision during Research Stages I-IV and Writing Stages I-II; clarifying writing guidelines and student-supervisor obligations; providing optional forms of draft submission (student) and feedback (supervisor); explaining the process and composition criteria for thesis supervision and thesis defense committees.

### 3. Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

The need for increased University support for the Programme in order to obtain manageable workloads for staff and ensuring that qualified teachers can remain active in the Programme is highly felt by the members of the Programme Coordination Committee. The Programme is not so much vulnerable to staff changes as to limitations to staff course offerings. The offer of cross-listed courses is dependent on both staff preferences and department needs. The recent hire of a new gender and sexuality faculty member by the Sociology and Political Science Department is an important development as this new faculty member will be joining the staff of the GS Program. This, however, does not resolve the difficulty of staff overload particularly with regards to mandatory course offer frequency. Participating departments require that faculty members teach two courses every semester. When GS Programme staff are teaching cross-listed courses, their teaching load does not increase. When, however, they are teaching courses which are not cross-listed and offered exclusively by the GS Programme, their teaching load does increase. This problem can be resolved in the following way/s: either by hiring Gender Studies academic faculty for the Center who would also teach in the GS Programme and/or by allowing GS staff to split their teaching load responsibilities between GS and Department. In other words, teaching non-cross-listed courses should qualify towards meeting the two courses per semester teaching requirement. This could also be pursued through another change, that is, the change of the Programme from self-financed to regular University Program. These changes require changes at the higher level of University Administration and Structure and lie at the core of the agenda for the meeting we will have with the Rector, the Rectors' Council and School Deans.

The development of structures to support continued professional pedagogical training and exchange as well as the delineation and fostering of a career path whereby junior staff would be supported in developing their teaching and supervision skills are highly needed at the University level. The unrecognized labour of thesis supervision needs to be problematized with regards to staff overload. We will submit to Graduate School a proposal for conducting a comparative study on student supervision work load across departments as well as across the University of Cyprus and other Universities and developing formulas for a more equitable distribution of teaching load between teaching courses and supervising dissertations. We find interesting and particularly fruitful the EEC's suggestion for developing a procedure for training in thesis supervision and we will be forwarding a relevant proposal to the Rectors' Council and the Center for Teaching.

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

As discussed in our response to the MA Program Evaluation Report, the self-financed form of the Program is historically contingent. The Programme was developed and approved by the Senate in 2012, at a time when the University was less committed to the development of graduate Programmes and even less committed to the development of an interdisciplinary Programme such as the GS Programme. The self-financed framing of the Programme secured the necessary force for its approval but also secured a relative autonomy for the Programme from departmental control and the autonomous handling of its budget. Thus, the self-financed character of the Programme ensured autonomy for an interdisciplinary Programme, an autonomy which could not have been otherwise secured through or against departmental structures in the University of Cyprus.

University higher education policy and politics have changed a lot since 2012 and the University recognizes now the need for supporting interdisciplinary and interdepartmental synergies at both the administrative and academic level. It is within this new framework that the Coordination Committee will propose and pursue the institutional autonomy of the Programme. As explained in previous sections, this would also secure University funding for the Programme and particularly for PhD student research.

The recommendation for clearer structures for the PhD programme and, in particular, procedures for supporting and assessing student progression from the time the proposal is defended, has been addressed in the previous section. The EEC's observation on the lurking spectre of the classic model (whereby students are often left on their own to complete their dissertations once coursework and other formal requirements are made) is quite thoughtful and pegs challenges for both the staff and the students of the Programme. The effect of this spectre on UCY programmes, more saliently perhaps on PhD programmes in the Humanities and Social Sciences, does need to be recognized particularly by a Programme with, as the EEC notes, "a focus on gender and sexual dissidence". The efficacy of this model has been reckoned with but must be further challenged. Towards this direction we will critically rethink and rework in a more formal way the guidelines for and culture of dissertation guidance, temporalization and creative productivity.

## 5. Learning resources and student support (ESG 1.6)

Limited opportunities for fellowships for MA students is a University wide problem. Whereas this is not perceived as a problem by other Programmes across the University, it is perceived as a problem by the GS Programme. Student recruitment has been high enough to secure the viability of the Programme yet it could have been better. Opportunities for fellowships could enhance student recruitment but would also enable enrolled students to focus on their studies, attend on a full-time basis and complete their studies faster, and engage in research and writing for publication.

Though we recognize there are weaknesses with staff teaching load and staff resilience, labour precariousness of academic staff might be a too broad frame. The main difficulty is that teaching non-cross listed GS courses implicates additional teaching load. This load is manageable on the short run but on the long run it puts staff at a precarious position with regards to allocating sufficient time for research. All staff would prefer to teach under a scheme where teaching GS courses would count towards meeting university teaching load requirements. Extra payment for teaching above the regular teaching load has never been a motive for teaching in the Programme. The way we intend to deal with this problem is to pursue the transfer the Programme under the administrative jurisdiction of the Center for Gender Studies and to develop a scheme of dual appointment (between the Center and the Departments) for academic staff who teach in the Programme on a regular basis. With regards to international visiting teaching staff, we are in the process of recuperating from the freezing of mobility imposed by the Covid Pandemic. Arrangements for partnerships and exchanges are already in place.

Digital and distance teaching has been imposed on the Programme, as with all other UCY Programmes, as an emergency and temporary *modus operandi* due to the pandemic. The Cyprus University Law for public universities restricts distance education provision, with the Open University of Cyprus being designated as the only provider of distance higher education. Physical enrolment and class attendance are mandatory for all, undergraduate and graduate, Programmes at the University of Cyprus. Transitioning to hybrid forms of provision at the graduate level had already been among the University's agenda before the beginning of the Covid Pandemic under the mandate for increasing internationalization. Dealing with the Pandemic has changed views and attitudes for digital distance education, both at the state and the university level. We have lost a lot due to the Pandemic but we have also learned a lot: how to operate online, how to combine digitalization with creative and multi-vocal modalities of teaching and learning, how to bridge communities online. In the context of reconsidering modes of provision, we will be considering and pursuing modifications that would allow part of the Programme to be conducted through distance education.

Office space for students and faculty to meet and work is a priority. It is one of the main topics to be discussed with the Rector's Council and the Administration of the University. We have managed to build and foster a sense of community among our students, yet the provision of physical space specifically for the Programme would further enhance their sense of community, support the students in their research, and provide a physical anchor of identity to also serve as an interface with the society, media, policy actors and other academic units and communities.



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

We strongly agree with the EEC's suggestion that a better scholarship programme and further institutional recognition of the programme would enhance both recruitment diversity and success rates. We are confident the completion of the External Evaluation of the Programme will enhance our bargaining leverage with university authorities towards two directions: the administrative placement of the Program under the Center for Gender Studies and the support of the Center with resources and funding.

Enhancing international recruitment could work in parallel and not in tandem with the problems of staff teaching overload if such an agenda of internationalization is combined with the administrative autonomy of the Programme under the auspices of the Center and in partnership with the UNESCO chair.



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

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## B. Conclusions and final remarks

The evaluation of the Gender Studies PhD Programme has been a productive and thought provoking process for the Programme Coordination Committee, staff and students. We are thankful to the Chair and members of the External Evaluation Committee and to all the administrative staff of both the University of Cyprus and the CYQAA for facilitating and supporting this process. We believe the External Evaluation Committee managed to ‘see’ the Programme but also to ‘see’ *through* the Programme and *behind* the Programme. All the recommendations for improvement are appreciated and welcomed as they reflect a comprehensive understanding of the Program’s vision and praxis as well as an informed and critical analysis that takes into consideration contextual constraints and potentialities at the local institutional level as well as at the international level of higher education economies, fluidities and flexibilities.

The MA-PhD transition is well explained and structured, though we do recognize the need for developing more transparent and formal procedures for PhD student mentoring beyond those required by the Graduate School.

Addressing the problem of limited opportunities for PhD student financial support is very high on our agenda.

We believe that the becoming autonomous of the Programme combined with increased support and resources from the University would put a vitalizing spin to the Programme’s development, outreach and internationalization, shelter the staff from over-teaching fatigue, and protect the Programme from future contingencies.

We fully embrace the recommendation for introducing participatory democratizing procedures for planning and decision-making as well as recommendations for accelerating programme completion rates and rhythms.



### C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Zelia Gregoriou	Coordination Committee Chair	
Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	
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Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	
Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	

**Date:** 1.10.2021

