

Higher Education Institution's Response

Date: 29.03.2021

- **Higher Education Institution:**
University of Nicosia
- **Town:** Nicosia
- **Programme of study**
Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)

In Greek:

Διεθνείς Σχέσεις και Ευρωπαϊκές Σπουδές (3 Έτη, 180 ECTS, Διδακτορικό)

In English:

International Relations and European Studies (3 Years, 180 ECTS, PhD)

- **Language(s) of instruction:** English, Greek
- **Programme'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.300.1.1) 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 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. 300.1.1).*
- *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, 1.8, 1.9)

Comments made by the EEC (copied from the External Evaluation Report)

Findings

- *The programme is established in 2013. So far, three students have completed their doctorate. Presently 10 students are enrolled in the programme.*
- *The programme in general conforms with some of the main stream international doctoral programmes. The programme complies with the Qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area.*
- *The programme is administered by a permanent Departmental Doctorate Program Committee.*
- *Specific demands for the PhD application.*
- *Long study times is created by the possibility to be enrolled as part time PhD student. The maximum period of doctoral studies is 8 years.*
- *Two calls per year. The programme receives 10-15 applicants per semester. 0-3 is hired each semester.*
- *Tight screening of applicants. Enroll only students that the department has the capacity to advise*
- *Each student has two internal and on external advisors.*
- *Close monitoring from advisors.*
- *The programme have guidelines for writing the dissertation.*
- *Relatively low tuition fee compared to other private universities.*

Strengths

- *See also section 6 below.*
- *Very well structured enrollment criteria and demands for the content of the application increases the chance of a successful doctorate.*
- *The use of external advisors increases alignment with mainstream demands for doctorates.*
- *Tight relations between doctoral candidates and their supervisors, in particular the internal advisors.*
- *The possibility of part-time PhD students allows a larger intake and allows students to work part time (and having an income) at the same time as having their studies enriched by real life working experiences.*
- *An attractive price/quality ratio.*

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- *While part time doctoral studies has many advantages they also run the risk that the students spends too many years on the dissertation and will risk to be less state-of-the-art when it finally is submitted. Presently there is an 8 year time limit for submission of the thesis. The EEC recommends that it is considered if this is too long a period, or alternatively introduces an article/paper based PhD, cf. below.*

Response/Action

The PhD has been considered to be fully compliant in all criteria of this section. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified. The Program was found in full conformity with some of the mainstream international doctoral programmes. The Program also complies with the Qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area.

The EEC found that the establishment of a high quality doctoral Program increases the international profile of the School of Law, the Department of Politics and Governance and of the University of Nicosia. Although the PhD program is a relatively recent development, it has attracted about 15 students mostly from Cyprus and Greece. The students interviewed by the EEC commented very positively about the program, the level and quality of supervision and the research profile of the teaching staff of the Department of Politics and Governance. The Program of study is well managed and there is a strong emphasis on identifying risks and opportunities for its future development and expansion. Students are closely monitored and selection criteria are strict and well-defined. The use of external advisors increases alignment with mainstream demands for doctorates. Moreover, the possibility of part-time PhD students that the Department offers, allows for a larger intake and enables students to work part time (and having an income) at the same time as having their studies enriched by real life working experiences. The EEC was impressed by the energy and commitment of the teaching personnel as well as their desire to provide students with excellent support, timely supervision and research materials. To this end, the departmental strategy of attracting and retaining high quality staff, the strong link between research and teaching, the active pursuit of interdisciplinary connections and international collaborations, are crucial.

The EEC has further made suggestions for improving the Program. It suggested that the Department considers the issue of the maximum length of study allowed for PhD students and the risks that might be involved for the dissertation to be less state-of-the-art when it finally is submitted. The Department acknowledges the concern of the EEC. The recommendation is well noted. However, we believe that there are reasons relating to the background of the vast majority of our PhD students and pool of applicants that oblige us to maintain the current arrangement (see general conclusions below).

2. Process of teaching and learning and student-centred teaching methodology (ESG 1.3)

Comments made by the EEC (copied from the External Evaluation Report)

Findings

- *Tight collaboration between doctoral students and advisors.*
- *There is not a fixed sum for doctoral candidates for conference attendance, data collection, stays abroad, course attendance, etc. but it is possible to apply for and be granted money for such purposes. The candidates interviewed did not express any unsatisfied needs in this respect.*
- *University resources in the form of libraries and other services are reported to be fine. The virtual tour de university supported this view.*

- *The PhD education does not contain course participation. Candidates with special needs for advanced methodologies may attend an advanced course supplied at university level.*
- *The PhD thesis is defined as an anthology (preferably at a length of up to 80.000 words).*
- *There are no requirements for conference attendance.*
- *There is no requirement to spend time at foreign universities.*
- *There is no requirement to obtain teaching skills while enrolled as a PhD student. However, it is possible to teach as a teaching assistant and be remunerated by reduced tuition.*
- *An online platform underpins interaction between advisors and doctoral students.*

Strengths

- *Close relationship between PhD candidates and supervisors.*
- *Availability of advanced methods course*

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- *See section 6 below*

Response/Action

The PhD Program has been considered to be fully compliant in all criteria of this section. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified.

The EEC noted that there is tight collaboration between doctoral students and advisors. Moreover, it was noted that the program supports students' individual and social development in various ways: the continuous guiding/help by the Supervisors and monitoring ensures individual development. Social development is supported inter alia through the aim to educate students on how to disseminate research through presenting their work in academic conferences or seminars, the defence /presentation of the thesis etc. Additionally, the objective for an annual intake of up to 5-6 students and the University's internal limit for supervisors to oversee a maximum of 5 PhD students guarantees personal care on a high level and therefore involvement. Furthermore, the students are granted support when facing difficulties/personal challenges by the centre for research and counseling services (KESY). The process of teaching and learning is flexible, considers different modes of delivery, and facilitates the achievement of planned learning outcomes. The structure and content are catered to individual students needs and are primarily shaped by each student's research interests and their interaction with their Supervisor. The students are encouraged to take an active role both with regards to the content such as the design and the execution of their thesis, as well as with regards to managing their progress due to the time limit of eight years. The students in the program are encouraged to work independently but can refer to their Supervisor for any matter and at any time. The Supervisors maintain regular and frequent contact with the students. University resources in the form of libraries and other services were found to be fine, whereas the students can apply for and be granted money for such purposes as conference attendance and data collection.

The EEC has further made recommendations for further improvement of the Program which were duly noted and are addressed below (general conclusions).

3. Teaching Staff (ESG 1.5)

Comments made by the EEC (copied from the External Evaluation Report)

Findings

- *A fine match between faculty and doctoral students is secured by strict screening at the time of enrollment.*
- *A broad range of the department's faculty is involved in PhD advice.*
- *Staff members can apply for sabbatical every 7th year to go to another university. Remunerated with part time salary.*

Strengths

- *Broad engagement of the department's teaching staff in the doctoral programme.*
- *Close relations between doctoral students and advisors.*
- *The possibility to go to another (foreign) university for a semester promotes internationalization.*

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- *No suggestions for improvement*

Response/Action

The PhD Program has been considered to be fully compliant in all criteria of this section. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified.

The EEC has confirmed that the teaching staff consists of highly qualified faculty members who are capable to ensure quality and sustainability of teaching and learning. The teaching staff is regularly engaged in professional and teaching-skill training and development. A broad range of the department's faculty is involved in PhD advice. The Department is further subject to quality assurance internal committees. It has been confirmed that the specializations and qualifications of faculty adequately support the delivery of the PhD program, and that members of staff are research active, that the balance between teaching, research and administration appears reasonable, and that the staff is highly motivated. The Committee identified a fine match between faculty and doctoral students that is further secured by strict screening at the time of enrollment. The possibility to go to another (foreign) University for a semester during Sabbaticals promotes internationalization

The EEC had no suggestions for improvement in this section.

4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

(ESG 1.4, 1.6, 1.7)

Comments made by the EEC (copied from the External Evaluation Report)

Findings

- *Well defined, clear and fair admission criteria.*
- *A PhD handbook is distributed to doctoral student upon enrollment.*
- *A 12.000 word research proposal must be submitted after 12 months of study.*
- *A Code of Practice and Regulations for Doctoral Programmes provides clear and specific guidelines for the writing of the proposal and the final doctoral dissertation.*
- *After submission of the thesis, the departments doctoral committee appoints a two-member Final Examination Committee, who is responsible for conducting the defense and examination: One external examiner and one internal examiner who has not supervised or assisted the student during his/her studies. The committee is chaired by an independent chair (usually the chair of the independent Chair (usually the DDPC Coordinator) with no voting rights.*

Strengths

- *Well regulated admission criteria and well regulated standards for appointing advisors, examination committee.*
- *The existence of a PhD-handbook witnesses of a well ordered program*

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- *A doctoral student must submit a research proposal after 12 months of study at the size of around 10.000 word. The EEC recommends that this policy is reconsidered: It is well known that many – probably most – PhD students ends up doing a project that is significantly different from the original project idea. This is no problem and in good accordance with the core of the academic production process that has to allow for trials and errors, reconsiderations etc. However, allowing 12 months for the research proposal to come into being risks leaving too many decisions to be made at a late point of time. The EEC therefore recommends to reconsider whether the 12 month period should be reduced to 6 or 9 months or – alternatively – that there are some procedures to secure that the work with the proposal is going well.*

Response/Action

The PhD has been considered to be fully compliant in all criteria of this section. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified.

The EEC has confirmed that the regulations and criteria regarding student admission are well pre-defined, clear and published online, and that the access policies, admission processes and criteria are implemented consistently and in a transparent manner. Moreover, a PhD handbook is distributed to doctoral student upon enrollment which attests to a well-ordered Program. The EEC has also noted that students' progress is continuously assessed throughout the semester, utilizing various methods and techniques. A Code of Practice and Regulations for Doctoral Programs provides clear and specific guidelines for the writing of the proposal and the final doctoral dissertation. The process and the standards for appointing advisors and examination committees were found to be well-regulated.

The EEC has also made recommendations and remarks for further improvement. The EEC recommended that the policy of submitting a research proposal after 12 months of study at the

size of around 10.000 word is reconsidered. The Committee believes that allowing 12 months for the research proposal to come into being risks leaving too many decisions to be made at a late point of time and recommends to reconsider whether the 12-month period should be reduced to 6 or 9 months or – alternatively – that there are some procedures to secure that the work with the proposal is going well. The Department acknowledged the suggestion. However, we believe that there are reasons for maintaining the existing time-frame (see general conclusions below).

5. Learning resources and student support (ESG 1.6)

Comments made by the EEC (copied from the External Evaluation Report)

Findings

- *See also section 6 below.*
- *The doctoral students expressed great satisfaction with their study conditions inclusive of library access, financial support for conference participation etc.*
- *The small number of doctoral students makes it possible to establish very close relations with the students and thus accommodate their preferences.*

Strengths

- *Numerically small programme makes close relations between the department and the doctoral students possible.*
- *Well-equipped university in terms of infrastructure.*

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- *No recommendations, however see section 6 below*

Response/Action

The PhD has been considered to be fully compliant in all criteria of this section. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified.

The EEC has confirmed that the teaching and learning resources are adequate and that the physical resources are fit for purpose and are ensured for changing circumstances. The University was found to be well-equipped in terms of infrastructure in this regard. The students of the Program have access to various resources and student's services as library, information center, computing facilities etc. The doctoral students expressed great satisfaction with their study conditions inclusive of library access, financial support for conference participation, etc. Moreover, the small number of doctoral students makes it possible to establish very close relations with the students and thus accommodate their preferences. The lecturers in general use in their courses research material and other resources, linking research activity to teaching. The University is committed to educational excellence that encompasses inclusive access to higher education and fosters teaching and learning. It has further been noted that the monitoring of student progress can

be seen as a best practice, and that learning resources are of good standard. Also, that student support is adequate to support the transfer Program.

The EEC had no further recommendations in this section.

6. Additional for doctoral programmes (ALL ESG)

Comments made by the EEC (copied from the External Evaluation Report)

Findings

- *As mentioned above, a strict admission procedure secures the selection of good students with a high probability of completion success.*
- *The program allows part time doctoral studies.*
- *A thesis cannot be submitted before three years of study. As a number of the doctoral students have part time job, some will submit significantly later than 3 years after enrolment. There is a maximum period of 8 years for submission of the thesis.*
- *A thesis can only be submitted as a monograph (preferably a maximum of 80.000 words).*
- *The format of the thesis is well defined.*
- *There are no course requirements, no teaching obligations, and no requirements for research stays abroad or for conference attendance.*
- *There are clear procedures for the formation of an advisory committee as well as for an examination committee.*
- *There are requirements of at least one meeting per semester between doctoral students and their advisors, but an online platform allows much more frequent interaction.*
- *Department faculty must advise a maximum of 5 PhD students.*
- *The possibility of part time doctoral studies increases the societal relevance of doctoral studies*

Strengths

- *Small program with close relations between department and doctoral students.*
- *Well regulated programme from enrolment to degree granting.*
- *Very engaged teaching staff.*
- *Part time studies allows for a boarder intake of doctoral students and increases possible societal impact of doctoral studies.*
- *A competitive tuition/quality rate.*

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- *Consider whether a maximum of 8 years for thesis submission is too long. The risk is that the thesis is surpassed by other developments within the field.*
- *Consider to introduce a thesis based on papers/articles. This is a well-defined standard in many countries, and can be done in many different ways. It can increase the market value of candidates on the academic job market if candidates have proved able to publish in good journals. A paper/article based model could also be a good possibility for part time students*

so that results can be distributed faster and the risk of the thesis being outside state-of-the-art demands. A paper/article model may also justify the 8 year limit.

- *Consider whether 1 year for the research proposal is too long or introduce some milestones during the first year.*
- *Consider a mandatory introduction to research integrity, inclusive of data management in the light of how important research integrity and data management have become.*
- *Consider to somehow induce full time doctoral students to go abroad for a period of time during their study.*
- *Consider to make it a demand that doctoral students should participate in at least one international conference with paper presentation.*

Response/Action

The PhD has been considered to be fully compliant in all criteria of this section. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified.

The EEC has identified a number of strengths: a small program with close relations between department and doctoral students which ensures regular contact with the supervisory team and the provision of timely feedback; a well-regulated Program from enrolment to degree granting; very engaged teaching staff; part-time studies allow for a boarder intake of doctoral students and increases possible societal impact of doctoral studies; a competitive tuition/quality rate.

Yet, it also identified areas of improvement and made some recommendations as follows: to consider whether a maximum of 8 years for thesis submission is too long; to consider the introduction of a thesis based on papers/articles, a well-defined standard in many countries, and one that may also justify the 8 year limit; to consider whether 1 year for the research proposal is too long or introduce some milestones during the first year; to consider a mandatory introduction to research integrity, inclusive of data management in the light of how important research integrity and data management have become; to consider to somehow induce full time doctoral students to go abroad for a period of time during their study; to consider making it a demand that doctoral students should participate in at least one international conference with paper presentation.

Some of these issues have been partially addressed above. We will address all of them once again and in full-length in the general conclusions.

B. Conclusions and final remarks

Copied from the External Evaluation Report

“The committee was impressed by the programs provided by the department of Politics and Governance, University of Nicosia, and the dedication shown by staff to supporting the student learning experience. For all three programs there is a clear sense of focus and commitment. The department utilizes its small size to create tight relations between teaching staff and students at all levels. As seen from the committee the department “walk the talk” when it comes to committing itself to quality teaching and the creation of a secure, and yet challenging learning environment.

The committee is of the overall opinion that the programs come with good design and a commitment to secure quality by standard operating procedures as well as personal engagement in teaching and students. Teaching programs are moving targets in dialogue with the surrounding society and should always be open to discussions and realignments. It is from this philosophy that the committee above has noted aspects of the program to be considered in order to develop and improve the existing already well-functioning programs.”

Response/Action

The Department wishes to thank the EEC for the professionalism they showed. The detailed discussion of all issues pertinent to the PhD degree, led to a very constructive discussion between the members of the EEC and the faculty members of the Program. The discussion proved to be extremely helpful due to the expertise of the members of the EEC and their willingness to share their suggestions and recommendations for further improving the Program.

We have assessed and reviewed carefully the EEC report in all dimensions. We are pleased to note that the report is extremely positive, and we thank the EEC for their positive remarks. We thank the external committee for being very supportive of the PhD Program, without identifying any instances of non-compliance. At the same time, we fully acknowledge that all Programs -our PhD program included- are always amenable to further improvement, and indeed we have been constantly working towards further improving our Program since it was initially accredited in 2014. Accordingly, the suggestions for further improvement offered by the EEC are taken very seriously into account. We consider the suggestions of the EEC as very helpful and we will try to incorporate them to the widest extent possible. Having said that, we acknowledge that, as the EEC has noted, the recommendations aim to the further improvement of an already fully compliant program. Once again, we would like to express our gratitude to the EEC for all the suggestions/recommendations for improvement. Below, we address each one of them, for further improving the PhD Program.

- 1. “Consider whether a maximum of 8 years for thesis submission is too long. The risk is that the thesis is surpassed by other developments within the field.”**

Response/Action: The Department acknowledges the concern of the EEC. The recommendation is well noted. However, we believe that there are reasons relating to the background of the vast majority of our PhD students and pool of applicants that oblige us to maintain the current arrangement. Most (if not all) of our PhD students and applicants already have jobs outside the University which unavoidably affects the expected length of their study. Therefore, most students carry out their PhD on a part-time basis. We believe that it is to the benefit of the PhD program to maintain this flexibility that the maximum of 8 years allows for exceptional cases, although in practice we haven’t had any student that used the maximum allowed time limit of the 8 years to graduate. It is our policy to strongly encourage our students to avoid making use of the full extent

of this margin and to finish their studies within reasonable time. This is being highlighted strongly in the revised PhD Handbook (see attached) and the meetings we hold with the students on a semester basis. Moreover, the 8 years maximum is compliant with DIPAE criteria and is the norm in all Cypriot universities.

- 2. “Consider to introduce a thesis based on papers/articles. This is a well-defined standard in many countries, and can be done in many different ways. It can increase the market value of candidates on the academic job market if candidates have proved able to publish in good journals. A paper/article based model could also be a good possibility for part time students so that results can be distributed faster and the risk of the thesis being outside state-of-the-art demands. A paper/article model may also justify the 8 year limit.”***

Response/Action:

The Department believes that the suggestion of the EEC is very interesting and has been well noted. However, the Department believes that it cannot introduce such a wide-reaching change in a unilateral way, without consultation and approval by the University’s authorities since it is bound by the University regulations which are very specific about the form of the final PhD dissertation. We emphasize that we fully respect the suggestion of the EEC but our Regulations are different. This is a point that we will raise internally through the proper University procedures in order to have a university-wide decision.

- 3. “Consider whether 1 year for the research proposal is too long or introduce some milestones during the first year.”***

Response: The recommendation by the EEC is well noted. However, we believe that the time-frame for the candidate to submit the final research proposal is best if it is maintained at the 12-month period. The University regulations provide for a 12-month period for submitting the research proposal and this is something that the Department has to abide by. It is not something that we can change unilaterally. Moreover, past experience has shown that the one-year period has in practice proven a short amount of time for the student to prepare the presentation of the research proposal, considering that the student is actually asked to undergo a mini-viva after the first year. We’ve had these discussions internally in the past and we decided to introduce specific milestones for the student to achieve in this period, which is compliant with the alternative suggestion of the EEC. The milestones concern very specific instructions of what the student must prepare and present in this 12-month period and include: the title of the research proposal; a literature review; identify the gaps in the existing literature and present the rationale for the proposal; clearly present the aims and objectives of the proposal, the research questions and the hypotheses; present the methodology and clearly explain the case selection; discuss any ethical considerations; present the expected outcome of the research; present a specific time plan for completion; include references and bibliography. The student is then asked to prepare and present before the supervisory committee the complete research design. The mini-viva comprises the culmination of this stage and is done in such a way as to ensure that the candidate is suitable to proceed. Therefore, we believe that we should maintain the existing time-frame.

- 4. “Consider a mandatory introduction to research integrity, inclusive of data management in the light of how important research integrity and data management have become.”***

Response: The Department agrees with the above suggestion of the EEC. In this respect, the following actions will be taken. For one, all students who have not had a research methodology course in their post-graduate studies (MA Programs) will mandatorily take the Research Methodology course offered at the Master's level, as all aspects of research design and execution that are included in this course (including issues of research integrity and data management). This will be added as part of the research proposal process with a Pass/Fail grade and without ECTS provision. Each student will deliver her/his final research proposal after having completed the Methodology course. Moreover, the Department will strongly encourage all PhD students to attend to online research-supportive sessions organized on a yearly basis at the University level. These amendments have been incorporated in the revised PhD Handbook.

5. “Consider to somehow induce full time doctoral students to go abroad for a period of time during their study.”

Response: The Department notes the suggestion of the EEC. However, the fact that most of our accepted students and applicants are part-timers, already working outside the academia and taking into consideration the financial costs inherent in such action, we believe that the acceptance of this suggestion as a required condition for a successful PhD completion is difficult. However, the Department will make all efforts possible to encourage PhD students who have the capability and flexibility to go abroad to do so. In this direction, we will enhance the visibility of the Erasmus agreements we already have in place with a number of Universities abroad to doctoral students. The Department will organize a session with the Head of the Erasmus Office every semester and after every intake, explaining them their study-abroad options.

6. “Consider to make it a demand that doctoral students should participate in at least one international conference with paper presentation.”

Response: The recommendation is welcome. We note that the University currently offers financial support for PhD students (centrally) to enable them to participate in international conferences. Moreover, the Department has decided to institutionalize (together with the Department of Law) a yearly PhD colloquium in which students will be encouraged to present aspects of their ongoing research in order to receive feedback from the academic staff of the Department. In addition, the PhD Handbook has been amended in the relevant section with the following provision: ‘students are strongly encouraged to participate in at least one international conference and/or submit at least one paper to a peer reviewed journal during the period of their studies’.

We would like to thank the EEC once more, both for the positive and fair evaluation, as well as the constructive comments and suggestions and the fruitful discussion that we had with its members during the lengthy virtual visit. We also thank the Committee for the time and thoroughness it dedicated to the evaluation of the PhD and for helping us improve the PhD through the suggestions made. All recommendations of the EEC refer to further improvement. The recommendations and evaluation of the committee are seriously taken into account for the further improvement of the Program. We consider this endorsement under the conditions of external peer review as a resounding vote of confidence in the PhD and its potential for academic success. We finally acknowledge the clear positive evaluation and recommendation for accreditation of the PhD Program.

C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Panayiotis Angelides	Professor, Vice Rector for Academic Affairs	
Achilles C. Emilianides	Professor, Dean	
Andreas Theophanous	Professor, Head	
Christina Ioannou	Associate Professor and Associate Dean	
Yiannos Katsourides	Assistant Professor and Program Co-Coordinator	

Date: 29.03.2021