

## Higher Education Institution's Response

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

- **Town:** Nicosia

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

**In Greek:**

Κοινωνική Εργασία (4 έτη/ 240 ECTS, Πτυχίο)

**In English:**

Social Work (4 years/ 240 ECTS, Bachelor of Science)

- **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 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 300.1.1/1 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. The answers' documentation should be brief and accurate and supported by the relevant documentation. Referral to annexes should be made only when necessary.*
- *In particular, under each assessment area and by using the 2<sup>nd</sup> column of each table, the HEI must respond on the following:*
  - *the areas of improvement and recommendations of the EEC*
  - *the conclusions and final remarks noted by the EEC*
- *The institution should respond to the EEC comments, in the designated area next each comment. The comments of the EEC should be copied from the EEC report **without any interference** in the content.*
- *In case of annexes, those should be attached and sent on separate document(s). Each document should be in \*.pdf format and named as annex1, annex2, etc.*

### Introduction

We refer to the report of the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) for the evaluation – accreditation of the programme of study BSc in Social Work (4 Years, 240 ECTS, Bachelor of Science, Conventional) which was prepared following the onsite visit at the University of Nicosia by the members of the EEC on 4 July 2023.

We would like to thank the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) for their professional and thorough work during the onsite evaluation of the BSc in Social Work programme. We would also like to express our appreciation for the collegial and constructive approach with which they conducted their evaluation. The BSc programme is found to be fully compliant with all criteria in all sections. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified by the EEC.

We have considered their report thoroughly and the following is our response to all points raised by the EEC. Under each assessment area, please see our comments to the findings and strengths outlined in the EEC report. In response to the areas of improvement and recommendations made by the EEC, please find our response and actions taken in column 2 of the table in each section.

## 1. Study programme and study programme's design and development (ESG 1.1, 1.2, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9)

The EEC found the BSc in Social Work programme (SWP) to be compliant and in line with the European standards of learning and teaching in Social Work. The EEC has also recognised that there is a quality assurance programme in place but noted that it is ambiguous how relevant data such as student enrollment informs the internal quality programme.

Regarding the employability of the social work graduates, amount on research funding and current external projects we have provided relevant information after the EEC's visit with all requested data.

The EEC also highlighted the low rate of students which is noted and we thank the EEC for pointing this out and for the recommendations they made. We have developed a robust action plan with three main objectives which are outlined below:

**Aim 1.** Increase SWP's visibility in social media.

**Aim 2.** Strengthen the link with the local community and the social impact of the SWP's activities by developing synergies for continuous improvement of the education and research provided, adopt and promote the goals of sustainable development and social cohesion.

**Aim 3.** Work on extroversion and internationalization by expanding and intensifying international networks and strategic partnerships with academics and other institutions.

Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
<p>Low numbers of students. Take action to form an overall strategy integrating teaching, research and outreach to the society</p>	<p>The recommendation of the EEC is noted and we value their concern about social work education in Cyprus. We have designed a robust approach which has already started to be implemented in collaboration with all relevant university administrative departments e.g. marketing, student recruitment and admissions. More specifically the following actions have been implemented since May 2023 and will be continued and enhanced in the near future.</p> <p><b>Aim 1: Increase Social Work Programme's visibility in social media</b></p> <p>1.1 Build a strong and regular presence on UNIC's social media accounts following a standardized procedure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Produce short newsletters, articles, infographics and leaflets which will be appropriately promoted through social media accounts as paid adverts.</li> <li>• Produce short videos of current students and alumni to be promoted in social media, YouTube, (<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zmVeJOA7wPA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zmVeJOA7wPA</a>) and the programme's website.</li> </ul> <p><b>Aim 2. Strengthening the connection with the local community and strengthening the social impact of the SWP's action, through the development of synergies for continuous improvement of the provided education and research, adoption and promotion of the goals of sustainable development and social cohesion.</b></p> <p>2.1 Build strong collaboration in with Greek and Cyprus Association of Social Workers and its regional offices across Greece</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide free lectures</li> <li>• Organise webinars, conferences</li> <li>• Create free learning resources</li> <li>• Visit regional offices of the association and inform stakeholders</li> <li>• Sponsor events and/or visits</li> </ul> <p>2.2 Sign MOUs with organisations such as the: Cyprus National Addiction Authority, Youth Board Organization Nicosia, Larnaca, Paralimni, and Limassol Municipalities, Pancyprian Volunteerism Council, Social Welfare Ministry, and NGOs.</p> <p>Through the MOUs we plan to collaborate in the delivery of short educational and research activities, as well as sponsor events and benefit through indirect promotion.</p> <p><b>Aim 3. Extroversion and internationalization by expanding and intensifying international networks and strategic partnerships with academics and other institutions.</b></p> <p>Strengthening strategic partnerships (MoU's) with academic institutions of international scope</p> <p>3.1. Sign bilateral agreements with Greek and EU Universities</p> <p>3.2 Strengthening student mobility by making use of Erasmus (+) actions</p> <p>3.3 Development of foreign language courses for Erasmus (+) students coming from EU countries</p> <p>3.4 Sign bilateral agreements with Greek and EU Universities</p> <p>Development of a dynamic community of SW Program graduates</p> <p>3.5 Alumni will be utilised to promote the programme in their local communities through their professional roles. Many of them are employed and with some motivation they could become SWP Ambassadors.</p> <p>3.6 Organise summer schools for prospective students (16+)</p> <p>3.7 Participants could be educated in different aspects of social work such as well as gain work experience.</p>	
<p>One way to do this is to consider a PhD-programme in Social Work. This could strengthen the relationship between undergraduate studies with current research.</p>	<p>We thank the EEC members for identifying and suggesting alternative ways for enhancing social work education. Their recommendation is noted and as we explained during the meeting this is something that will need to be discussed in the relevant institutional bodies e.g. the Social Sciences Department, the School Council, the University Senate etc.</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>
<p>Another strategy could be to establish research center/topics that promote the reputation and visibility of social work in Cyprus.</p>	<p>We appreciate the EEC members' recommendation on promoting the reputation and visibility of the programme. On 16/06/2023 a meeting with the Deputy Minister of Social Welfare was conducted in the presence of UNIC Rector, Dean of School, Head of Department and Programme Coordinator in order to discuss challenges and opportunities for social work education and establish collaboration. It was decided to proceed with an MOU which will set in place areas of collaboration in terms of research and providing our scientific knowledge in order to assist the Ministry with policy planning and services implementation. It is expected that this collaboration will promote the UNIC Social Work programme and attract more students. It is also expected that faculty members will be able to</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>

	contribute significantly to the national social care and social policy discourse.	
We strongly recommend a focus on contemporary social policies relevant to Cyprus. Therefore we (for example) see good attempt in the “boarder project” together with Bosnia and Northern Ireland.	The platform of United Cyprus, an initiative of the Social Work programme’s faculty has as its main aim the promotion of intercommunal studies with colleagues from the Turkish community. It has already organised several intercommunal conferences projects, and have also published research papers. In that respect in June 2023 a conference was held in Nicosia in collaboration with EASSW on addressing the challenges of political conflict with case studies from N. Ireland, Bosnia Herzegovina and Cyprus. This initiative is going to be strengthened and continued with the support of the University and it is expected to contribute towards to the expansion of our international collaborations.	Choose level of compliance:
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**2. Student – centred learning, teaching and assessment**  
(ESG 1.3)

As the EEC stated in its findings: Students “appreciate the swift feedback on their assignments. They assert that they have received a practice-oriented training that prepares them for a job in the field. They particularly appreciate the generalistic approach of the curriculum”.

The EEC also noted the limited amount of contemporary references and resources on course outlines but with a good international orientation. This is due to the fact that the application for the programme’s evaluation was submitted back in 2019 and it was under preparation from 2017 onwards. However, the teaching staff have continued to update the learning resources for all courses, which are attached to this document.

Areas of improvement and recommendations <b>by EEC</b>	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
<p>This should include a long-term strategy enhancing Social Work in Cyprus. Beside marketing, visibility should be gained by addressing central social problems for Cyprus society. For example, the expertise on migration and community development could be areas to expose the importance social work societal contributions. The connection to society could be strengthened by social policy research.</p>	<p>We appreciate the Committee’s suggestion, which was discussed in detail during their visit. Indeed, migration is a sector to which we have already contributed several times as a programme through EU and national funding and it has had a significant impact on social policy as well as on social services provision.</p> <p>In the short-term, our aim is to establish a close collaboration with the Ministry of Social Welfare and the Department of Social Welfare Services in order to be able to identify areas of common ground and develop initiatives that will have a positive societal impact.</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>
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### 3. Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

We thank the EEC for identifying and pointing out that the “*The staff seems to be dedicated to enhance a sufficient teaching and research environment with a strong interaction with the surrounding society*”. The University, the School and the Department support the development of a research culture, encouraging all faculty members to strengthen their research profile. This is facilitated through various policies, such as the Research Time Release, and the sabbatical scheme to be found in the institution’s internal regulations. We also agree with the EEC that the research activity of the teaching staff could be enhanced. Even though this is challenging due to the teaching and administrative workload, there are continuous efforts to establish various research groups and collaborations between the members of the Department and the School. More specifically, the School of Humanities and Social Sciences aims to achieve the following:

- Strengthen and improve research impact and knowledge exchange; our research quality should be reflected in field-specific citation rates and in humanities and social sciences subjects/research topics found in international tables.
- Maintain and improve our position in international rankings by subject – as in the case of Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings by Subject 2023 for Psychology and Social Sciences.
- Strengthen the scholarly reputation of our SHSS faculty locally, nationally, and internationally by distinctly articulating our research activities.
- Support and further consolidate the existing but also develop new high-quality research centres and labs of excellence; explore areas such as Digital Humanities.

The establishment of such research centres will allow for further collaboration between the faculty in the Department as well as interdepartmental and inter-institutional research activities. To this end the School has proceed to produce *Zealos: Studies in the Humanities, Social Sciences, Arts & Design* an annual peer-reviewed and open-access journal published by the School of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Nicosia (UNIC).

Areas of improvement and recommendations <b>by EEC</b>	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
The staff’s research output when it comes to publications, conferences etc. is obviously modest and the outreach is low. The current level is currently insufficient This should be strengthened with a publication strategy and the engagement of future PhD Students on research projects.	We thank the EEC for the recommendation and we reaffirm our strong affirmation to work on increasing publication output. It is considered important to build on and work on the EEC recommendation for attracting PhD students and we will pursue it based on the Department’s and School’s strategic aims.	Choose level of compliance:
It would be recommendable to develop more international contributions by guest lecturers and professors.	We thank the EEC for this important recommendation. We will enhance our network of collaborations to provide our students with more opportunities to learn from established academics in the field of social work and social policy.	Choose level of compliance:



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

The EEC noted the lack of “essential statistics on on acceptance, choices of courses, success/dropout rates etc. which complicates and limits our evaluations scope to determine on appropriate standards and progression for the programme”. We would like to note that all the information requested by the EEC was sent by the Vice Rector’s Office on the 5<sup>th</sup> of July in order to reach the EEC on time.

The EEC noted that the cost of studies in the programme was surprisingly high, but also recognized that the University had a robust financial support strategy in place. It is essential to note that fees are decided by the University of Nicosia’s Council and are publicly available via our website.

The EEC highlighted the field practice as a strength of the programme, which offers a variety of opportunities to gain work experience.

Areas of improvement and recommendations <b>by EEC</b>	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
An area of improvement could be a more systematic alumni with follow-up of employment and further studies. This could be a part of a successful strategy to attract future students. After increasing the number of bachelor students in the long-term a PhD program could gain attraction for all social work studies at the University.	We appreciate the comments made by the EEC members and we will take them under consideration in our strategy as already explained in point 1. Study programme and study programme’s design and development under Aim 3.	Choose level of compliance:

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

The EEC positively noted that students who experience financial difficulties receive an excellent level of support in order to facilitate their studies. It was also asserted that social work students have access to a diverse range of services in case they need help with different aspects in their lives.

Areas of improvement and recommendations <b>by EEC</b>	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
The EEC also strongly recommends re-evaluating and updating the list of recommended books and articles in diverse courses. Some courses on social work should be offered in English.	We thank the EEC for their comments and recommendations. Updated course outlines are attached. However, as the programme is taught in Greek, it is not possible to offer courses in English.	Choose level of compliance:

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

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

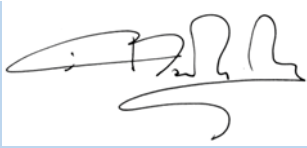


Areas of improvement and recommendations <b>by EEC</b>	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
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## B. Conclusions and final remarks

We would like to thank the Committee 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 on-site visit.

Conclusions and final remarks by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
<p>The low number of students seems to be the main challenge of the study program. We suggest to establish a consistent strategy to promote social work. This should include a long-term research agenda with clear focus and emphasis on social issues and social policies in Cyprus. Alumni and visibility in public debates are essential to gain reputation.</p>	<p>Thank you for your recommendation. As stated earlier in this document, we are taking this into consideration and it will be fully implemented in the coming months.</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>
<p>Beside this a generalistic approach in curriculum should not be seen as contradiction to promote specific expertise on current social challenges in Cyprus.</p>	<p>We thank the EEC for identifying and pointing out areas of improvement for the programme and for making relevant recommendations to achieve these.</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>
<p>The international networks and cooperations should support this further development. In the long-term a PhD program would be desirable to attract students for Bachelor and Master level.</p>	<p>We thank the EEC for identifying and pointing out areas of improvement for the programme and for making relevant recommendations to achieve these.</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>
<p>With regard to academic standards, the volume of publications and the integration of research into teaching should be improved on open access and international level.</p>	<p>Thank you for your constructive recommendations. Our research and publication strategy will be enhanced in line with the School's strategy and will certainly have an impact on teaching and learning for our student community.</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>

**C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Signature</b>
<b>Prof. Klimis Mastoridis</b>	Dean	
<b>Dr Marios Adonis</b>	Head of Department	
<b>Dr Despina Cochliou</b>	Programme Coordinator	

**Date:** 10/10/2023