

Doc. 300.1.2

Date: 08/10/2021

Higher Education Institution's Response

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

- **Town:** Nicosia

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

In Greek:

Ψυχολογία (3 έτη, 180 ECTS, Διδακτορικό)

In English:

Psychology (3 years, 180 ECTS, PhD)

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

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 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)

We would like to thank the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) for their professional and thorough work during the onsite evaluation of the PhD in Psychology programme. We would also like to express our appreciation for the collegial and constructive approach with which they conducted their evaluation.

The programme has been found to be fully compliant with all European Standards and Guidelines subareas. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified by the EEC.

We do welcome the Committee's recommendations for improvements, which will enhance the quality of our programme which will be addressed in the corresponding sections below.

Findings for PhD. Psychology

The program consists of 180 ECTS, which correspond to six semesters (30 ECTS each) in which students take different steps in their doctoral work: (a) literature review, (b) final proposal, (c) data collection I, (d) data collection II, (e) write-up and (f) write-up and defense. They do so by engaging in individual study as well as one-to-one meetings with their supervisor. Apart from the thesis, there are no other compulsory or elective courses in the program.

Strengths for PhD in Psychology

- Purposes, objectives and learning outcomes are clearly outlined and publicly accessible.
- Quality assurance procedures are in place; An internal evaluation was conducted in 2018 by teams of internal and external reviewers

Areas of improvement and recommendations for PhD Psychology

- See section 6

ANSWER

We welcome the very positive comments made by the EEC members regarding the strengths of the programme. We will address the improvement recommendations in section 6.

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

Findings for PhD in Psychology

The program is structured into six stages (from literature review to final write-up). An individual development plan is drawn up in collaboration with the team of supervisors. Formal supervisory meetings are to be held at least twice per semester. The student's progress is reviewed annually by the team of supervisors. The students reported to meet with the supervisor at least once per month. Students appreciated the program's structure, but also mentioned a need for stricter deadlines for each stage. As there are too few PhD-students in this program to create a stable learning environment, the Department seeks to provide the students with opportunities to connect with PhD students outside of the program. The EEC especially welcomes the notion of conducting pan-cypriot national conferences for PhD-students.

Strengths for PhD in Psychology:

- large amount of assistance and support provided by the supervisors

Areas of improvement and recommendations for PhD Psychology

- See section 6

ANSWER

We welcome the very positive comments from the examiners regarding the strengths of the programme. We will address the improvement recommendations in section 6.

3. Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

Findings for PhD in Psychology

The program is supported by twelve full time faculty members who have good expertise in a variety of topics within psychology. All are qualified researchers with an ongoing publication track-record. The currently low number of PhD students on the programme is well manageable.

Strengths for BSc in Psychology, MSc in Clinical Psychology and PhD in Psychology

- Highly skilled teaching staff, who are responsive, engaged and are actively involved in research, with some national and international collaborations. Students are very positive about staff.
- Staff-student ratio is good.

Areas of improvement and recommendations for BSc in Psychology, MSc in Clinical Psychology and PhD in Psychology

- Staff research could be strategically developed further by having clear streams of research, to which students could affiliate.

ANSWER

The EEC's recommendation is well received. Indeed, at the Department we have identified this need and since last academic year we have been working in establishing research groups with identified streams of research. This would allow for further collaboration between the faculty in the Department as well as interdepartmental and interinstitutional collaborations. The involvement of students in these research groups will of course be an essential part. Currently the research across the department is focused on: 1. Clinical and Health Psychology, 2. Social Psychology, 3. Criminology/Forensic Psychology 4. Developmental Psychology, 5. Educational Psychology, and 6. Positive Psychology. More fine grained distinctions regarding the sub-components of these lines of research will be developed in the upcoming year and made available on the Departmental website. Some research groups are also currently applying for distinct recognition within the School/University and will be added once successful in their applications.

- Staff could be released further to conduct research by having some of their administrative tasks completed by local administrative support teams.

ANSWER

The EEC's recommendation is well received and indeed this need has been identified by the Department for some time now and in response a proposal has been submitted to the administration of the University for administrative support. The proposal has been approved and currently we are in process of filling the position.

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

Findings for PhD in Psychology

There is a two stage admission process (written application; interview). Admission and assessment criteria for entering into the program are clearly documented. Research proposals are assessed by the Departmental Postgraduates Programmes Committee. Progression criteria are clear. Procedures appear appropriate and ensure high quality. Regulations regarding student recognition and certification are in place.

Strengths for PhD in Psychology

- The admission process and criteria are clearly documented.
- Student progression criteria are clear.

Areas of improvement and recommendations for PhD Psychology

- See section 6

ANSWER

We welcome the very positive comments from the EEC regarding the strengths of the programme. We will address the improvement recommendations in section 6.

5. Learning resources and student support (ESG 1.6)

Findings for PhD in Psychology

Learning resources and student support appear adequate. The physical and infrastructural resources needed to implement a PhD project might vary a lot depending on the respective project. The EEC gained the impression that everything is being done on the Departmental level to provide appropriate resources and hence to minimise the additional financial burden on students.

Strengths for BSc in Psychology, MSc in Clinical Psychology and PhD in Psychology

- Good student support given the good staff-student ratio and dedicated staff.
- Excellent state-of-the-art physical resources/infrastructure

Areas of improvement and recommendations for BSc in Psychology, MSc in Clinical Psychology and PhD in Psychology

- The programmes can further exploit interdisciplinary working within other programmes within and out-with the Department.

ANSWER

The EEC's recommendation is well received. Department faculty members have been involved in interdisciplinary projects with other Departments within and outside our University. Faculty are currently involved in projects with colleagues from the Medical School, the Department of Life and Health Sciences, the Institute of Neurology and Genetics, and Social Work programs, just to name a few. This collaboration will be further facilitated once the establishment research groups with identified streams of research discussed earlier is complete.

- EEC recommends considering non-academic administrative support at school/departmental level, which would allow academic staff to use more working hours for scholarly activities

ANSWER

The EEC's recommendation is well received and indeed this need has been identified by the Department for some time now. In response a proposal has been submitted to the administration of the University for administrative support. The proposal has been approved and currently we are in process of filling the position.

6. Additional for doctoral programmes (ALL ESG)

Findings

6.1. Selection criteria

There is a clear set of selection criteria and a detailed admission process, the information is publicly available. Application rates to the programme are below 10, with a drop to below 5 as the pandemic started. Since fall 2018 four students were admitted, and four graduated.

6.2 Proposal and dissertation

Candidates are provided with written guidelines to prepare their initial research proposal. Three scientific manuscripts ready for submission form the core of the thesis. Specific and clear guidelines on how to prepare the thesis document are set.

A plagiarism check system is in place.

6.3 Standards

The student's progress is monitored by a supervisory team, which is composed of three members. The main supervisor has to be a full-time member of faculty.

There is not yet a core PhD curriculum, but a research skills development programme is underway, which also contains PhD specific seminars. The examining committee consists of an internal and an external examiner and an internal administrator.

The PhD-programme is - in line with the other study programs at the Department - subject to the internal programme evaluation process.

Strengths

- Great academic counselling service for students
- Thesis format of academic papers portfolio is excellent and cutting-edge
- Great to see the research skills training being offered to PhD students and staff

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Consider thematically arranging clear lines of research strength or focus of the department

ANSWER

The EEC's recommendation is well received. Indeed, at the Department we have identified this need and since last academic year we have been working in establishing research groups with identified streams of research. This would allow for further collaboration between the faculty in the Department as well as interdepartmental and interinstitutional collaborations. The involvement of

students in these research groups will of course be an essential part. Currently the research across the Department is focused on: 1. Clinical and Health Psychology, 2. Social Psychology, 3. Criminology/Forensic Psychology 4. Developmental Psychology, 5. Educational Psychology, and 6. Positive Psychology. More fine grained distinctions regarding the sub-components of these lines of research will be developed in the upcoming year and made available on the Departmental website. Some research groups are also currently applying for distinct recognition within the School/University and will be added once successful in their applications.

- Consider having video abstracts for studies for your website for public dissemination of research (and to attract prospective students)

ANSWER

The EEC's recommendation is very useful. This is in line with the Department and the University's strategy for wider public research dissemination. Within the next year and in tandem with the development of the lines of research (mentioned above), we will create small video abstracts showcasing current research being conducted at the Department.

- Consider having obligatory training for all students around general skills (e.g., presentation skills, poster development)

ANSWER

The EEC's recommendation is very timely. As presented during the visit, the Office of the Vice-Rector for Research and Faculty has developed in collaboration with the PhD Program Coordinators a series of seminars/webinars on research skills for staff and PhD students. The following modules of the Research Skills Development Program will be part of the obligatory training of students in the doctoral program. We will also liaise with the Vice-Rector for Faculty and Research to develop sessions on scientific communication (conference presentations, social media, scientific writing for lay members of the public, etc.).

Obligatory modules:

- Conducting a Literature Search Using UNIC Library Resources
- Introduction to Refworks
- Research Philosophy and Methodology
- Introduction to the Systematic Literature Review Methodology
- Introduction to Quantitative Research
- Introduction to Qualitative Research



- Ethics in Research and Publishing
- Publishing – Why, Where and How
- Research Collaborations, Proposals and Associated Funding
- Research Opportunities, Collaborations and Practical Grant Writing Tips
- PhD Coordinators/Directors and Supervisors: Roles and Responsibilities
- Introduction to the Code of Practice and Regulations for Doctoral Programmes
- Project Management and Time Management
- Writing a PhD Thesis
- Preparation for the PhD Viva

These changes have now been incorporated in the PhD Handbook (see appendix 1, p.15)



7. Eligibility (Joint programme) (ALL ESG)

Not applicable.

B. Conclusions and final remarks

Overall, all three programmes we reviewed appeared to be well run and were largely compliant with national accreditation standards. We were particularly impressed with the course coordinators' efforts in compiling the paperwork and the presentations for our visit, which enabled us to get a clear picture of the university, department, and relevant programmes. They engaged with us in a very open and transparent manner. We would like to highlight that the staff appear well-suited to contribute to the programmes and have clearly demonstrated excellent support for their students, who fully appreciate their support.

The university's physical resources are excellent, and we would like to encourage the university to promote more interdisciplinary working, enabling staff and students to make full use of all facilities across departmental and school boundaries. This, we feel, will benefit students and help staff improve their research potential.

While we saw some good evidence of staff research being linked to their teaching, we felt that the full potential of their research capabilities are not currently being exploited. To this extent, we would urge the Department to clearly outline their research strategy, consider a few well developed research themes, and attract students to work within these themes. This will enable the development of a critical mass of researchers (and research outputs) from research groups.

We saw excellent examples of how staff were involved in several leading national and international initiatives. We would however like to encourage the Department to consider more widely how the public and service users can be involved in various parts of the programmes (particularly, the clinical psychology programme).

ANSWER

We would like to thank the EEC for the positive evaluation, the constructive comments and suggestions, and the fruitful discussion that we had during the online visit. We also thank the Committee members for the time and thoroughness they dedicated to the evaluation of the programme and for helping us improve it through the suggestions they made. In preparation for the new academic year, we have already taken action and incorporated all recommendations of the Committee as indicated above in our response.

We would like to highlight again the high score evaluation and the very positive comments of the EEC, which we consider as recommendation for accreditation.

C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Prof Klimis Mastoridis	Dean	
Dr Nuno Ferreira	Programme Coordinator	
Dr Marios Adonis	Head of Department	
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: 08/10/2021

