

Doc. 300.1.2

Date: 16/01/2025

Higher Education Institution's Response

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

- **Town:** Nicosia

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

In Greek:

Βιολογικές Επιστήμες (3 ακαδημαϊκά έτη, 180 ECTS,
Διδακτορικό)

In English:

Biological Sciences (3 academic years, 180 ECTS,
Doctor of Philosophy)

- **Language(s) of instruction:** English

- **Programme's status:** New

- **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 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 2nd 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.*

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

We are grateful to the EEC for acknowledging our efforts in developing a high-quality doctoral programme that aligns with international standards. The Committee's suggestions regarding enrolment thresholds, student involvement, and enhanced data transparency have helped us refine the programme's structure, ensuring an optimal learning environment and a strong sense of community among our doctoral candidates.

Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
<p>Number of students: The programme shall only start if a minimum number of students (e.g. 3 per year) is reached. Starting with less students will make the development of a coherent programme difficult.</p>	<p>The programme will commence only when the minimum enrollment criteria are met. Given that students are already enrolled in various PhD programmes within the department, we anticipate easily achieving the required minimum number. All enrolled students will participate in a shared set of courses, fostering both a cohesive cohort and a strong sense of community among the students.</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>
<p>Formalize Student Involvement: While students are involved in feedback, their input in the actual development and revision process should be more formalized. Creating student committees or councils to give continuous feedback would make their input more impactful. Regular formal meetings should be scheduled to give continuous feedback.</p>	<p>We have established student advisory committees that convene on a quarterly basis to provide structured and meaningful feedback. This formalized approach ensures that student input plays a significant role in the development and revision of academic and administrative processes. By instituting these regular meetings, we aim to make student contributions more impactful and integral to institutional decision-making.</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>
<p>Greater Transparency in Employment Outcomes: There is room to improve the transparency of graduate career paths. Regular surveys of alumni and data collection on job placement should be made publicly available to provide insights into program success. This is becoming more relevant once the programme is running for a couple of years.</p>	<p>Alumni surveys are conducted annually. Job placement statistics published in programme brochures and website.</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>

<p>Strengthen Feedback Mechanisms for Stakeholders: Though industry feedback is utilized, there is a need for a more structured system to ensure that external stakeholders (employers, alumni) contribute consistently and effectively to the program's development.</p>	<p>Created an Industry Advisory Board with regular consultations and structured feedback cycles.</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>
<p>Enhanced Data on Graduation and Pass Rates: Publicly available, detailed data on graduation rates and comparisons with other European programs could better showcase the program's success.</p>	<p>We are committed to further improving our data transparency. Beginning with the first cohort, these data will be made publicly available via our website and in annual programme reports. Where relevant, we will also include comparisons with other European doctoral programmes to contextualize our performance.</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>

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

We appreciate the EEC's observations on student-centred learning approaches and assessment diversity. Our existing strategies, such as incorporating journal clubs, group presentations, and continuous feedback mechanisms, demonstrate our strong commitment to fostering an inclusive, interactive learning environment that caters to varied student needs.

Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
<p>Further Integration of Practical Training: While theory and practice are interconnected, the practical training component could benefit from more structured guidelines and stronger feedback mechanisms from students and stakeholders regarding internships and real-world applications.</p>	<p>The practical training for PhD students will be embedded within their experimental work, whether conducted in UNIC laboratories or in collaboration with industry partners. Structured guidelines will outline clear objectives, expected outcomes, and assessment criteria specific to their research activities. Feedback will be gathered through regular progress reviews with supervisors and, where applicable, industry collaborators to ensure the practical training aligns with the research goals and programme standards.</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>
<p>Broader Range of Assessment Methods: Although assessments are</p>	<p>The programme already incorporates diverse assessment</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>

<p>clear, incorporating a wider range of assessment formats, such as peer reviews or collaborative projects, could better address different learning styles and foster deeper engagement.</p>	<p>methods, including PhD student group presentations and participation in journal clubs, which are part of the current curriculum structure. These methods are actively implemented to enhance critical thinking, foster collaboration, and encourage peer learning.</p>	
<p>Enhanced Monitoring of Student Workload: More consistent feedback mechanisms could be implemented to ensure that the student workload remains aligned with ECTS credit allocations. This would help identify any imbalance in actual student effort and the intended workload.</p>	<p>The programme has an elaborate system for monitoring PhD student workload, ensuring alignment with ECTS credit allocations. This is achieved through regular progress reports and the submission of DSO (Doctoral Student Oversight) forms, which provide detailed insights into students' coursework, lab work, and research activities. These mechanisms effectively track student progress and workload, ensuring any imbalances are identified and addressed promptly.</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>
<p>Expand Faculty Training in New Technologies: While educational technologies are used effectively, continuous faculty training in new and innovative digital tools would ensure that teaching remains cutting-edge and aligned with the evolving digital landscape.</p>	<p>Faculty training in new and innovative digital tools is already addressed at the university level through the Faculty Development Programme and AU training sessions. These initiatives ensure that faculty are continuously updated on emerging educational technologies, enabling them to maintain cutting-edge teaching practices aligned with the evolving digital landscape.</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>

3. Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

We acknowledge the EEC's valuable input regarding faculty development and balancing teaching and research responsibilities. By strengthening our peer reviews, mentorship programmes, and support for international collaborations, we aim to maintain a high standard of both teaching excellence and research output within our faculty.

Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
<p>More Structured Feedback for Faculty: While peer and student</p>	<p>Structured feedback for faculty is already implemented at the</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>

<p>evaluations are conducted, providing more structured and frequent feedback loops, particularly for new staff, could further enhance teaching quality. This can be tied to ongoing professional development programs</p>	<p>department level through peer reviews and student evaluations. New staff benefit from mentoring programmes guided by experienced faculty, ensuring regular performance discussions and professional growth aligned with teaching standards.</p>	
<p>Balancing Teaching and Research Time: The balance between teaching duties and research activities should be continually reviewed to ensure that faculty have sufficient time for both. Ensuring that research time release is fairly allocated, based on research output, will maintain high standards in both areas.</p>	<p>Faculty feedback and workload balance are already addressed at the Department and School level through established processes, including peer review assessments and self-assessments. These mechanisms ensure that faculty receive structured feedback on teaching quality and that the Research Time Release (RTR) policy is effectively implemented. Regular evaluations and adjustments based on measurable research outputs, such as publications and grant success, ensure that teaching and research activities remain well-balanced and aligned with institutional standards.</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>
<p>Broader Faculty Engagement with External Institutions: Expanding opportunities for more collaborative teaching arrangements with international institutions would enhance the global outlook of the program and provide students with a more diverse academic experience</p>	<p>Our institution is committed to enhancing the global perspective of our academic programmes by actively engaging in collaborative initiatives with international partners. Through our membership in the NEOLAiA European Universities Alliance and various global research networks, we facilitate interdisciplinary research and academic exchanges. These collaborations offer PhD students and faculty valuable opportunities to engage in international projects, participate in joint seminars, and utilize shared resources. Furthermore, faculty are encouraged to co-author publications with international scholars and pursue joint research grants. These efforts significantly strengthen the programme's global outlook and enrich the academic experience, providing students with</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>

	access to a wider array of perspectives and expertise.	
Strengthening Student-Staff Interaction: While student feedback mechanisms exist, more active and regular forums for students to engage with staff outside of formal evaluations (e.g., town hall meetings or focus groups) would improve communication and help tailor the learning environment to evolving student needs.	The PhD Programme establishes regular forums for informal student-staff interaction such as focus group discussions. These sessions provide a platform for students to share feedback, discuss concerns, and propose ideas directly with faculty and programme coordinators.	Choose level of compliance:

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

We appreciate the EEC's insights on supporting diverse student populations, especially international candidates. Our revised processes aim to ensure a more seamless integration for all students, from the point of admission to the completion of their studies, while recognizing varied prior learning experiences and ensuring transparency through the Diploma Supplement.

Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
Enhance Support for International Students: While international students follow the same admission process as local students, additional preparatory programs or bridging courses could be offered to ensure they meet the required academic standards before admission	Support for international students begins at the admission stage, where only applicants meeting the required academic standards are accepted. After admission, the institution ensures a smooth transition through comprehensive introductory seminars that outline academic expectations, research requirements, and available resources. Additionally, each international student will be paired with a local PhD candidate serving as a peer mentor to provide guidance on academic and cultural adaptation, fostering a collaborative and inclusive environment.	Choose level of compliance:
Broader Use of Recognition Procedures for Informal Learning: While the program recognizes formal qualifications and work experience, expanding recognition procedures to include non-formal and informal learning (e.g., MOOCs or professional training) could	This is a PhD programme, and no extra credit is awarded for informal learning. However, relevant qualifications, including non-formal and informal learning experiences such as MOOCs or professional certifications, will enhance an applicant's chances of admission by demonstrating preparedness and	Choose level of compliance:

provide more flexibility and enhance access to the program.	alignment with the programme's academic and research focus.	
Increase Awareness of Diploma Supplement: Although the diploma supplement is provided, more emphasis on informing students about its importance for international recognition and mobility could be beneficial, particularly for students intending to continue their studies or work abroad.	The institution will enhance awareness of the Diploma Supplement through targeted orientation sessions, online resources, and workshops, emphasizing its value for international recognition and mobility, particularly for students pursuing studies or careers abroad.	Choose level of compliance:

5. Learning resources and student support (ESG 1.6)

We are grateful for the EEC's positive remarks on our existing infrastructure and support services. We strive to continuously evaluate and upgrade these resources to ensure they meet the evolving academic, professional, and personal needs of our PhD students.

Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
Enhance Resource Monitoring for Evolving Needs: The institution's infrastructure is flexible, but there should be a continuous evaluation process to track the changing needs of students, especially in terms of physical facilities like labs and study spaces. More detailed feedback from both students and staff could help fine-tune resource allocation. Students shall have the possibility to acquire additional skills based on their specific needs, either internally or via secondments.	Resource monitoring is conducted annually at the Department and School level to ensure alignment with the evolving needs of PhD students. This process evaluates labs, study spaces, and other resources to maintain their relevance and adequacy for the programme's requirements. Feedback from students and staff is integrated into these reviews to guide any necessary adjustments.	Choose level of compliance:
Expand Practical Training Resources: While the current facilities support theoretical learning, an increase in hands-on training opportunities, especially in labs or fieldwork environments, would further align with the practical needs of the program. Feedback from both students and faculty could guide future resource investments.	The institution will continue to expand hands-on training opportunities by enhancing lab facilities and increasing access to fieldwork environments. Continuous and new partnerships with industry and research institutions (besides the established ones like CING) are established to provide practical training experiences. Regular feedback from students and faculty will continue to be collected to	Choose level of compliance:

	prioritize resource investments and ensure alignment with the programme's practical training needs.	
Research laboratories: Although some research laboratories (cell culture, molecular biology) are present they would benefit from some investment in infrastructure / equipment.	Research laboratories are evaluated annually at the Department and School level to ensure they meet the evolving needs of the PhD programme. This process includes assessing existing infrastructure, identifying potential gaps, and integrating feedback from faculty and students to maintain high standards for research support.	Choose level of compliance:
Improve Communication on Support Services: While services such as counselling and career support are available, ensuring that all students are fully informed about the range of available services is crucial. Expanding orientation programs and making information more visible in digital platforms could help.	We will continue to enhance communication on support services by expanding orientation programmes to include detailed sessions on available resources, such as counseling and career support. Information is made more accessible through updates to the student portal, targeted email campaigns, and visible announcements on campus and digital platforms. These efforts ensure that all students are well-informed and can easily access the support they need.	Choose level of compliance:
Strengthen Mobility Support: The university encourages student mobility through partnerships with other institutions, but more could be done to streamline the process for international students. Providing more tailored support for students seeking to study abroad or participate in exchange programs would enhance global engagement.	The university already provides support for student mobility through guidance on applications and access to information about exchange opportunities (e.g. ERASMUS). To further enhance this, we will create a detailed guide outlining the mobility process, including key deadlines and requirements, and hold periodic information sessions to address student queries. Feedback from participating students will be gathered to identify any areas for incremental improvement.	Choose level of compliance:

6. Additional for doctoral programmes (ALL ESG)

We thank the EEC for emphasizing the importance of industry connections, interdisciplinary collaboration, and clear guidelines for doctoral workloads. These recommendations allow us to further enrich our students' educational journey and better prepare them for various career paths.

Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
<p>Support for Doctoral Students' Transition to the Labour Market: While the program provides strong academic training, further integration of industry-related skills or links with non-academic careers could enhance the value of the doctoral degree outside academia. Collaborations with industry stakeholders or offering more professional development workshops might better prepare students for diverse career paths. It is advised to include transferable skills courses and opportunities during the programme to further improve employability.</p>	<p>The programme builds on its strong academia-industry collaboration by integrating industry-related skills and transferable skills courses into the doctoral programme. These include workshops on project management, communication, and entrepreneurship, as well as guest lectures from industry professionals. Existing partnerships with industry stakeholders will be leveraged to provide students with networking opportunities, internships, and insights into non-academic career paths. These initiatives aim to enhance the employability of doctoral students across diverse sectors.</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>
<p>Increased Involvement in Interdisciplinary Research: Encouraging more interdisciplinary collaborations and research projects could broaden the scope of doctoral research and provide students with wider perspectives. This could be achieved by promoting joint research initiatives across different departments or institutions.</p>	<p>The Department of Life Sciences actively promotes interdisciplinary research by fostering collaboration among students and faculty from the programmes of Nutrition/Dietetics, Sport Science, and related fields. Joint seminars, collaborative research projects, and shared courses provide students with opportunities to work across disciplines, broadening their research perspectives. These initiatives will continue to be supported and expanded to further enhance the interdisciplinary nature of the programme.</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>
<p>More Robust Guidelines for Doctoral Student Workload: While the supervisory structure is clear, more explicit guidelines on workload expectations (both in research and teaching assistantships) could help students manage their time more effectively.</p>	<p>The programme will develop and implement detailed guidelines for doctoral student workload, outlining clear expectations for research, teaching assistantships, and coursework. These guidelines will include recommended time allocations, maximum allowable</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>

<p>This could include setting clearer boundaries between research, teaching duties, and coursework.</p>	<p>teaching hours, and flexibility for research demands. Supervisors will receive training to ensure consistent application of these standards, and regular feedback from students will be used to adjust guidelines as needed to support effective time management.</p>	
<p>Supervision conducted by PhD students: It is recommended to give the PhD students the option to supervise BSc and MSc research projects. Results from these projects could become part of the final thesis of the PhD student.</p>	<p>The programme will offer PhD students the opportunity to supervise BSc and MSc research projects under the guidance of their primary supervisors. This is actually done through the Student Teaching Assistantship (STA) protocol from the UNIC's PhD office which allows PhD C to supervise BSc and MSc students. This initiative will allow PhD students to develop mentoring and leadership skills while contributing to their research. Clear guidelines will be established to ensure that the results from supervised projects can be appropriately integrated into the PhD student's thesis, provided they align with the research objectives and meet academic standards.</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>

7. Eligibility (Joint programme) (ALL ESG)

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

We are truly thankful for the EEC's conclusions and final remarks, which have guided us in refining certain aspects of our programme. Below we reiterate the specific actions taken to address your valuable feedback, all of which reinforce our strong commitment to high-quality doctoral education.

Conclusions and final remarks by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
It is advised to include transferable skills courses and opportunities to develop those.	We have introduced structured workshops and seminars focused on developing key transferable skills such as scientific writing, research ethics and communication. Guest lectures from industry professionals are also incorporated to give students practical insights and networking opportunities beyond academia. These initiatives ensure our doctoral candidates gain a well-rounded skill set that enhances their employability across diverse career paths.	
Increase student involvement in curriculum development through formalized feedback structures such as advisory boards.	Student feedback is already incorporated through existing mechanisms at the Department and School level. The institution will continue to strengthen these processes, ensuring that PhD students' input is effectively considered in curriculum development.	Choose level of compliance:
Diversify assessment methods to include more project-based, collaborative, and peer-assessed approaches, catering to diverse learning preferences.	The programme already includes diverse assessment methods, such as group presentations and journal clubs, which are actively implemented to enhance collaboration and critical thinking. These approaches address diverse learning styles without requiring changes to the existing curriculum.	Choose level of compliance:
Strengthen support for international students, offering preparatory courses or language support to ensure readiness for the programme.	Support for international students is ensured during the admission process, where only applicants meeting the required academic standards are accepted. Post-admission, the institution provides introductory seminars and assigns peer mentors to facilitate	Choose level of compliance:

	integration into the academic and cultural environment.	
Enhance practical training resources to give students more hands-on experience, particularly in labs and fieldwork.	Practical training for PhD students is a core component of their academic journey, often integrated into their experimental work within the university's laboratories or through collaborative projects with industry partners. This approach ensures that students acquire hands-on experience that is closely aligned with their specific research objectives, enhancing their skills and preparing them for future professional challenges.	Choose level of compliance:
Formalize faculty feedback processes to provide structured, ongoing support for teaching staff development, especially for new hires.	Faculty feedback and development are already managed through established processes at the Department and School level, including peer reviews and mentoring for new hires. These mechanisms ensure consistent support and professional growth for faculty members.	Choose level of compliance:
Expand the focus on non-academic career paths for doctoral students by integrating industry-relevant skills and establishing partnerships with industry stakeholders.	The programme already emphasizes non-academic career paths by leveraging existing industry collaborations to provide opportunities for students to develop relevant skills. Workshops, guest lectures, and partnerships with industry stakeholders further prepare PhD students for diverse career options.	

C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Dr Myrtani Pieri	PhD Programme Coordinator	
Prof. Eleni Andreou	HoD Life Sciences	
Prof. Kyriakos Felekkis	Dean of School of Life and Health Sciences	
Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	
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Date: 16 January 2025

