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Date: Date.

# External Evaluation Report

(Joint - conventional -  
face-to-face programme of  
study)

- **Higher Education Institution:**  
University of Cyprus
- **Collaborative Institution(s):**  
University of Athens
- **Town:** Nicosia
- **School/Faculty (if applicable):** School/Faculty
- **Department/ Sector:** Department of Psychology
- **Programme of study- Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)**

**In Greek:**

Programme Name

**In English:**

MA School Guidance & Counselling

(140 ECTS credits)

- **Language(s) of instruction:** Greek
- **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 2021 [L.136(I)/2015 – L.132(I)/2021].**

## A. Introduction

The panel were satisfied with the papers provided in advance of the site visit. These were comprehensive and provided in good time. The staff responsible for the programme, and University quality assurance arrangements are to be congratulated on the documentation. The panel had access to a full video recorded lecture, and also images of the premises.

The panel undertook a full day visit on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2021, conducted online via Zoom. The panel were impressed by the co-operation and hospitality they received, and are grateful for the patience of the host institution staff and students in explaining their programme and its context in Cyprus.

During the visit, the panel had access to a range of University of Cyprus staff, including senior managers, the programme team, library and administrative support staff. They also had access to students and alumni of the programme. Notwithstanding difficulties in connection on the day the panel were pleased that a representative of the Ministry of Education had sought to make herself available to support the work of the committee. Representation of the partner institution, the University of Athens was limited.

The panel were made aware of broad considerations that shape the provision:

- The programme is fully delivered in the Greek language. This has great benefits for local contextual relevance, but places strong constraints on the ability of the University to serve the Turkish Cypriot community, or to expand to an international audience. This is kept under review but currently no change is anticipated.
- The University is young but has rapidly developed a strong reputation. There is good evidence of impressive international links, notably with Europe.
- The Department of Psychology has notable strengths in its academic staffing profile and in its research performance.

Our work has been easy due to the willingness of all participants to be transparent and clear about the strengths and weaknesses of the programme. The panel would like to express its gratitude for this support.



## B. External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>University</i>
<b>Peter Robertson (chair)</b>	Professor	Edinburgh Napier University
<b>Athina Skotara</b>	Student Representative	Open University of Cyprus
<b>Maria do Ceu Taveira</b>	Associate Professor	University of Minho
<b>Jerome Rossier</b>	Professor	University of Lausanne

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

### **Sub-areas**

- 1.1 Policy for quality assurance**
- 1.2 Design, approval, on-going monitoring and review**
- 1.3 Public information**
- 1.4 Information management**

### **Findings**

- The internal quality assurance procedure involves supervision by a board of directors of four members and seems appropriate. The formative procedure of course assessment is systematic. The external quality assurance processes used by the board of directors include benchmarking with similar provision across the world, in North America (where many professors have been trained) or Europe. This is important to ensure that the qualification offered by this programme will be recognized in other countries.
- Each course and each professor are assessed every six months by students using a mandatory online questionnaire. Professors are also invited to self-assess their performance. This procedure seems standard and appropriate.
- In general, the internal and external quality insurance procedures are appropriate.

### **Strengths**

- The department has put in place a student and alumni feedback policy on a semester or annual basis. These people's views are considered, data collected and discussed during regular internal conferences between academic and administrative university staff.
- Student evaluation is mandatory and takes place two weeks prior to the commencement of the examinations. Alumni evaluation response rate is quite high, reaching 90% approximately.
- There is a structured internal quality review process involving students, staff and important external stakeholders, such as the Department of School Guidance and Counselling, which operates under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth.
- Appropriate procedures for dealing with students' complaints regarding the process of teaching and learning are in place.

### **Areas of improvement and recommendations**

- There is no system to ensure that module designs are kept up to date and under review, instead this is left to the module leader. Module descriptors appear not to have been updated

for several years. They should be reviewed and updated.

- 140 credits are required to complete the programme. This is above European norms for Masters programmes (90-120 ECTS credits), although the number of credits for the Master thesis and for the practicum are in line with what can be seen in other similar programmes. Reducing to 120 credits should be considered in the interests of equity and managing student workload, perhaps by removing an optional module.
- Further information regarding study and work life balance as well as graduate employment information should be communicated more effectively to prospective students via university's website (e.g. part-time mode, workload per course etc.)
- The programme is mainly focused on public sector. There is an indication of a trend towards private sector, which may have an impact on future employment prospects, so this should be kept under review.

**Please select what is appropriate for each of the following sub-areas:**

Sub-area		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
1.1	Policy for quality assurance	Compliant
1.2	Design, approval, on-going monitoring and review	Partially compliant
1.3	Public information	Compliant
1.4	Information management	Compliant

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

### **Sub-areas**

- 2.1 Process of teaching and learning and student-centred teaching methodology**
- 2.2 Practical training**
- 2.3 Student assessment**

### **Findings**

- Teaching combines didactic and active approaches to learning, offering the students the opportunity to participate in the learning process and to put their knowledge into practice, for example, through the use of case studies, simulations and practicums.
- There are several procedures that ensure the students' academic and social development needs are met throughout the program. For example, from the beginning of the programme, each student is assigned an academic advisor, to whom the student can turn in case of difficulty or need for clarification or support. Additionally, the university offers a series of supporting systems (in financial, health care, social and academic areas), as well as good facilities, and library and administrative services that seem appropriate to the students' needs and to the learning and research challenges raised by the program.
- There is evidence of a concern to teach models and techniques of intervention in the school career guidance and counselling field based on theory and empirical evidence
- Practical and theoretical studies are interconnected in the program, by offering courses on emerging problems in the school context and related effective intervention methods and techniques, and by offering a practicum course, for application of theoretical learning in a real context, supported with supervision.
- The programme evidences a strong investment in the organization of practical training, supporting achievement of planned learning outcomes by the students and meeting the needs of the stakeholders of the educational system.
- Assessments are composed at least by two different components. Assessment components are adequate, demonstrating the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved. There is some variety in assessment types. Assessments are published at the start of the module/semester.

### **Strengths**

- The programme incorporates a practicum component of 500 hours of supervised work in educational contexts (public and private schools). There is a balance between theory and practice. Students referred repeatedly to the importance of the practicum.

- In the practicum courses, the programme implements a strong supervision scheme of the students by faculty members and professionals in the field of counselling and career guidance (e.g., regular monitoring and feedback procedures, individual and peer group supervision sessions, use of a reflection journal by the students, seminars on applied topics).
- The programme has a good organization of practical training practice, establishing good relationships and collaboration agreements with public and private entities and educational professionals. Practical elements contribute to student employability. In fact, most of the students find a job very quickly and in the field of their studies (93%). This is a very positive sign of the quality of the programme and suggests that the training is in line with the requirements of the labour market. Assessment of practical learning is detailed and adequate.
- The programme contributes to the construction of an adequate professional identity of school and career counsellors, ensuring the development of technical, transferable, and ethical and deontological skills.
- The programme extends to the surrounding community, transferring knowledge and testing models and practices, in a collaborative scheme, fostering the foundations for the construction of practical research communities
- The inter-institutional and international nature of the programme, promotes mobility of students and faculty, intercultural knowledge at and a basis for international scientific, academic and professional collaborations
- Students identify with the 'scientist-practitioner' model adopted by the programme, valuing learning the role of professionals based on theory and empirical evidence
- There are regular procedures of formative evaluation of the programme, by coordinators and teachers.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Module descriptors need to be reviewed and updated. Assessment information is inconsistently presented on the module descriptors. In many cases inadequate information is provided to inform students and staff of the assessment requirements (e.g. nature of the task; weighting; timing; size of the task in word count or time; purpose of the assessment). Also, the recommended readings for most modules are out of date, with few sources less than 10 years old being listed. It is recommended that all teaching staff review and update their module descriptors, and hold an internal scrutiny event to share them with colleagues on the programme for their feedback and to encourage consistency.
- Career development and vocational guidance are less salient in the teaching, when compared with educational psychology topics, despite the former being a hallmark of the identity of the programme and the professional roles students go on to. It is suggested that the programme design is reviewed, and consideration given to rebalancing the content to better represent topics such as career theory, assessment, career education, career counselling, employment/labour markets, information provision etc. This may mean developing additional modules on

these themes. The publications provided by the Network for Innovation in Career Counselling in Europe (NICE) may prove helpful in identifying the detailed learning requirements:

<http://www.nice-network.eu/pub/>

- A number of non-compulsory courses are on topics not directly linked with school counselling, vocational guidance, career development/counselling issues. We understand that this list of options reflects the competences of the academic staff, but we recommend it is reviewed for relevance.
- The topics of supervision and consultation are less present in the learning topics and outcomes of the programme. We suggest these topics be integrated and assume more visibility in the program. These topics could also be offered in some of the seminars offered to the practicum school supervisors.
- Current practicum arrangement should be retained and opportunities to offer additional diverse practical experience should be explored.

Please select what is appropriate for each of the following sub-areas:

Sub-area		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
2.1	Process of teaching and learning and student-centred teaching methodology	Compliant
2.2	Practical training	Compliant
2.3	Student assessment	Compliant

### 3. Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

<u>Sub-areas</u>
3.1 Teaching staff recruitment and development
3.2 Teaching staff number and status
3.3 Synergies of teaching and research

#### Findings

The programme draws on a good range of diverse staff across both the University of Cyprus and the University of Athens, including a number of senior and experienced academics. Several of the



teaching team have studied in the USA, and as a result the American guidance counsellor model tends to inform the programme design more than European models.

### Strengths

- The programme has contributions from staff with impressive credentials. There is strength in depth in fields related to educational psychology. This makes an option-rich programme possible and enables students to develop interests that may take them towards teaching or counselling/pastoral care.
- The faculty includes academics with extensive teaching and research background in the knowledge areas covered by the programme, who are teaching courses and subjects in their specialty area. Several of the faculty have experiences of teaching abroad. In addition, some teachers also have extensive experience in professional practice, in the domains of counselling and guidance.
- The Department has an impressive research performance, and this is further strengthened by being able to draw on expertise in Athens. A good number of the teaching staff are research active, and this will inform their teaching.
- There are opportunities to transition to doctoral studies in the department. Student representatives were able to describe opportunities offered to them during their MA programme, that could facilitate access to a research career.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

The programme relies on non-tenured staff for some crucial elements of delivery. It is advisable to build academic strength in areas related to career development and vocational guidance.

**Please select what is appropriate for each of the following sub-areas:**

Sub-area		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
3.1	Teaching staff recruitment and development	Compliant
3.2	Teaching staff number and status	Compliant
3.3	Synergies of teaching and research	Compliant

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

##### **Sub-areas**

- 4.1 Student admission, processes and criteria**
- 4.2 Student progression**
- 4.3 Student recognition**
- 4.4 Student certification**

##### **Findings**

To be eligible for an enrolment, applicants must hold a bachelor's degree from a recognized higher education institution, in a field directly or indirectly related to the programme. No official minimum threshold in the final grade of the degree acquisition is put in place. Additionally, applicants are invited for an interview upon the evaluation of the documentation they provide during their application.

University student regulations are communicated to students clearly and proactively and are also available online. Learning outcomes, assessment criteria, final exam regulations and final grade calculation methods are communicated to students through the specific syllabus and at the introductory session of each module, so that they are aware of their tasks and obligations throughout their academic semester/year.

The programme applies the recognition of ECTS. There is a general university policy for evaluating transfer of credit / recognition of prior studies requests. The department also participates in the Erasmus+ programme, providing student mobility opportunities for both studies and placements, and appropriate recognition of studies/practicum completed abroad are in place.

Certification procedures are in place and students are informed about them in advance and accordingly. Furthermore, the University issues the Europass Diploma Supplement document, upon student's request.

##### **Strengths**

- Admission requirements are clear and transparent.
- The degree is accredited, and complies with both Cypriot and Greek regulation for the conduct of the "School and Career Counsellor Profession".
- There is a general university policy for evaluating transfer of credit / recognition of prior studies requests

##### **Areas of improvement and recommendations**

- The programme is not broadly recognized nor accredited by international scientific organizations and/or professional bodies. The potential for doing so should be reviewed.
- Policies for credit transfer and the recognition of informal and non-formal prior learning are not clear as they would specifically be applied to this programme.

- Prospective students should be proactively informed about workload, employment and recognition prospects.
- Although drop-out rates are very low, the department should put in place a specific method to proactively handle such cases.

Please select what is appropriate for each of the following sub-areas:

Sub-area		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
4.1	Student admission, processes and criteria	Compliant
4.2	Student progression	Compliant
4.3	Student recognition	Compliant
4.4	Student certification	Compliant

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

### Sub-areas

- 5.1 Teaching and Learning resources**
- 5.2 Physical resources**
- 5.3 Human support resources**
- 5.4 Student support**

### Findings

- All administrative support mechanisms are in accordance with Cypriot and Greek laws and standards. Student support covers the needs of quite a diverse population.
- Information regarding additional student support services are communicated to them both in person by visiting the university's administrative premises and online through the University's website. Furthermore, orientation and career fairs are organized in annual basis.

### Strengths

- The University of Cyprus offers a variety of additional administration support services at institutional level. More specifically:
- Free psychological and counselling services to all students through the Psychological Support Centre
- Free personal, professional and career guidance and placement and employment services to all students through the Career Centre

- Free library support and guidance services through a series of seminars regarding how to use online library tools, plagiarism, and literature review.
- Free soft skills development seminars through the University's Teaching and Learning Centre
- Special needs support measures are being applied when needed.
- A code of ethics, as well as a complaint and harassment policy are put in place and monitored by the University's Office of Inclusivity, Quality and Diversity is responsible.
- A variety of study and placement abroad opportunities is offered to students through the Erasmus Office.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Further attention should be given to enhancing online student support services vis-à-vis COVID-19
- Although there are many active bilateral Erasmus+ agreements, the international dimension of the programme is limited to exchanges between Greece and Cyprus. Opportunities to welcome Erasmus/international students coming from countries other than Greece, should be explored. A suggestion would be to offer specific modules in the form of independent project-based study so that non-Greek students could be able to complete them with a personalized pedagogical approach.

**Please select what is appropriate for each of the following sub-areas:**

Sub-area		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
5.1	Teaching and Learning resources	Compliant
5.2	Physical resources	Compliant
5.3	Human support resources	Compliant
5.4	Student support	Compliant

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

**Sub-areas**

- 6.1 Selection criteria and requirements
- 6.2 Proposal and dissertation
- 6.3 Supervision and committees

Please select what is appropriate for each of the following sub-areas:

Sub-area		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
6.1	Selection criteria and requirements	Not applicable
6.2	Proposal and dissertation	Not applicable
6.3	Supervision and committees	Not applicable

## 7. Eligibility (ALL ESG)

### **Sub-areas**

**7.1 Legal framework and cooperation agreement**

**7.2 The joint programme**

**7.3 Added value of the joint programme**

### Findings

This programme is based on a collaboration between two recognized universities. All the appropriate accreditation and approval processes appear to be correctly observed.

### Strengths

The partnership between The University of Cyprus and the University of Athens enriches the programme in two main ways. Firstly, it enables a wider range of modules to be offered. Academic staff strengths in each university can be made available to students through a selection of optional modules. Secondly, it facilitates mobility of staff and students between Cyprus and Greece.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

Academic strengths in the two universities could be more complementary e.g. if one university develops its capacity around teaching career development and vocational guidance.

The growth of online and blended learning teaching methods during the pandemic may offer potential to strengthen access to teaching remotely. This may extend access for students and facilitate the availability of new topics or learning opportunities.

**Please select what is appropriate for each of the following sub-areas:**

<b>Sub-area</b>		<b><i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i></b>
<b>7.1</b>	Legal framework and cooperation agreement	Compliant
<b>7.2</b>	The joint programme	Compliant
<b>7.3</b>	Added value of the joint programme	Compliant

## Conclusions and final remarks

The programme successfully serves a niche market by preparing educators, guidance and counselling professionals for work in schools. Students are broadly satisfied with their learning experience on the programme, and the opportunities that the qualification opens up for them.

Overall strengths in the provision include:

1. There is an impressive academic staffing profile, particularly in relation to educational psychology and related topics.
2. Student satisfaction and student retention are good.
3. Practicums seem to be very successful and promote employability. The relationship with the Ministry of Education supports this. Student progression into relevant employment is good.
4. The joint programme arrangement between the two universities enriches the range of teaching available, and facilitates mobility between Cyprus and Greece.

There are two main areas where we recommend improvements:

1. Module leaders should be required to review and update their module descriptors and ensure that required readings are current. An internal scrutiny event for all relevant teaching staff may help to ensure consistency in module design expectations, and awareness of programme needs.
2. The current programme modular design reflects the expertise and preferences of teaching staff, and does not fully meet the needs of the programme and the profession. The programme design should be reviewed, so that:
  - a. Career development and vocational guidance are more strongly represented
  - b. Consideration is given to reducing the overall number of credits to 120
  - c. Consideration is given to the number and relevance of optional modules.



### C. Signatures of the EEC

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>
<b>Peter Robertson</b>	
<b>Maria do Céu Taveira</b>	
<b>Jérôme Rossier</b>	
<b>Athina Skotara</b>	
Click to enter Name	
Click to enter Name	

**Date:** 21/12/2021