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Date: 28th March 2022

External Evaluation Report (Conventional-face-to-face programme of study)

- **Higher Education Institution:**
University of Nicosia
- **Town:** Nicosia
- **School/Faculty (if applicable):** School of Humanities and Social Sciences
- **Department/ Sector:** Department of Social Sciences
- **Programme of study- Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)**
In Greek: Συμβουλευτική Ψυχολογία (2,5 ε΄τη / 150 ECTS, Μάστερ)
In English: Msc Counseling Psychology (2,5 years / 150 ECTS, Master of Science)
- **Language(s) of instruction:** English
- **Programme’s status:** Evaluated and accredited by SEKAP/ECPU
- **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 Msc in Counseling Psychology offered by the University of Nicosia is a highly international program adhering to the Bologna and the EHEA directives for HI.

The EEC members received the appropriate documentation to assess the Master design and development and were ready to discuss some issues and doubts during the visit on the 9th of March. The online site visit started with a meeting with the Rector - Head of the Institution and the Vice Rector of Academic Affairs – who shortly presented the mission, vision and figures of the Institution followed by a meeting with the members of the Internal Evaluation Committee.

Through the different sessions, the EEC had the opportunity to hear and discuss with the teaching staff, the students and the administrative staff. All the participants shared the presentations and, when required, complementary information requested by the EEC.

All the sessions undergo as expected and were highly informative to clarify the documentation. The comments and recommendations included in this report resulted from the combination of the received documentation and the online discussions during the visit and were consensually agreed by the EEC members after the visit.

B. External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>University</i>
Montserrat Castelló	Full professor	Universitat Ramon LLull
Christina Athanasiades	Associate professor	Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece
Stephanos Vassilopoulos	Full professor	University of Patras, Greece
Patricia Bijttebier	Full professor	K.U. Leuven
Maria Nikou	Private Practitioner	Independent
Maria Christoforou	Student	University of Cyprus

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

1.1 Policy for quality assurance

The quality assurance procedure is governed by the general quality assurance regulations of the University of Nicosia. Appropriate procedures seem to be in place.

There is a clear pedagogical support structure. This offers additional quality assurances.

1.2 Design, approval, on-going monitoring and review

The MSc Program in Counselling Psychology was developed based on the educational guidelines proposed by European (EuroPsy), British (BPS) and American (APA) professional organisations in Psychology. It also meets the legal requirements of the Republic of Cyprus for registration in the Registry of Professional Psychologists with a specialisation in Counselling Psychology.

The program consists of 150 ECTS, of which 100 ECTS come from compulsory courses, 35 ECTS from compulsory practicum and 15 ECTS come from electives (students choose either a Master's thesis or two additional courses on child-topics). The program has substantial overlap with another master's program of the department, i.e. the M.Sc. in Clinical Psychology (180 ECTS). In the compulsory part of the program, seven courses (52,5 ECTS) overlap completely. Three other courses (22,5 ECTS) seem to be 'light' or less advanced versions of courses in the Clinical Psychology program. Only four courses (30 ECTS) cover content that clearly differs from the content of the Clinical Psychology program (couple and family counselling, counselling practice, positive psychology, career counseling). Courses such as on career-oriented personality

assessment, and advocacy for social justice, which are as well central to the specialty of Counseling Psychology (see <https://apps.apa.org/CommentCentral2/attachments/Counseling%20Psychology%20petition.pdf> and <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0011000018755512>), are missing from the curriculum of the program. Given the legislation of Cyprus where independent practice begins at the level of a Master's degree, it is important to address this gap for securing the meeting of the corresponding counselling needs (e.g. social advocacy for refugees) of the people in Cyprus. According to the documentation, there is ongoing monitoring regarding the structure and the content of the MSc Program based on the students' needs as well as the needs of the local community in counselling services.

During the visit, the staff ensured us that the courses are regularly updated with the latest innovations. However, the documentation does not reflect this adequately. Looking at the course descriptions, some choices about content seem to be somewhat 'outdated', e.g., strong emphasis on theoretical perspectives and their associated therapeutic approaches (rather than evidence-based interventions targeting - often transdiagnostic - mechanisms) and focus on DSM-based disorders rather than dimensionally conceived psychological problems. Also, some of the required textbooks are quite old.

1.3. Public Information

The University of Nicosia website provides clear and accurate information on different aspects of the program: the profile, learning outcomes, academic path, semester breakdown, faculty profiles, career prospects, assessment policy and graduation criteria. Prospective applicants can click on relevant links to access details of individual courses. Staff profiles are clear, and almost all include a brief CV, which is useful for applicants. Only the section on admission criteria is blank, which is rather critical for candidates and transparency.

1.4. Information Management

During the visit, we were presented with relevant information about the number of applicants, accepted students, graduates, etc. However, accurate information on students' progress during studies and their career prospects after graduation was missing.

Strengths

- Clear information about most aspects of the program is available in the public domain, through the Institutions' website. This point was also explicitly raised by students and graduates of the program we met.
- KESY is a clear strength of the programme and allows students to access a group of people who they can support while developing their skills, under the supervision of trained counseling psychologists.
- Academic staff are appropriately trained, demonstrate continued engagement in research, have a national and international profile, and there is good evidence that they offer considerable support for their students, which the students fully appreciate.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The EEC is of the view that having a master's thesis as compulsory part of the master's program is indispensable to meet international standards. We recommend the program team reconsider this matter.
- The EEC considers that it would be good to better articulate the specific profile of the Counselling program (in terms of how it differs from the Clinical Psychology program) to facilitate prospective students' decision to apply for either of both, to foster a strong counseling psychology identity for the students and graduates of the program, and to maintain the integrity of the specialty of counseling psychology by preventing misunderstanding and/or misrepresentation of the qualification.
- Objectives and Learning outcomes of Advanced Statistical & Research Methods 1 programme has a focus on quantitative and qualitative methods (including ethnographic methods and focus groups), but the course content does not appear to have any qualitative methods topics. Advanced Statistical & Research Methods 2 course appears to be even more heavily weighted towards quantitative methods. In fact, through many parts of the curriculum, we noticed a preponderance of quantitative approaches to qualitative approaches (e.g., in Thesis 1: course purpose and objectives, and learning outcomes, make reference to 'hypotheses'; recommended textbook is for SPSS – same for Thesis 2).



During the visit we learned that staff is aware of this and has already increased attention to qualitative methods (including a lecture on it, encouraging students to choose qualitative methods for their research activities etc.). Additional staff could be considered for this purpose, as the expertise does not seem to be represented in the current staff.

- In addition, staff could enhance the management of the information regarding the program and maybe ask for additional administrative support. A MSc program like this, with a rather large number of students each year, justifies the need for extra administrative support.



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

Sub-area		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
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

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

Sub-areas

1.2 Process of teaching and learning and student-centred teaching methodology

1.3 Practical training

1.4 Student assessment

Findings

2.1. Process of teaching and learning and student-centred learning methodology

We saw and heard good evidence that the teaching was student-centred, and there were good mechanisms in place to solicit student feedback. Individual as well as group meetings with students are regular during the academic year on different occasions (courses, evaluation for practicum, supervision, etc.). Students are encouraged to express their needs and they are being treated as active learners. At the same time, their demands on extra activities are seriously considered (this was mentioned by students as well).

2.2. Practical training

Students have the opportunity to engage in practical training via KESY, under the supervision of trained counseling psychologists. Additional placements are found from outside the University. Where external placements are found, there is a contract/agreement with external providers, and regular check-in with course staff to ensure that learning objectives are met. We recognised that there were some limitations in terms of possible placements for international students who do not master the Greek language. These students more often get delayed in finishing their practicum and graduating.

2.3. Student assessment

This appears mainly via examinations and coursework/presentations and is in line with the learning objectives for each course. Each course is required to use at least two different assessment methods (e.g., continuous assessment + final exam). Plus, there is continuous evaluation of students regarding their readiness for involvement in practicum and direct

psychological services to the public. However, there is no evidence regarding how this continuous assessment and formative feedback is provided and guaranteed. Documentation regarding assessment was misleading in some courses and formative assessment remains unclear in others. During the visit, we learnt some aspects of the assessment were inaccurate in the documentation.

Strengths

- The programme presents a good ratio of the student per class in relation to the number of allocated teaching hours.
- Student welfare: We saw evidence of good support systems available to all students from within the university. Speaking to the students, it was clear that the academic staff were very approachable and supportive.
- The structure and organisation of the practicum through KESY and other placements (at other agencies) is a real strengths. There are many opportunities for practising in different contexts and groups of people with constant supervision by trained and experienced supervisors. Also, it seems that there is good monitoring of the process of practicum at all stages.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Based on the documentation, the expected format of the thesis seems to be somewhat 'old school'. It would be recommendable to revise it and encourage students to consider revising the thesis structure – to determine whether an 'journal article' style output is acceptable to the University, because this is a useful skill to have for counseling psychologists), and may help add to staff research CVs. We did, however, note that some students were successful in publishing their thesis as journal articles, which is commendable. Therefore, this recommendation should be considered as a means to improve the scale of such successes and provide students with an additional skill (preparing a manuscript for publication) that is useful for the profession.

- There appears to be different assessment formats, but exams and written work appear dominant. We would encourage staff to consider other assessment formats also (e.g., creation of video resources, poster presentation, public engagement activities, etc.) and provide regular formative feedback to the students regarding their learning and progress within each of the courses.

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	Partially Compliant

3. Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

Sub-areas

- 3.1 Teaching staff recruitment and development**
- 3.2 Teaching staff number and status**
- 3.3 Synergies of teaching and research**

Findings

3.1 Teaching staff recruitment and development

Teaching staff have the required expertise and commitment to teaching the various courses. Many have had academic and/or clinical qualifications from different countries and experience working in other universities (internationally). This is an asset because it allows them to bring the best of different systems, methods, experiences to develop the current courses. There are development opportunities for teaching staff provided with the university, and some opportunities for continued professional development from outside the university also.

3.2 Teaching staff number and status

Teaching staff are well respected by the students, and they are perceived to be approachable and responsive to student needs. They are a clear strength of the programme. The staff-student ratio is good. We felt that staff were suitably qualified to provide expert input into various courses. We were not certain about who amongst the staff members would be providing the teaching and supervision of qualitative methods. Based on the research papers in staff CVs, though there is expertise in the teaching staff, additional input may be required to cover this topic (e.g., in the form of visiting lecturers, adjunct staff, etc.)

3.3. Synergies of teaching and research

Teaching staff are research active, which is a major credit for the course and recognised by students. The department offers some opportunities for staff to engage in research, through research time being bought out. There appear to be some synergies between teaching and research, though not clear evidence was provided to assess them.

Strengths

- 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 the teaching staff, praising the excellent quality level of their lectures
- The staff underlined a cultural shift in the University policy towards the management of excessive teaching workload, which enhanced their motives and resources for research.
- Staff-student ratio is good.
- The programme's coordinator is well equipped for the task.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Staff could be released further to conduct research by having some of their administrative tasks completed by local administrative support teams.
- Research could also be enhanced by means of revising the thesis consideration (compulsory instead of elective) and genre (close to a research paper instead of a monography), and thus, having more students engaged in collaborative applied research activities with their supervisors.
- We encourage the improvement of the research activity of the teaching staff.



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

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

Sub-areas

- 3.1 Student admission, processes and criteria
- 3.2 Student progression
- 3.3 Student recognition
- 3.4 Student certification

Findings

4.1 Student admission, processes and criteria

The admission process and criteria are clearly documented (although not visible at the website). There appears to be a transparent process by which admission decisions are made: preselection of applicants who meet the criteria by the admission office, followed by interviews at the department do to determine the final selection among them (max=15).

4.2 Student progression

The student progression criteria are clear. The Practicum Readiness Evaluation ensures that students are safe and ready to proceed to this stage of their training. Examination of Professional Readiness assesses the trainee's competence and readiness to function as an independent professional counselling psychologist. There is a system of academic and clinical probation for students who do not make the required grades for progression. There appear to be relevant and required processes and tools to collect and monitor student progress.

It seems also, according to the students and graduates' feedback, that there is an easy transition phase to the labour market, since most students are employed right after their graduation. Plus, they feel confident with their qualifications and have a sense of personal growth and empowerment as well.

4.3 Student recognition

Credits (ECTS) are clearly marked for each course. According to the University's Internal Regulations, credits earned at other accredited colleges and universities or in accredited programs are transferable to the University of Nicosia. A transcript is required.

4.4 Student certification

There is a description of the certification process in terms of number of practicum (face-to-face) therapy hours for the registration to both the national register of Counseling psychologists, but also for the optional top-up for EuroPsy accreditation.

Strengths

- The admission process and criteria are clearly documented.
- Student progression criteria are clear.
- Students are well supported and taken care of

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- In spite of the fact that since the time of application, the criteria with respect to English language proficiency have become more stringent, the new criteria (e.g., internet-based TOEFL ≥ 80) are still at the lower side compared to international standards.
- According to some of the students' concerns about practical sessions, it would be worth considering the knowledge of the Greek language as one of the relevant merits in the admission process

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

4. Learning resources and student support (ESG 1.6)

Sub-areas

4.1 **Teaching and Learning resources**

4.2 **Physical resources**

4.3 **Human support resources**

4.4 **Student support**

Findings

5.1 Teaching and Learning resources

We saw evidence of student-centred teaching and learning. The resources appeared appropriate and adequate. Computer facilities appeared good.

The staff mentioned that the University invested a lot of money in technology and customer service, especially during the pandemic, which will be an asset for all departments and programs in the following years. There is also a student portal that allows students and faculty to handle their learning and other procedures remotely. All resources appeared fit for purpose.

5.2 Physical resources

The physical resources are excellent and appear to be modern and functional. The EEC also notes that the esthetic quality of buildings and premises is at the highest level.

5.3 Human support resources

Support services appear to be adequately staffed and the students we met did not raise any concerns. There are provisions for students with special needs. Assistance is offered at an individual level. The administrative staff mentioned that there are also procedures for students' complaints, regarding courses, communication with faculty and sexual harassment.

5.4 Student support

This is one of the real strengths of the programme. It was clear from the documentation that there is considerable support for students from the wider university, and this was also attested by the

students with whom we spoke, who were clear in their appreciation for the teaching staff who offered a lot of support and room for personal development. In addition, there are many informative seminars and presentations during the academic year, especially for newcomers. Based on the evidence, we were left with no concerns that students were well supported.

Strengths

- Good student support given the good staff-student ratio and dedicated staff.
- Excellent state-of-the-art physical resources/infrastructure.
- Good communication and dissemination procedures with all members of the academia (i.e., weekly news-letter, live chat, telephone, etc.).

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- It might be good to decentralise some of the administrative/support services according to the needs of this particular programme

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

C. Conclusions and final remarks

Overall, the Msc Counseling Psychology Programme satisfied the EEC in its mission, objectives, processes and general commitment to a worthy area of study, that is certainly needed both locally, regionally and internationally, given the increasing need for holistic counselling services of high quality. The EEC wishes to commend the programme's structure and organization of the practicum, as well as its approach to student welfare and the existing infrastructure. In addition, the academic staff teaching competence, research profile and publication record appear to be another asset of the programme.

However, the EEC considers both the status of the thesis (elective instead of required) and its expected format (a monograph instead of a 'journal article' style) somewhat old-fashioned, that prevents the majority of students from engaging in highly quality research activities with their supervisors. Furthermore, the EEC noticed a substantial overlap between this programme and another master programme in Clinical Psychology within the same department and a corresponding gap in the content pertaining specifically to Counseling Psychology that should be addressed in future revisions of the specific content areas covered by individual courses (these are commented on elsewhere in this report).

The EEC strongly recommends that the programme's consideration of the thesis, overall focus and corresponding contents are adjusted in line with the specific observations presented in this report. Furthermore, the EEC concludes that this should be accomplished before the next admission of new students.



D. Signatures of the EEC

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Montserrat Castelló	
Christina Athanasiades	
Stephanos Vassilopoulos	
Patricia Bijttebier	
Maria Nikou	
Maria Christoforou	

Date: 28th March 2022

Signature Certificate

Reference number: ZCXUS-DRYCT-QF7WC-R4G9U

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