

Doc. 300.1.1/3

Date: Date.

External Evaluation Report

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

- **Higher Education Institution:**
University of Nicosia
- **Collaborative Institutions:**
University of Padova (Italy)
University of Torino (Italy)
Catholic University of Uruguay (Uruguay)
- **Town:** Nicosia
- **School/Faculty (if applicable):** School of Law
- **Department/ Sector:** Department of Law
- **Programme of study- Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)**

In Greek:

Θρησκεία, Πολιτισμός και Δημόσια Ζωή (3
ακαδημαϊκά έτη, 180 ECTS, Διδακτορικό)

In English:

Religion, Culture and Public Life (ReCuPL) (3 academic
years, 180 ECTS, Doctoral Degree (PhD))

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

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].

- **Programme’s status:** New
- **Concentrations (if any):**

In Greek: Concentrations

In English: Concentrations

A. Introduction

The EEC (see under B, for details as to its composition) visited the University of Nicosia on 27 May 2024 for an onsite visit as part of its evaluation of the newly proposed 3-year Joint PhD Programme entitled "Religion, Culture and Public Life" (ReCuPL), to be carried out together with the University of Padova, University of Torino, and Catholic University of Uruguay.

On this site visit, the EEC met among others, with the University of Nicosia's Rector, Vice Rector for Academic Affairs, the relevant school's (i.e. the Law School) Head of Department and Deputy Head, as well as the academic coordinators for the newly proposed programme. The latter included Dr. Nikos Koumoutzis, programme coordinator on behalf of the University of Nicosia (and other members from the coordinating committee), as well as the overall academic coordinator from the coordinative partner Prof. Giuseppe Giordan of the University of Padova.

In addition to university governors and programme coordinators, the EEC also met with (prospective) programme teaching staff, PhD graduates from a previous joint PhD programme in which the University of Nicosia was involved, as well as administrative staff ranging from library staff to the director of Academic Affairs.

The EEC also inspected the campus, visiting lecture halls and general campus facilities.

Prior to the onsite visit, the EEC members received the application material which they studied and pre-discussed in an online meeting. The EEC also met with CYQAA by way of briefing regarding the site visit; the CYQAA also more generally facilitated the EEC's needs to access to (additional) information or requests concerning the onsite visit.

The present report has been drafted by the EEC after the onsite visit.

B. External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>University</i>
Marat Shterin	Professor of Sociology	King's College, University of London
Uta Balbier	Professor of History	St Ann's College, University of Oxford
Jeroen Temperman	Professor of International Law	Erasmus University Rotterdam
Ioanna Chrysovitsioti	Student	University of Cyprus



C. Guidelines on content and structure of the report

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

1.1 Policy for quality assurance

Standards

- *Policy for quality assurance of the programme of study:*
 - *has a formal status and is publicly available*
 - *supports the organisation of the quality assurance system through appropriate structures, regulations and processes*
 - *supports teaching, administrative staff and students to take on their responsibilities in quality assurance*
 - *ensures academic integrity and freedom and is vigilant against academic fraud*
 - *guards against intolerance of any kind or discrimination against the students or staff*
 - *supports the involvement of external stakeholders*

1.2 Design, approval, on-going monitoring and review

Standards

- *The programme of study:*
 - *is designed with overall programme objectives that are in line with the institutional strategy and have explicit intended learning outcomes*
 - *is designed by involving students and other stakeholders*
 - *benefits from external expertise*
 - *reflects the four purposes of higher education of the Council of Europe (preparation for sustainable employment, personal development, preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies, the development and maintenance, through teaching, learning and research, of a broad, advanced knowledge base)*
 - *is designed so that it enables smooth student progression*
 - *is designed so that the exams' and assignments' content corresponds to the level of the programme and the number of ECTS*
 - *defines the expected student workload in ECTS*
 - *includes well-structured placement opportunities where appropriate*
 - *is subject to a formal institutional approval process*

- *results in a qualification that is clearly specified and communicated, and refers to the correct level of the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area*
- *is regularly monitored in the light of the latest research in the given discipline, thus ensuring that the programme is up-to-date*
- *is periodically reviewed so that it takes into account the changing needs of society, the students' workload, progression and completion, the effectiveness of procedures for assessment of students, student expectations, needs and satisfaction in relation to the programme*
- *is reviewed and revised regularly involving students and other stakeholders*

1.3 Public information

Standards

- *Regarding the programme of study, clear, accurate, up-to date and readily accessible information is published about:*
 - *selection criteria*
 - *intended learning outcomes*
 - *qualification awarded*
 - *teaching, learning and assessment procedures*
 - *pass rates*
 - *learning opportunities available to the students*
 - *graduate employment information*

1.4 Information management

Standards

- *Information for the effective management of the programme of study is collected, monitored and analysed:*
 - *key performance indicators*
 - *profile of the student population*
 - *student progression, success and drop-out rates*
 - *students' satisfaction with their programmes*
 - *learning resources and student support available*
 - *career paths of graduates*

- *Students and staff are involved in providing and analysing information and planning follow-up activities.*

Findings

The conclusions of the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) are based on the submitted application for the collaborative programme ‘Religion, Culture and Public Life’ and the site visit of one of the participant institutions – University of Nicosia. EEC has found that the underlying policy, design, the principles and processes of quality assurance meet the standards of the European Qualifications Framework and good practice of the leading world universities. The presented material and explanations suggest that the leading participant institutions – Universities of Nicosia and Padova have the necessary regulations, structures and processes in place to assure a high quality of teaching, good working conditions, and wellbeing of teaching staff, students and administrative services. The EEC found that the leadership and staff of these universities are involved in the design, approval and subsequent evaluation of the programme. The University of Nicosia also provided evidence of upholding the principles of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in the institution’s policies regarding academic staff and students. According to the Application, Agreement between the participant institutions and communication during the site visit, the appropriate standards of Higher Education will be maintained by the University of Torino (Italy) and the Catholic University of Montevideo (Uruguay).

The proposed collaborative programme is highly timely and reflects the public need worldwide for multidisciplinary expertise in issues related to religious diversity and its accommodation within political and legal structures and processes, and in the multifaceted expressions of religion in public life in different social contexts. The proposed courses are designed to use the existing academic strengths of participant universities to enable students’ engagement with the world-class research in areas such as religion and law (University and Nicosia) and the sociological aspects of religious freedom (University of Padova). It will also draw on the expertise of invited scholars outside these universities, mainly from Italian and Greek universities. The considerable advantage of the programme is that it provides opportunities for international students to spend a substantial amount of time outside their main host university and benefit from learning resources and other educational and cultural opportunities provided by the participant institutions. EEC also appreciated the evidence of wider public engagement of PhD students at the Department of Law at the University of Nicosia, such as involvement in an academic journal and debates on contemporary issues of religion and society.

Considering the collaborative nature of the programme, the EEC raised question regarding the consistency in the implementation of high standards of policies, administration and everyday academic practices across the participant universities. This concerns the design and delivery of the constituent courses within the proposed programme. This also applies to the principles of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), in particular with the reference to ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, and disability. The committee was reassured during the visit that the present representatives of the two participant universities are aware of the need to secure consistent administration of the programme across universities, such as registration, students’ time abroad, certificates etc. Finally, the EEC would like to see better coordination between the offered courses in terms of the topics and variety of approaches and perspectives as well as engagement with the contemporary debates within academia regarding decolonisation and diversification of the university curricula in social sciences and other disciplines.

Strengths

Collaborative nature of the programme

Enhanced student mobility

Its focus on issues and themes of considerable public importance

Multi- and inter-disciplinarity, diversity of perspectives

Opportunities for PhD students to engage in public debates on a variety of themes

Reasonably good post-PhD career prospects for students

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The EEC would like to see stronger evidence of the processes in place to secure better coordination and consistency between overall policies, processes and implementation of the EDI principles between the participant institutions.

We recommend that the leadership of the RECuPL initiate discussions regarding updating its curricula to engage with the themes raised from the decolonial perspective. This is especially important considering the programme’s overall focus on religion, cultural diversity and public engagement.

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

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

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

<u>Sub-areas</u>
<p>2.1 Process of teaching and learning and student-centred teaching methodology</p> <p>2.2 Practical training</p> <p>2.3 Student assessment</p>

<p>2.1 Process of teaching and learning and student-centred teaching methodology</p> <p><u>Standards</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The process of teaching and learning supports students’ individual and social development.</i>

- *The process of teaching and learning is flexible, considers different modes of delivery, where appropriate, uses a variety of pedagogical methods and facilitates the achievement of planned learning outcomes.*
- *Students are encouraged to take an active role in creating the learning process.*
- *The implementation of student-centered learning and teaching encourages a sense of autonomy in the learner, while ensuring adequate guidance and support from the teacher.*
- *Teaching methods, tools and material used in teaching are modern, effective, support the use of modern educational technologies and are regularly updated.*
- *Mutual respect within the learner-teacher relationship is promoted.*
- *The implementation of student-centred learning and teaching respects and attends to the diversity of students and their needs, enabling flexible learning paths.*
- *Appropriate procedures for dealing with students' complaints regarding the process of teaching and learning are set.*

2.2 Practical training

Standards

- *Practical and theoretical studies are interconnected.*
- *The organisation and the content of practical training, if applicable, support achievement of planned learning outcomes and meet the needs of the stakeholders.*

2.3 Student assessment

Standards

- *Assessment is consistent, fairly applied to all students and carried out in accordance with the stated procedures.*
- *Assessment is appropriate, transparent, objective and supports the development of the learner.*
- *The criteria for the method of assessment, as well as criteria for marking, are published in advance.*
- *Assessment allows students to demonstrate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved. Students are given feedback, which, if necessary, is linked to advice on the learning process.*
- *Assessment, where possible, is carried out by more than one examiner.*
- *A formal procedure for student appeals is in place.*
- *Assessors are familiar with existing testing and examination methods and receive support in developing their own skills in this field.*
- *The regulations for assessment take into account mitigating circumstances.*

Findings

The EEC was impressed by the emphasis put by the HEI and the representative of the University of Padua on the intersections between programme content and social development of the student. The HEI is committed to providing an international education which fosters multicultural values in the student body. Reports by students, who were involved in the PhD programme, which will be succeeded by the programme under consideration, highlighted the value of the international and multicultural education experience on which the new programme will build on.

The PhD programme creatively combines compulsory core modules in the first year, and complementary modules, chosen by the students in their second year of study, with other education components such as conferences, seminars, and summer schools. During the site visit, the EEC felt assured that students could take a leading role in shaping particularly the alternative education components such as seminars and conferences. Representatives from the HEI emphasised throughout their willingness to further develop the programme together with the PhD students involved in it.

Staff at the HEI showed their willingness to develop new courses which address contemporary student interests such as environmental change. The EEC appreciated that they did not just meet staff currently teaching on the programme, but also those who will become involved in the future. This clearly indicated the evolving and dynamic nature of the programme.

Processes to support student development and welfare, address the challenges of EDI, and consider students' complaints are in place.

The programme clearly builds on the HEI's strength in providing distant-learning education.

Strengths

The EEC committee based on elements from the application and on the onsite visit, found many strengths that this program has in terms of teaching:

The University of Nicosia and the University of Padua seem to have experience in distant-learning teaching and appear to be aiming at the creation of international classrooms.

Cutting edge technology, platforms like Moodle, and the fact that every classroom in the university of Nicosia is well equipped for online teaching.

Shared access to library resources.

The compulsory minimum of three-months stay at one of the partner institutions will contribute significantly to the students' social and individual development and enhance their autonomy as persons and researchers.

Students have the opportunity to get actively involved in research and to publish in accredited journals, while taking part in seminars and academic events, which is something that helps the academic career path of students. The launch of the new *Journal of Religion, Culture, and Public Life* seems particularly innovative.

The special value put on the student-supervisor relationship. Former students spoke highly of the value of that relationship. The intended co-supervisor arrangements, according to which co-supervision is always provided by two supervisors based at two different partner institutions, will further strengthen the supervisor-student relationship intellectually and socially and provide a form of additional support mechanism should problems occur.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Based on the programme’s report and the onsite visit, The EEC committee found some areas of improvement:

Even though we were assured that individual supervisors monitor student progress very closely, the EEC would encourage establishing a reporting system which captures progress and potential problems at least every six months; this would protect students’ as well as supervisors’ interests. External examiners may be involved at an earlier stage to decide about students progressing from one year to the next.

There are still many things that can be done to promote academic collaboration in the classroom such as Interdisciplinary courses offered by teaching staff from different universities; co-teaching can be easily facilitated thanks to the excellent facilities at the HEI.

The EEC is concerned that the academic workload of the first year of study is quite heavy, taking in consideration that students must take their degree in three years. Thus, the decongestion of the first year will help to students to focus more on their thesis and finish in time.

Even though the HEI has a compelling EDI plan in place, the EEC strongly encourages that the RECuPL convenors work actively toward the creation of a more diverse student bodies. Regarding the composition of the PhD cohort of the previous PhD programme, the term “international” seemed to stand for “diverse” which often is not the case.

As there seems to be a connection between teaching content and attractiveness of a programme to students, the EEC strongly recommends developing and incorporating courses into the programme from the fields of postcolonial and disability studies as well as queer theory. The human rights component of the course should take an inclusive approach to the consideration of the protected categories beyond faith, including among others gender, gender identity and sexual orientation.

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)

Sub-areas

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

3.1 Teaching staff recruitment and development

Standards

- *Institutions ensure the competence of their teaching staff.*
- *Fair, transparent and clear processes for the recruitment and development of the teaching staff are set up.*
- *Teaching staff qualifications are adequate to achieve the objectives and planned learning outcomes of the study programme, and to ensure quality and sustainability of the teaching and learning.*
- *The teaching staff is regularly engaged in professional and teaching-skills training and development.*
- *Promotion of the teaching staff takes into account the quality of their teaching, their research activity, the development of their teaching skills and their mobility.*
- *Innovation in teaching methods and the use of new technologies is encouraged.*
- *Conditions of employment that recognise the importance of teaching are followed.*
- *Recognised visiting teaching staff participates in teaching the study programme.*

3.2 Teaching staff number and status

Standards

- *The number of the teaching staff is adequate to support the programme of study.*
- *The teaching staff status (rank, full/part time) is appropriate to offer a quality programme of study.*
- *Visiting staff number does not exceed the number of the permanent staff.*

3.3 Synergies of teaching and research

Standards

- *The teaching staff collaborate in the fields of teaching and research within the HEI and with partners outside (practitioners in their fields, employers, and staff members at other HEIs in Cyprus or abroad).*
- *Scholarly activity to strengthen the link between education and research is encouraged.*
- *The teaching staff publications are within the discipline.*
- *Teaching staff studies and publications are closely related to the programme's courses.*
- *The allocation of teaching hours compared to the time for research activity is appropriate.*

Findings

Based on the submitted application, site visit and the additional documentation such as the University of Nicosia EDI questionnaire, the EEC concluded that the participant institutions have academic staff capable of delivering the programme to the high HEI standards. The staff involved in the programme are highly qualified and capable of offering diverse expertise, securing multi-disciplinarity and wide coverage of relevant themes and issues. For instance, the University of Nicosia and Padova have complementary expertise in Law and Sociology of Religion respectively. Representatives of these universities pointed out the practice of connecting their research with PhD teaching and supervision. This is especially important to enhance multi-disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity within this programme.

The EEC also saw evidence of engaging students in evaluating teaching and consequently analysing students' feedback at the universities of Nicosia and Padova. Whenever necessary, the existing academic expertise of participant universities will be complemented by invited lecturers, as demonstrated by the teaching plan and syllabi provided at the site visit. The EEC also appreciated evidence of post-PhD career opportunities for early career academics some of whom are planned to be involved in the teaching within ReCuPL. However, we could see limited evidence of engaging relevant PhD students in the process of developing ReCuPL.

The EEC noted a relatively socially and culturally homogenous academic staff involved in the ReCuPL. This is something for the leadership of the programme and of the participants universities to consider in their academic staff recruitment policies.

Strengths

- Multi-disciplinary expertise of the academic staff
- High academic qualifications of the staff involved in the programme
- Evidence of engaging students in various aspects of the teaching process
- Care for post-PhD trajectories of students

Areas of improvement and recommendations

We recommend that the programme should seek to diversify its academic staff according to the EDI principles.

The need for diversification also applies to recruitment of staff with more varied academic expertise in the relevant research areas, e.g. Religious Studies.

It is highly recommended that relevant current and former PhD students get involved in the developing this programme across all participant universities.



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

4.1 Student admission, processes and criteria

Standards

- *Pre-defined and published regulations regarding student admission are in place.*
- *Access policies, admission processes and criteria are implemented consistently and in a transparent manner.*

4.2 Student progression

Standards

- *Pre-defined and published regulations regarding student progression are in place.*
- *Processes and tools to collect, monitor and act on information on student progression, are in place.*

4.3 Student recognition

Standards

- *Pre-defined and published regulations regarding student recognition are in place.*
- *Fair recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, are essential components for ensuring the students' progress in their studies, while promoting mobility.*
- *Appropriate recognition procedures are in place that rely on:*
 - *institutional practice for recognition being in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention*
 - *cooperation with other institutions, quality assurance agencies and the national ENIC/NARIC centre with a view to ensuring coherent recognition across the country*

4.4 Student certification

Standards

- *Pre-defined and published regulations regarding student certification are in place.*

- *Students receive certification explaining the qualification gained, including achieved learning outcomes and the context, level, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed.*

Findings

The EEC has found that the admission requirements – consisting chiefly of a CV and an initial proposal – are clearly set out (see, however, under 6, for recommendations on making explicit selection criteria beyond these nominal ones, notably on how to assess the quality of the submitted proposals). The selection process and selection criteria are dictated by the University of Padova and national (Italian) rules. While this ensures a single and hence universal procedure throughout the consortium, the international dimension of the study is vouched for by way of the Selection Committee, which will consist of members of all four universities – thus was elaborated to the EEC during the site visit. Through this single, centralised enrolment process, PhD students are formally enrolled at all four universities. This strikes as a reasonable model for enrolment; also, the international nature of the programme is adequately accommodated through this procedure.

Student progress is monitored in various ways. As far as the compulsory courses are concerned, students receive pass/no pass marks, which strikes the EEC as an adequate and manageable approach. As far as the PhD research is concerned, supervisory committees shall consist of at least one member of the Academic Board and a co-supervisor. Upon the site visit, the EEC learned that the precise composition of the supervisory committee primarily depends on the PhD topic concerned. The EEC recommends that in order to enhance internationalization, it may be worthwhile endeavouring *mixed* supervision committees, i.e. consisting of members of the different collaborating universities that comprise this programme. The EEC finds that the one does not exclude the other: the PhD topic ought naturally to be leading in the process of designating supervisors, but at the same time a systematic effort could be made to secure co-supervisors from one of the other universities – this would tremendously enhance the programme's collaboration on an almost daily basis.

The EEC has no observations regarding student recognition and student diploma, adequate procedures appear to be in place in these areas.

Strengths

Clear and uniform admission procedures

Selection Committees involve representatives of all four partaking universities, a concerted effort

Standard enrolment at all four universities concerned, testament to the collaborative and international nature of the programme

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Internationalisation may be enhanced as far as the supervisory modalities are concerned, i.e. regarding the monitoring of students' research progress.

Specifically, the EEC advises that as far as the PhD topics allow - and it is submitted that these typically will so, as there exists rich expertise at all four universities on the subject matter of Religion, Culture and Public Life – supervisory committees consist of co-supervisors drafted from more than one partaking universities. This modality forges intensive research collaboration as a matter of course

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

5.1 Teaching and Learning resources

Standards

- *Adequate and readily accessible teaching and learning resources (teaching and learning environments, materials, aids and equipment) are provided to students and support the achievement of objectives in the study programme.*
- *Adequacy of resources is ensured for changing circumstances (change in student numbers, etc.).*
- *All resources are fit for purpose.*
- *Student-centred learning and flexible modes of learning and teaching, are taken into account when allocating, planning and providing the learning resources.*

5.2 Physical resources

Standards

- *Physical resources, i.e. premises, libraries, study facilities, IT infrastructure, are adequate to support the study programme.*
- *Adequacy of resources is ensured for changing circumstances (change in student numbers, etc.).*
- *All resources are fit for purpose and students are informed about the services available to them.*

5.3 Human support resources

Standards

- *Human support resources, i.e. tutors/mentors, counsellors, other advisers, qualified administrative staff, are adequate to support the study programme.*
- *Adequacy of resources is ensured for changing circumstances (change in student numbers, etc.).*
- *All resources are fit for purpose and students are informed about the services available to them.*

5.4 Student support

Standards

- *Student support is provided covering the needs of a diverse student population, such as mature, part-time, employed and international students and students with special needs.*
- *Students are informed about the services available to them.*
- *Student-centred learning and flexible modes of learning and teaching, are taken into account when allocating, planning and providing student support.*
- *Students' mobility within and across higher education systems is encouraged and supported.*

Findings

PhD students, their research, needs, and future careers, clearly are at the heart and centre of the programme. Committed supervisors are in place, access to teaching technology and research resources are provided by the HEI. The EEC welcomes the HEI's EDI strategy and the excellent support for students with special needs provided through

the Centre for Research and Counselling Services (KESY). Students' international education and mobility is encouraged and students are inspired to approach their research question in an interdisciplinary manner.

Strengths

The EC committee found positive elements on the aspect of learning resources and student support.

First, in addition to the universities being well-equipped and provide quality online teaching, they have good facilities and shared library databases for students in all four of the universities. Teaching seems to be flexible and does address the special needs of students.

Also, the HEI has good welfare provisions for psychological help and counselling of students. For instance, the University of Padova organises monthly meet-ups of all the PHD students, which is good practice, as it reduces the PhD students' feeling of isolation.

Moreover, human support resources, e.g. provided by supervisors, are adequate to support the study programme and to help the students. PhD students from the preceding programme gave quite positive feedback on their supervisors. The HEI provided evidence of commitment to support PhD students on the programme through administrative and teaching staff already employed.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The EEC committee has recommendations for student support and learning resources.

While the universities seem to have welfare systems in place, most of the students are not aware of them. Communication could clearly be enhanced.

Bureaucratic hurdles that students are facing when moving from one university to another need to be addressed.

Further consideration should be given to the specific needs faced by students with disabilities. Assurance should be sought from all partner institutions that the same support mechanisms for students with disabilities will be available at all partner institutions. This is especially crucial regarding the mobility of students with disabilities when moving between partner institutions regarding access to specific therapeutic and medical support.

Three of the four partner institutions should have established EDI strategies in accordance with European law. If the Catholic University of Uruguay is not in possession of a similar strategy, the European programme convenors should actively encourage such a strategy to be implemented there to provide a safe environment for the PhD students they are sending abroad.

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

6.1 Selection criteria and requirements

Standards

- *Specific criteria that the potential students need to meet for admission in the programme, as well as how the selection procedures are made, are defined.*
- *The following requirements of the doctoral degree programme are analysed and published:*
 - *the stages of completion*
 - *the minimum and maximum time of completing the programme*
 - *the examinations*
 - *the procedures for supporting and accepting the student's proposal*
 - *the criteria for obtaining the Ph.D. degree*

6.2 Proposal and dissertation

Standards

- *Specific and clear guidelines for the writing of the proposal and the dissertation are set regarding:*
 - *the chapters that are contained*
 - *the system used for the presentation of each chapter, sub-chapters and bibliography*
 - *the minimum word limit*
 - *the binding, the cover page and the prologue pages, including the pages supporting the authenticity, originality and importance of the dissertation, as well as the reference to the committee for the final evaluation*
- *There is a plagiarism check system. Information is provided on the detection of plagiarism and the consequences in case of such misconduct.*
- *The process of submitting the dissertation to the university library is set.*

6.3 Supervision and committees

Standards

- *The composition, the procedure and the criteria for the formation of the advisory committee (to whom the doctoral student submits the research proposal) are determined.*
- *The composition, the procedure and the criteria for the formation of the examining committee (to whom the doctoral student defends his/her dissertation), are determined.*
- *The duties of the supervisor-chairperson and the other members of the advisory committee towards the student are determined and include:*
 - *regular meetings*
 - *reports per semester and feedback from supervisors*
 - *support for writing research papers*
 - *participation in conferences*

- *The number of doctoral students that each chairperson supervises at the same time are determined.*

Findings

The selection criteria coincide with the regular admission criteria required by UniPd, the coordinating partner, as clearly set out by the international cooperation agreement. In essence, the chief criterion is the possession of a Master's degree relevant to the pursued scientific PhD topic. Further administrative procedures are illucidated in Annex 5 of the agreement. Overall, these procedures strike the EEC as sound and straightforward.

The exact selection criteria as to be used by the Selection Committee at the selection exam to be held at Padova are not very detailed. For instance, originality, innovation, inter-disciplinarity, manageability, academic and societal relevance, could all in theory be weighing in such a process, but the application material and the agreement largely leave this in the middle. The EEC advises that, in order to advertise the positions adequately, further thought is put in specifying and publicizing the criteria the Selection Committee will be using in assessing the candidates' proposals.

The EEC finds that the guidelines on preparing and formatting the doctoral thesis are extensive and clear.

The international cooperation agreement as well as the application materials clearly explain the supervisory structures, the role of the Academic Board, and the composition and competences of the Supervisory committees. As also highlighted separately under point 7, regarding the composition of the supervisory committees the EEC finds that internationalization could be enhanced. Specifically, Supervisory committees could ensure that co-supervising modalities designedly bring together the expertise from the various universities, i.e. implementing mixed supervisory committees composed of staff from the different partaking universities.

Strengths

Clear and comprehensive guidelines on preparing and formatting the doctoral thesis.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

While the nominal enrolment criteria and selection procedure is clearly elucidated, the EEC finds that more thought could go in spelling out the criteria that are used to shortlist or reject PhD proposal applications. Since the programme is interdisciplinary, inter-disciplinarity (alongside e.g. originality, academic and societal relevance) could be among the criteria. Mixed supervisory committees are recommended, composed of staff from the different partaking universities, thus enhancing collaboration

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	Compliant
6.2	Proposal and dissertation	Compliant
6.3	Supervision and committees	Compliant

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

7.1 Legal framework and cooperation agreement

Standards

- *The joint programme is offered in accordance with legal frameworks of the relevant national higher education systems.*
- *The terms and conditions of the joint programme are laid down in a cooperation agreement. The agreement in particular covers the following issues:*
 - *Denomination of the degree(s) awarded in the programme*
 - *Coordination and responsibilities of the partners involved regarding management and financial organisation, including funding, sharing of costs and income, resources for mobility of staff and students*
 - *Admission and selection procedures for students*
 - *Mobility of students and teaching staff*
 - *Examination regulations, student assessment methods, recognition of credits and degree awarding procedures*
 - *Handling of different semester periods, if existent*

7.2 The joint programme

Standards

- *The partner universities apply joint internal quality assurance processes.*
- *The joint programme is offered jointly, involving all cooperating universities in the design, delivery and further development of the programme.*
- *Aims and learning outcomes are clearly stated, including a joint syllabus, language policy, as well as an account of the intended added value of the programme.*
- *Study counselling and mobility plans are efficient and take into account the needs of different kinds of students.*

7.3 Added value of the joint programme

Standards

The joint programme leads to the following added values:

- *Increases internationalisation at the institutions.*
- *Stimulates multinational collaboration on teaching at a high level and makes cooperation binding.*
- *Increases transparency between educational systems.*
- *Develops study and research alternatives in accordance with emerging needs.*

- *Improves educational and research collaboration.*
- *Offers students an expanded and innovative arena for learning.*
- *Increases highly educated candidates' employability and motivation for mobility in a global labour market.*
- *Increases European and non-European students' interest in the educational programme.*
- *Increases competence at partner institutions through cooperation and implementation of a best practice system.*
- *Increases the institution's ability to change in step with emerging needs.*
- *Contributes to tearing down cultural barriers, both personal and institutional.*

Findings

The Legal framework and cooperation agreement is overall sound, clear and adequate. The international cooperation agreement transparently identifies the objective of the collaboration between the 4 universities and identifies UniPd as coordinating partner, a partner – the EEC learned upon the site visit – with ample experience in this important role.

The EEC finds that with respect to (7.2) the joint programme and (7.3) the added value of the joint programme, the programme's strength could be enhanced especially from an *internationalization* perspective. The EEC would like to provide the following examples:

The curriculum, i.e. the compulsory PhD courses, strike as somewhat compartmentalised in that the 24 course units are spread out over the 4 universities. No co-teaching, i.e. joint teaching efforts cutting across the collaborating universities and combining their various and varying perspectives and disciplines, is proposed. Upon the site visit, the EEC learned, however, that such further teaching integration is envisioned for the additional, recurring Seminars also offered by the programme. Also, from there (Seminars), in future editions of the programme, such inter-university teaching may be further developed. The EEC advises to do start instigating such inter-university teaching modalities as early as possible.

As mentioned under 4 as well, internationalization may also be applied to the Supervisory committees, i.e. the Academic Board could aim to secure collaboration across the universities when it comes to co-supervising the PhD students, still naturally letting the topic of the thesis be leading when it comes to designating supervisors.

Both upon studying the materials prior to the site visit as well as during the site visit, the EEC detected a predominance of some universities in the design of the programme, while the precise role and input by others appears to be comparatively modest. The latter notably goes for the University of Uruguay (and to a far lesser extent, Torino). The EEC recommends that a level of symmetry is aimed for throughout the various activities of the programme.

Strengths

An adequate international cooperation agreement, transparently identifying the objective of the collaboration between the four universities and identifying UniPd as coordinating partner

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The programme's strength, as far as the joint programme and the added value of the joint programme are concerned, could be enhanced especially from an *internationalization* perspective.

Specifically, inter-university teaching may be incorporated into the curriculum design, thus inserting the spirit of collaboration into the compulsory courses.

Supervisory committees could ensure that co-supervising modalities similarly designedly bring together the expertise from the various universities.

More generally, the EEC recommends that a high level of symmetry - in terms of the input by the 4 universities - ought to be aimed for throughout the various activities of the programme.

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

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

D. Conclusions and final remarks

The EEC was overall deeply impressed by the ambition, content, and development of the programme. Particularly the emphasis on educating the next generation of researchers in the field of Religion in Public Life in an interdisciplinary and multicultural environment seems promising. It responds to the public and educational need in expertise related to the issues posed by the increasing religious diversity and cultural complexities of contemporary societies in different contexts:

We see, however, three clearly defined areas for further improvement:

Content of the programme: The educational and intellectual content of the programme needs further consideration to engage with pressing questions regarding the decolonisation of educational curricula. This is especially important given the expressed international profile of the programme. This also applies to the consideration of multi- and interdisciplinarity, i.e. the inclusion of a wider variety of relevant disciplines and deeper collaboration between them.

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion: We strongly recommend that the programme makes provisions for addressing the diversity of the cultural and educational needs present in contemporary society. This applies to its content, education approach, and welfare provision for PhD students.

International collaboration: We suggest that the programme has great potential still to be realised for deepening the international collaboration between the partner universities involved. This refers to their participation in further developing the programme, collaborative teaching, including joint supervision and evaluation, as well as administrative procedures.



E. Signatures of the EEC

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Professor Marat Shterin	
Professor Uta Balbier	
Professor Jeroen Temperman	
Ms Ioanna Chrysovitsioti	

Date: May 28, 2024