

Doc. 300.1.2

Date:

Higher Education Institution's response

- **Higher education institution:**

UNIVERSITY OF CYPRUS

- **Town:** NICOSIA

- **Programme of study (Name, ECTS, duration, cycle)**

In Greek: ΠΡΟΔΗΜΟΤΙΚΗ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗ

In English: PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION

- **Language of instruction:**

GREEK

- **Programme's status**

New programme: NO

Currently operating: YES

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 and 2016” [N. 136 (I)/2015 and N. 47(I)/2016].

A. Guidelines on content and structure of the report

- *The Higher Education Institution (HEI) based on the External Evaluation Committee’s (EEC’s) evaluation report (Doc.300.1.1) must justify whether actions have been taken in improving the quality of the programme of study in each assessment area.*
- *In particular, under each assessment area, the HEI must respond on, without changing the format of the report:*
 - *the findings, strengths, areas of improvement and recommendations of the EEC*
 - *the deficiencies noted under the quality indicators (criteria)*
 - *the conclusions and final remarks noted by the EEC*
- *The HEI’s response must follow below the EEC’s comments, which must be copied from the external evaluation report (Doc. 300.1.1).*
- *In case of annexes, those should be attached and sent on a separate document.*

1. Study programme and study programme's design and development

(ESG 1.1, 1.2, 1.8, 1.9)

EEC's comments

Strengths:

Very good equipment, including the new library and the facilities for the students on campus. The balance and the relationship between theory and practice. The School Experience I-III are well integrated in the succession of first the theoretical knowledge, then followed by didactics, then implementations to practice in classroom as well as reflection on the practice. The four years of studies include a cyclical structure where this is implemented in several stages.

The alignment between curriculum and the employers expectations (public preschools) is very strong and the warrants the future employability of the students.

The EEC was positively impressed of the programme's academic staff as regards their commitment, knowledgeability, reflexivity and qualification.

Areas of improvement and recommendations:

The most important room for improvement is increasing the transparency of the internal quality procedures and making them more explicit. The students evaluate every course, however, the evaluation is merely utilized as feedback to individual teachers, even if more could be done with the data without breaching the anonymity or privacy. The overview of, for instance, the students' experiences of the workload and other comparable markers of each course could be monitored and discussed in the level of the whole programme with the staff.

In addition, when revising the curriculum, it would be important to include student representatives in the process. Stating the more explicit the intended learning outcomes and goals for each course would improve the transparency in all levels as well as benefit the alignment of the programme. The EEC is convinced by the quality of the programme due to the commitment of the staff as expressed by the academics in the site visit, yet the sustainability of this quality would be enhanced by making the internal quality proceedings more explicit. This would also ensure the continuity of the quality in cases of staff turnover.

The EEC is convinced that the academic staff has well resourced opportunities for carrying out research, both in terms of the regular opportunities for Sabbatical terms, conference / literature funding and the balance between teaching load and research time. However, we found that this was not always reflected in the course literature for the students in terms of most recent Early Childhood Education related readings.

We were unable to evaluate the elements marked with n/a, due to either the availability of the figures (e.g. success rates, employability records [below], number of incoming / outgoing Erasmus students). As regards the evaluation criteria specifying the need to periodically review the programme in the light of the changing needs of society, the EEC is concerned about how the increasing diversity in the Cypriot society is taken into account across the programme. In particular, how the students are prepared to work in multicultural, multireligious, multilingual environments, and to work with families in poverty, beyond the differentiation and individualization of the general pedagogical approach, in order to foster social cohesion and social inclusion.

Finally, the EEC wonders why the subject area and the academic staff's offices are not located at the university main campus, and hopes this does not reflect the position of the subject area within the disciplinary range.

Provide information on:

1. Employability records.

The EEC does not have the exact figures, however, the graduates of this programme was estimated by the alumni as the most sought after teaching staff in pre-primary settings in comparison to those graduating from other institutions.

2. Pass rate per course/semester

According to the teaching staff, students and alumni, literally all students graduate from the programme by if not their fourth year, at least within the permitted time scale.

3. The correspondence of exams' and assignments' content to the level of the programme and the number of ECTS

The EEC regards these to be in place.

HEI's response

We would like to thank the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) for their positive comments on the above aspects. We would like to also thank the committee for the feedback provided on the areas that need to be improved.

We do need to develop more explicit internal quality procedures, a point which the whole university is considering right now. Additionally, even though in many of our courses we incorporate and discuss multiculturalism, multilingualism, working with families in poverty, in our future revision of the program, if needed, we can consider developing a more contemporary seminar which would tackle these issues, especially when the students are in preparation to go out in schools so that it will be more context-related. The EEC rightfully noticed the issue with space, having the academic staff's offices away from the university campus. Space is a general university issue but we strongly push for this, through constant communication with the Technical Services of the University and we are next in line to be moved to the main campus.

Moreover, in response to some of the comments (e.g. workload, course objectives, and literature) of the EEC we feel important to highlight the following:

1. The workload of each course is based on the number of ECTS. Regular courses are designed by taking into account that each of them counts for 6 ECTS.
2. In the syllabus of each course the specific objectives for each course are clearly stated so that there is a common understanding of the content and expectations from the students (see Application for Evaluation-Accreditation Document 200.1, Annex2 pg. 83)
3. The literature for the Early Childhood Education (ECE) main courses is in line with the recent ECE publications. For example, we use the most recent articles from the journal "Young Children" which is more practice-oriented.

2. Teaching, learning and student assessment (ESG 1.3)

EEC's comments

Strengths:

Research orientation of the programme, both in terms of the method courses and as regards the staff research resources.

Throughout the programme there is attention to reflexive competencies of the students.

The well-resourced learning/ teaching environment: optimal staff/student ratio, well-equipped labs, excellent new library with remote access to relevant resources (e.g. journals).

Areas of improvement and recommendations:

The reflective competence of the students could be even more enhanced if there was more space for the students' initiative in choosing the project topic for School Experience III. Also, the EEC wonders whether it is necessary as regards both teaching staff allocation and student work load (stress levels at that particular time period in the study programme were experienced as high by the students) to for example numerically evaluate all the 75 lesson plans of each student. Perhaps a more qualitative constructive reflection could support the reflective competences of the students and encourage a stronger sense of autonomy in the learner.

From our discussions with the teachers, we have gained the impression that the teaching methods are well designed, but again the sustainability (in cases of staff turnover etc., see above) would be improved if these were more explicitly expressed.

The ability for students to express their views and to file complaints could perhaps benefit of being more separated from that available for the staff, in order to lower the threshold of accessing it

HEI's response

We would like to thank the EEC for recognizing the opportunities the university provides for our staff for research but also the experiences we provide through our library, labs and resources for our students to develop their teaching competences. The Department will continue working under the above principles and will try to continually take into account any future challenges in order to improve the quality of the teaching methods provided to students.

The EEC commented on the importance of students' having the opportunity of choosing their project theme during School Experience III but it is important to note that since our students are in the classroom for 10 weeks their themes have to be in line with the classroom teacher's goals and planning, and collaboratively decide on the project theme, considering children's previous experiences and future learning goals and needs.

It is important to highlight that both the number of lesson plans and other assignments expected to be fulfilled during this course respond to the number of the 20 ECTS allocated to the School Experience III.

During the seminars of the School Experience III, both the supervisors of each subject area as well as the program's administrators are evaluated since students are given the opportunity to evaluate and comment on the quality of the supervisors and seminars. Nevertheless, we agree with the EEC that it is important to develop some more evaluation mechanisms in order to give the chance to students to express their complaints. Of course, there is the University's Disciplinary Committee where a student can go ahead and file a complaint, about a professor or a co-student.

3. Teaching Staff (ESG 1.5)

In addition to your response to EEA's comments on the teaching staff:

- a. fill in TABLE 1: TEACHING STAFF at the end of this form and
- b. send the curriculum vitae of all the program lecturers on the forms posted on the Agency's website as an annex. (Form 500.1.03 for Universities and Form 500.1.04 for Higher Education Institutes)

EEC's comments

Strengths:

The ECC is very impressed by the qualifications of the teaching staff and the resources they have for carrying out research. These are compliant with the highest international standards. They are also contributing to the society both in terms of policy and practice.

Areas of improvement and recommendations:

As regards 3.12, see the justifications given above.

3.12 Feedback processes for teaching staff in regard to the evaluation of their teaching work, by the students, are satisfactory. 7

HEI's response

We would like to thank the EEC for acknowledging the hard work and efforts of our teaching staff to respond to the needs of our students, our society and international ECE community.

We agree that the feedback provided by the students for our teaching staff needs to be taken into consideration during the staff evaluation. For the moment, the chair of the Department has the opportunity to read the student evaluations for each member of our staff and when necessary, to make recommendations for professional development purposes. Additionally, the Center for Teaching and Learning is active in promoting teaching and is currently offering Teaching Excellence Awards in order to support colleagues and acknowledge their efforts in promoting teaching quality.

4. Students (ESG 1.4, 1.6, 1.7)

EEC's comments

The EEC wants to make a note that the actual regulations regarding student admission are beyond the jurisdiction of the university.

Also, we did not have access to the more precise information on students, such as the key performance indicators, exact success and drop-out rates, and the overall student satisfaction with their programme.

Strengths:

The students express high appreciation of the learning experience as well as the way in which they are supported in the programme.

There is a high success rate for completion of the programme and high employability for the graduates.

Areas of improvement:

Support and encouragement for the student internationalisation could be further enhanced. It was expressed by the teaching staff that the three optional courses included in the programme could well be replaced by courses taken abroad. This could be more strongly embedded in the programme structures by for example promoting the possibility for later international (Erasmus) exchange by already informing for the first year students about that. Also, the obligatory language courses of the programme could be aligned with the potential target country, together with the promotion of further language studies. This would diminish the now expressed worry of the students for possibly getting behind in their study programme due to international mobility. In addition, both the incoming, outgoing, and those students (e.g. with family) who are not able to do an exchange themselves, would all benefit from having some more courses in English embedded in the programme. For those students less competent with English language, optional foundational courses could be recommended. Also, as elaborated further below, although a general procedure for student complaints is in place, a specific procedure for student appeals could work towards lowering the threshold for students to have their voices heard.

HEI's response

We highly appreciate the constructive comments of the committee and we will take into account their recommendations for student internationalization. Erasmus opportunities will be shared with first year-students and they will be guided from early on to consider the obligatory language course of the program to be aligned with the potential target country. In addition, as we have already begun to do, we are offering courses in English for our own students as well as for Erasmus students.

5. Resources (ESG 1.6)

EEC's comments

Strengths:

The newly opened library is well equipped, also with remote access facilities.
The labs are well equipped, and there is suitable funds for updating when needed.
The resources match the highest international standards

Areas of improvement and recommendations:

The students' reading lists could be complemented with the most recent (international) Early Childhood Education literature.

The children's section in the library does not reflect the societal diversity in Cyprus. The library children's literature area could be complemented with books, to match the variety of childrens home languages in preschools. This could enhance the visibility of – and also encourage the support for – children's home languages, religions and cultures later on when the students are working in preschools.

HEI's response

We would like to thank the EEC for acknowledging the rich resources we have in place within our university in supporting our ECE program.

In reference to the students' reading list, it is important to highlight that we use as much bibliography there is in Greek. In regard to the main pre-school pedagogy courses, the readings are in line with the recent ECE international publications.

Even though our library is quite new, we will be more active in proposing ideas for books which support children's home languages, religions and cultures so that our students will be able to use them during their teaching in preschools.

6. Additional for distance learning programmes (ALL ESG)

N/A

7. Additional for doctoral programmes (ALL ESG)

N/A

8. Additional for joint programmes (ALL ESG)

N/A

B. Conclusions and final remarks

EEC's comments

The EEC was generally impressed by the commitment and knowledgeability of the academic staff, their qualifications, the material resources, the support for research and international mobility of the research staff. Some recurrent issues that could perhaps be further developed include the following:

- The deepening of the presence and understanding of societal diversity in the curriculum of the programme. The EEC has the impression that the pedagogy of diversity is reduced to a pedagogy of individualization and differentiation, while the current international literature holds out a deeper understanding of emerging prejudices, social cohesion and social inclusion, and understanding the needs of the families and children living in poverty as well as the well-being of potentially trauma-affected children.
- The structures for supporting and facilitating international mobility of the students (both incoming, outgoing, and the internationalization@home) could be rethought and strengthened (see the more specific remarks above).

- The possible procedures of making the aims and goals of the expected learning outcomes of the courses as well as their position in the wider programme could be made more explicit.
- Making the internal quality monitoring systems more transparent. This regards ensuring that student voices are taken into account both as regards the programme as a whole and the individual courses as well as the cumulative work load of particular semesters. In so doing, this could contribute to ensuring the sustainability of the programme quality in case of staff turnover.

The EEC appreciated the open discussions with the teachers, academics and students as well as the opportunities to meet the administrative staff, the alumni, and the representative of the Ministry of Education. However, in the future, perhaps it would be advisable to ensure that each group of stakeholders would be met separately in order to facilitate the free expression of experiences.

HEI's response

We would like to thank the committee for these final remarks. As identified to each evaluation section above, we will take into account the four major suggestions for improving the quality of the services provided by our Department.

C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

| <i>Name</i> | <i>Position</i> | <i>Signature</i> |
|----------------------------|---|------------------|
| Leonidas Kyriakides | Chair of the Department of Education | |
| Eleni Loizou | Associate Professor, Program Coordinator | |
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Date:2/12/19.....

TABLE 1: TEACHING PERSONNEL, COURSES AND TEACHING PERIODS IN THE PROGRAM OF STUDY

| A/A | Name and Surname | Discipline / Specialization | Teaching courses in the program of study under evaluation | | |
|-----|------------------------------|---|---|---|----------------|
| | | | Code | Course title | Hours/ week |
| 1. | Angeli Charoula | Educational Technology | EDU 137 | The Integration of digital technologies in pre-primary school | 3 |
| 2. | Gregoriou Zelia | Theory of Education | EDU 101 | Theory of Education | 3 |
| 3. | Constantinou Constantinos | Science Education | EDU 435 | Teaching Natural Sciences in pre-primary school | 3 |
| 4. | Eliophotou Maria | Educational Administration | EDU 412 | Organization and Administration of the Educational System | 3 |
| 5. | Leonidas Kyriakides | Educational Research and Evaluation | EDU 204 | Methodology of Educational Research | 3 |
| 6. | Loizou Eleni | Early childhood Education | EDU 102 | Education during Infancy (0-3 years) | 3 |
| 7. | | | EDU 369 | Play: Learning and Demelopment | 3 |
| 8. | Elia Iliada | Mathematics Pedagogy in Early Childhood | EDU 170 | Pre-Math concepts | 3 |
| | | | EDU 332 | Mathematics Education in pre-primary school | 3 |

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|-----|-----------------------|--|---------|---|---|
| | | | EDU 202 | Early Childhood Pedagogy | 3 |
| 9. | Papastefanou Marianna | Philosophy of Education | EDU 201 | Introduction to Philosophy of Education | 3 |
| 10. | Tsangaridou Niki | Methodology of Physical Education | EDU 487 | Teaching Physical Education in pre-primary school | 3 |
| 11. | Symeonidou Simoni | Inclusive Education | EDU 466 | Learning Disabilities | 3 |
| 12. | Ftiaka Helen | Sociology of Education and Inclusive Education | EDU 311 | Introduction to Inclusive Education | 3 |
| 13. | Photiou Stavros | Orthodox Theology, Religious Education | EDU 348 | Social Issues in pre-primary schools | 3 |
| | | | EDU 481 | Christian Ethics and Modern World | 3 |
| 14. | Philippou Stavroula | Curriculum and Teaching | EDU 404 | Curriculum Development | 3 |
| | | | EDU 220 | Theory and methodology of Teaching | 3 |
| 15. | Klerides Eleftherios | Comparative Education and History of Education | EDU 403 | Comparative Education | 3 |
| | | | EDU 105 | History of Education | 3 |
| 16. | Christou Miranda | Sociology of Education | EDU 218 | Sociology of Education | 3 |
| | | | EDU 118 | Education and Gender | 3 |

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|-----|--|--|---------|--|---|
| 17. | Kontovourki Stavroula | Literacy and Language Arts Education | EDU 424 | Multimodality and multiliteracies | 3 |
| 18. | New Academic Staff (in process) | Educational Research or/ Educational Evaluation or/ Educational Administration | EDU 305 | Student Assessment in pre-primary school | 3 |
| 19. | Panayiotis Stavrinides Psychology Department | Developmental Psychology | PSY101 | Developmental Psychology I | 3 |
| 20. | Kalia Orphanou Computer Science Department | Computer Science | CS002 | Introduction to Computer Science | 3 |
| 21. | Agapiou Sergios Mathematics and Statistics | Statistics | MAS 051 | Statistical Methods | 3 |
| 22. | Special Scientists (proclamation per semester) | | EDU 325 | Creative Drama | 3 |
| 23. | Theoni Neokleous (Special Teaching Staff) | Teaching of Language | EDU 224 | Forms of Language Expression | 3 |

| | | | | | |
|-----|---|--------------------------------|---------|--|---|
| 24. | Special Scientists (proclamation per semester) | | EDU 223 | Literacy in Early Childhood Education | 3 |
| 25. | Telemachou Nopi (Special Teaching Staff) | Music Pedagogy | EDU 258 | Music Education in pre-primary School | 3 |
| | | | EDU 368 | Teaching Music in pre-primary School | 3 |
| 26. | Papaellina Clea (Special Teaching Staff) | Physical Education | EDU 377 | Physical Education in pre-primary School | 3 |
| 27. | Savva Andri (Special Teaching Staff) | Pedagogy in arts and Education | EDU 252 | Art Education in pre-primary School | 3 |
| | | | EDU 352 | Teaching Arts in pre-primary School | 3 |
| 28. | Petrou Stella (Special Teaching Staff) | Science Education | EDU 175 | Natural Sciences in Pre-primary School: Environment-Living Organism | 3 |
| 29. | Michaelide Anthia (Special Teaching Staff) | Early Childhood Education | EDU 239 | School Experience in pre-primary School I | 3 |
| | | | EDU 339 | School Experience in pre-primary School II | 3 |

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|--|--|--|---------|---|------|
| | | | EDU 439 | School Experience in pre-primary School III | 30** |
|--|--|--|---------|---|------|

***See note “Preschool School Experience Program” under the table 2.**