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ΦΟΡΕΑΣ ΔΙΑΣΦΑΛΙΣΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΠΙΣΤΟΠΟΙΗΣΗΣ ΤΗΣ ΠΟΙΟΤΗΤΑΣ ΤΗΣ ΑΝΩΤΕΡΗΣ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗΣ
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Doc. 300.1.2

Date: 27.4.2020

Higher Education Institution's response
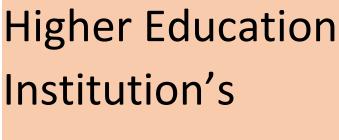
- **Higher education institution:**

  UNVERSITY OF CYPRUS

- **Town:** NICOSIA

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

  In Greek: ΜΑΣΤΕΡ ΣΤΗΝ ΕΙΔΙΚΗ ΚΑΙ ΕΝΙΑΙΑ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗ

  In English: MA SPECIAL AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

- **Language of instruction:**
- GREEK

- **Programme's status**
  New programme: NO
  Currently operating: YES

ΚΥΠΡΙΑΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ
REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS

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

Findings

The quality assurance of the MA programme is publicly available. There are codes of ethics, rules and regulations and anti-plagiarism system. The quality assurance supports teaching staff and students to take their responsibilities in quality assurance. There was evidence of this in the interviews. The policy guards against discrimination against students and staff. The course content and aim of the MA course are provided in the University of Cyprus prospectus. The four purposes of Higher Education by the Council of Europe were identified in the MA Course. The Master Programme is subject to a formal institutional approval process. The MA qualification is in accordance with the National Qualification Framework for Higher Education.

Strengths

There are good links with stakeholders, there is an active student inclusion group, involving parents and schoolteachers, artists are brought in, students visits organised. Lecturers and professors are sensitive to students' views and needs. External academics are invited regularly to contribute to the courses and programme. There is evidence that the course sequence enables smooth student progression. The use of school case studies in the programme provided well-structured placement opportunities. The focus on special and inclusive education, but a future change in the list system of the ministry might lead to a lower demand in course places. However, there is such a large pool of applicants, this should not be a problem. It seems that unemployment and financial crisis seems to work in their favour (e.g. to put their names on two lists improves their chances of securing a job in public schools). The team seem confident about the programme's future, which raises the question why they are not admitting more students.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The course purposes, knowledge learning outcomes are listed, but these could be complemented with personal learning outcomes. It is not known how decisions are taken on new courses; this procedure could be made more transparent. Though the ECTS credits were listed, there was a discrepancy between the prospectus and the information provided (120 ECTS vs. 90 ECTS). Since most students work in schools outside the course; there is an opportunity to enhance or extend placement assignment. This could take the form of supervised pedagogical assignments. The course references are extensive in English and Greek, suggesting that the focus is both local and international. However, the references do not include enough critical discourse about inclusion and an up-to-date review of the international literature. This could be introduced as an assignment to the students. The students could engage in critical discourse between the inclusion ideals and the realities in Cypriot schools. We were unsure of the extent of the use of peer collaborative review in the periodic review of the programme. We were also unsure of the regularity of the course review and revision. We found no public information about the interviews of applicants; we were unsure of the selection criteria used and whether they are made transparent. Though graduates are told what they will be able to do, there are no explicit intended learning

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outcomes made public. We were not clear about how much information was given publicly about the teaching and learning and assessment procedures, pass rates, learning opportunities available for students and employment information.

The programme team could consider to what extent the design of the MA programme is consistent with the European Qualification Framework regarding a MA qualification that does not include dissertation (MA Thesis).

Provide information on:

1. Employability records

The external evaluation team was not provided with exact statistics. Many of the 132 Graduates are employed in the public sector as well as in private schools. Some former students are currently employed in the Department of Education. Graduates have a higher chance of securing a teaching position due to dual listings as primary and special teachers.

2. Pass rate per course/semester

The exact pass rate was not discussed, but discussions made the external evaluation team assume that it is very high.

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

The external evaluation team was not able to check the exams and assignments, since we do not read Greek and we were not provided with the comments of the external examiners of the assignments and dissertations.

HEI's response

We would like to thank the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) for recognising that our master programme is of high quality and makes sure that all involved in it interact and learn from each other in the best possible way.

The EEC Committee asked for more information on the following issues, and these are provided below:

The conclusions of the EEC regarding the employment of our graduates are valid. Indeed, we did not provide any statistics on employment as these are not available. We hope that we will have statistical information in the future as the University Career Office now sets up a process to collect such data.

The EEC concluded from our discussion that the pass rate is high. The selection of our students by considering their application and their performance in an interview contributes in having very good cohorts of students, who have very good learning skills. We support all our students throughout their studies. Despite the fact that we have very good pass rates, at the same time, the grades among students vary, and some of them who do not perform very well, receive low grades. At times, when we feel that the performance of a student is low because s/he did not have a clear picture of what was expected from him/her, we ask him/her to resubmit an assignment. In this case, the student is marked with 'incomplete' and

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receives a grade the next semester, after s/he resubmits the assignment and passes the course.

In relation to the level up to which the exams and assignments in our courses correspond to the ECTS of the programme, we would like to reassure the EEC that we make sure that this is the case. To begin with, apart from the 3-hour attendance on a weekly basis, our students are expected to spend more hours within each week for several activities, e.g. read a paper in Greek or in English to prepare for the next lecture, begin to collect papers for a presentation or an assignment, start preparing a presentation which can be an individual or team task, prepare and submit short assignments that can be marked or not (sometimes feedback is given to activities prior to the activities that are marked), work on an assignment that is more extensive in length and demands literature review and data collection or lesson planning. Our students usually work over the weekends to respond to their commitments. In relation to the exams, again, we make sure that our students are presented with topics that not only require to understand the theory, but also require critical thinking skills that enable them to use the literature and practical skills in order to provide answers.

The EEC raised some areas of improvement and recommendations, which we appreciate. Here are our replies below.

In relation to the learning outcomes, we would like to note that the following learning outcomes exist, and they can be differentiated according to the students' backgrounds. In particular, after successful completion of the programme, it is expected that students:

- Will be acquainted with the basic literature on special and inclusive education.
- Will be familiar with the approaches to the design, development, and implementation of special and inclusive education research.
- Will develop skills for designing and running research in special and inclusive education.
- Will be acquainted with a range of research methods, and will acquire experience in applying these methods to the collection and analysis of data and in promoting the study of basic and applied questions in special and inclusive education.
- Will be able to employ theory and research in the development of policy and curricula.

The EEC asked for clarifications about the procedure about making decisions on new courses. In particular, the programme team suggests the title and description of the new course, and justifies why it is needed. From time to time, a Departmental Committee reviews all the programmes and makes proposals for more than one new courses. If the Departmental Board approves the proposal for a new course, then it is sent to the School of Graduate Studies for approval. The next step is approval by the Senate. The Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education is informed about the new course.

The EEC noticed that there was a discrepancy between the prospectus and the information provided (120 ECTS vs. 90 ECTS). Following approval of our programmes by the Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education, the forthcoming prospectus will be updated with the correct information.

We appreciate the EEC's suggestion to try supervised pedagogical assignments. However, many of our students are not placed in schools. Placing them in schools requires securing permissions from state services and this can be very difficult. Even for students who are placed in schools, we need to secure the same permissions. We encourage the students who can implement inclusive practice in their settings and we support them to secure the necessary permissions. However, we consider that it is difficult to organize supervised pedagogical assignments for all our master students.

We are happy to see that the EEC acknowledged the extensive references in Greek and in English used in our programme. In relation to the remark that there is a need about critical discourse and up to date literature, we would like to point out that in all our courses, the students are encouraged to read up to date literature and participate in critical discourse about inclusive education at international and local level, and draw the links with what happens in schools. Whenever there is a need, we use references that were published in the past, because we consider them 'classic' references or they are references from key authors in the field that we would like our students to engage with.

In relation to the comment about the regularity of peer collaborative review, we would like to note that following the new procedures of the Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education, the course review will be conducted every three years.

Our response about the interview criteria, and the teaching and learning criteria can be found in section 3 and 2 respectively.

In relation to the remark that our MA qualification does not include a compulsory MA thesis, we would like to note that the University of Cyprus and the European Qualification Framework do not consider an MA thesis as compulsory. Thus, all our programmes in the Department do not require for a compulsory MA thesis. It is an options for students who wish to undergo this experience.

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

EEC's comments

Findings

This is a very individualised programme with only 15 students per year. The process of teaching and learning is flexible with students able to change modules according to their preferences and backgrounds. Students take an active role in the learning process, for example, students organised workshops and seminars. There is evidence of students undertaking independent work in the courses.

Strengths

There is a strong pioneering spirit that inspires students. There is mutual respect in the teacher-student relationship with students identifying strongly with academic staff. There are strong relationships between the academic staff team which can carry to programme into the future. Assessment allows students to show that they have achieved the intended learning outcomes. Students are given feedback, but we are uncertain about the nature of formative assessment.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

There were questions about the long-term development of the course and the leadership beyond the pioneering phase. There is a good opportunity to consider sustainability question now and in the future. More use of ICT could be considered, for example, discussion fora, wikis, development joint writing and presentations, though we recognise that online learning is reserved for the Open University. For comments on case studies, see comments under 1. A stronger link between the courses and the practical work that all students do as teachers or learning support assistants could be established. Assessment is not as transparent as it could be, based on the paperwork and documentation provided to the evaluation team. This also applies to admission criteria (see under 1.). The criteria for methods of assessment are not published enough in advance, although it might be that these are communicated verbally to the students rather than in a written format. We have little evidence about the rules of marking as well as the reliability or moderation of marking (e.g. procedures for double-checking grades, calibration of scores between academics). Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

Comments:
2.14: we do not know enough about the examination part of the course to pass a judgment
2.16: not able to judge

HEI's response

We would like to thank the EEC for acknowledging that our master programme is individualised, flexible, respects students' various backgrounds, and promotes meaningful and constructive student-teacher relationships.

In relation to the areas of improvement and recommendations of the EEC, we would like to clarify the following:

We are aware of the importance of formative assessment. To this end, we make sure that our students receive formative assessment at different stages of the semester. For example, prior assignments that include several skills (e.g. literature review, data collection, lesson planning, etc.), we make sure that students are required to develop these skills through other activities that are not marked. We provide qualitative feedback on these activities. For example, prior engaging students in lesson planning, we assign activities asking for stating goals and developing activities that are relevant to the stated goals. Formative feedback usually helps students in learning how to use the appropriate verbs when setting goals, how to distinguish between basic and transformative knowledge, how to distinguish a goal from a statement that describes an activity, etc.

We are aware that online tools would make our courses more interactive and maximise the use of ICT for the benefit of the students. However, as the EEC noted, due to the regulations about the role of the Open University, the University of Cyprus cannot offer online courses. We make good use of blackboard in which we post our presentations, readings, instructions for assignments, criteria for evaluation of assignments and so on. Recently, the University updated its software and we have the opportunity to use Teams. This gave us the opportunity to create e-classes and register our students as members. Through Teams, we can chat, exchange materials and useful links, and arrange video conferences when needed. We intend to continue to use the opportunities of Teams in the future to increase interaction with our students.

We understand that the EEC would like to know more about the link with practice. In all our courses, we make sure that apart from the theoretical background, the students are engaged in practical activities that are relevant to their work and educational background. Examples of practical work could be research oriented or focus on lesson planning for learners that they work with (i.e. at different levels of education, in special or mainstream schools).

The EEC noted that the criteria of evaluation are not transparent. Although each instructor follows their own way of communicating the criteria of evaluation, we consider that these criteria are made known to the students in the end. In particular, some of the instructors provide written information to the students, explaining each criterion and providing a clear list of issues that will be marked in an assignment, a presentation, a portfolio assignment, etc. Other instructors provide verbal information. In light of the EEC's remarks, we will improve the way we communicate the criteria for assessment, and make sure they are available in advance in written form.

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Linked to the above, the process of marking differs among instructors. In particular, there are instructors who provide a list of written criteria for assessment, and use a detailed feedback form during marking so that the student is informed about his/her performance in each part of the assignment/presentation/activity. Others provide feedback by providing a list of comments that are relevant to what is marked. All instructors are committed in evaluating their students fairly and at the same time, provide feedback that will improve their performance. We understand the EEC's suggestion for double checking grades and calibrating scores between academics, but this process is not followed within the Department. However, we will discuss this suggestion with the Department and explore the possibility of developing such processes.

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3. Teaching Staff (*ESG 1.5*)

EEC's comments

Findings
We assume from the university website that there are transparent and clear procedures for recruiting teaching staff although we do not have detailed information. They have a sufficient number of permanent staff. There was evidence of staff collaborating in teaching and research with other HEI partners in Cyprus and abroad. The course regularly invites international staff to participate in their seminar programme. On the basis of the programme's staff's CVs, the staff are adequately qualified to ensure the quality of teaching and learning. There is a university teaching and learning centre which engages academics who teach the MA programme in teaching skill training and development.

Strengths
There are many strengths identified in the above description (see above). There is a good, highly personalised relationship between academic staff and students. The academic staff have been successful in securing external funding and attracting international colleagues to share the research and teaching.

Areas of improvement and recommendations
We did not know whether there is a formal assessment process for teaching staff, however, there is course evaluation and we assume that this is used to review and improve teaching quality. There could be more explicit and transparent criteria for recruitment and development of teaching staff. In addition, there was not enough explicit information about the assessment of staff's quality of teaching and research.
Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

Provide information on the following:
In every programme of study the special teaching staff should not exceed 30% of the permanent teaching staff.
Does not exceed

HEI's response

We would like to thank the EEC for recognising that there are clear and transparent procedures for recruiting teaching staff, that the staff is engaged in teacher professional learning activities, and that there are collaborations with teaching staff from other countries. We are also content to know that the EEC recognises the highly personalised relationship between academic staff and students, and the fact that the academic staff is successful in securing external funding and attracting international colleagues to share the research and teaching.

In relation to the EEC's concerns about the formal procedures of assessing courses, recruiting and developing staff, and the assessment of staff in the quality of research and teaching, we would like to clarify that:

The Centre for Teaching and Learning of the University of Cyprus runs the formal assessment process for courses and instructors. There is an online questionnaire that all students are required to submit in order to be able to have access to their final grades. Although the students have the right to open the questionnaire and submit it without evaluating the course and the instructor, most students fill it in. The instructors and the head of the Department receive the evaluation and discuss whether the course and the approach followed by the instructor needs to be improved.

There are transparent criteria for recruiting staff and a process that safeguards that the decision for recruiting staff is transparent and collective. The process is as follows: In order to attract as many candidates as possible who meet the requirements of each position, announcements are published in both printable and electronic media to cover the local and international labour markets including international scientific journals the Cyprus Government Gazette, daily press and the University of Cyprus website. The vacancy announcement describes in detail the content of the job, the minimum qualifications required, the subject field, the academic grade as well as the salary scale.

Evaluation Procedure:
- Appointment from the senate of a 5 member Review Committee with 3 external members (professors) coming from universities of at least two different countries
- Evaluation of the candidate's academic profile from the members of the committee and three other independent reviewers
- Face to Face interview
- The report of the evaluation committee and its recommendation can be accepted or rejected initially by the Faculty committee and then by the senate

In relation to the development of the teaching staff, the Centre for Teaching and Learning of the University of Cyprus provides seminars and day conferences for the staff (e.g. how to use research into teaching, how to link assignment topics with research, etc.). However, participation in these seminars is voluntary. In addition, the staff has adequate funding to attend conferences which also offer professional development in their area of interest.

In what follows, we provide a list of schemes/practices that encourage professional development.

- Research funding for participation in international conferences, for developing internal research programs through a competitive process, for developing research infrastructures (laboratories, equipment), for establishing and operationalising research centres / units and for co-funding external research programs.
- Administrative support for the submission of proposals and financial management of research programs
- Sabbatical leave for the purpose of conducting research and enriching knowledge
- Possibility to participate in the decision-making bodies (Councils of the Department, School, Committees, Senate, Electoral Bodies, Evaluation and Staff Election Committees)
- Unpaid leave for a period of up to one academic year in order to work in another university or to engage in research or other serious professional and/or personal reasons
- Explicit and transparent criteria about the assessment of staff's quality in teaching and research Evaluation Procedure:
- Appointment from the senate of a 5 member Review Committee with 3 external members (professors) coming from universities of at least two different countries

- Evaluation of the candidate's academic profile from the members of the committee and three other independent reviewers
- Face to Face interview
- The report of the evaluation committee and its recommendation can be accepted or rejected initially by the Faculty committee and then by the senate

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4. Students (*ESG 1.4, 1.6, 1.7*)

EEC's comments

Findings

There are published regulations about student admission, progression and certification. The programme has clear admission processes, but there were some questions about the transparency of the admission criteria used in the interviews. Students receive certifications with explanation of their qualifications they have achieved. There are mechanisms for complaint management and dispute resolution (Section 1.1.12 in the Postgraduate Study Rules).

Strengths

The students we interviewed expressed strong satisfaction with the programme. High value is placed on the recognition of previous staff and student experience. Students' mobility is promoted, although the numbers involved are not clear. There seems to be a strong emphasis on student support and welfare services. The university provides support for students with disabilities through central services. The programme covers or provides for the needs of students with disabilities or disadvantaged backgrounds. Student mobility is encouraged in the form of travel, attending conferences and financial support. Prior learning and work experience are taken into account in the admission process based on what we learned in the staff interviews.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

More transparent admission criteria used in interviews could be developed and published. More detailed information is required about how students' progress through the programme, success and drop-out rates. More information about the career paths of graduates, and how this is collected and analysed would be helpful in raising the public image of the course. More transparent information on student mobility could be provided. Though there are central mechanisms for student appeal, we do not know how these apply to this particular course.

Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

4.5. we don't know

HEI's response

We would like to thank the EEC for recognising that admission and support of students to the program is conducted with increased responsibility. We would like to provide the following responses to some questions and recommendations.

The admission criteria that apply for all programme are published by the School of Graduate Studies in the following link.
http://www.ucy.ac.cy/graduateschool/en/admissions/admission-requirements

During the interview, we aim to understand the candidate's personality, ask clarifications about his/her application, and understanding of inclusive education. The criteria for admission could be summarised as follows: background studies in education or relevant disciplines, good overall performance and very good performance in inclusive education courses, basic knowledge of inclusive education, understanding of the nature of the postgraduate programme, commitment to studying/researching on inclusive education, previous research experience in the undergraduate studies, good interpersonal skills, very good knowledge of English language. We will ensure that the criteria are made public, as suggested by the EEC.

The process of collecting information about the career paths of graduates is now being developed centrally by the University of Cyprus. The Career Office now organizes a procedure according to which all the departments will provide information that will be used by the University in different ways.

We do not have data on student mobility. We are aware that most of our students have family and work commitments in parallel with their studies and this is a barrier to their mobility. However, some of our students take advantage of the Erasmus programme and we support their applications.

We are happy that the EEC acknowledged the fact that there are central mechanisms for appeal. These mechanisms are followed by our course. In relation to appeals concerning assessment, the students contact the Head of the Department who investigates each case. The appeals for any disciplinary issues are examined by the University Disciplinary Board.

5. Resources (*ESG 1.6*)

EEC's comments

Findings

From the evidence presented, adequate and readily accessible resources seem to be available. We assume that in changing circumstances available resources are still adequate. We consider the resources fit-for-purpose and students are informed about the services available for them. Teaching staff are involved in the acquiring of materials and resources.

Strengths

There is a lab for research teaching and teacher professional learning with computers, AAC devices, books and games.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The academic team might consider providing students with software licences for their personal computers in order to be able to work outside the campus / laboratory.

Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

5.7 we do not know

HEI's response

We would like to thank the EEC for acknowledging that there are adequate and ready to use resources for students, and a very well equipped research and teaching lab.

In relation to the EEC's suggestion to provide students with software license for their personal computers, we would like to clarify that we make sure that licenses for any software are ordered for students who ask for them. We will make sure this information is clear and is included in the general information provided for the course.

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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

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B. Conclusions and final remarks

EEC's comments

In conclusion, in all general areas, we found the MA programme compliant with the standards. In most cases on the individual standards, we have given individual ratings of 4 or 5, in very few places we have given a rating of 3 with remarks on how to improve the current situation. Our recommendation is to accredit the MA programme "Special and Inclusive Education". We would like to express our thanks to the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education, to the management of the university, to the academic and administrative staff as well as to the students.

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 suggestions for improving the quality of our programme.

C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

Name	Position	Signature
Leonidas Kyriakides	Professor, Chair of the Department	
Eleni Phtiaka	Professor, Coordinator	

Date: ……4/5/20……………………….

TABLE 1: TEACHING STAFF

A/A	Name and Surname	Discipline / Specialization	Teaching courses in the program of study under evaluation (Master, Special and Inclusive Education)		
			Code	Course title	Hour Periods/ week
1.	Helen Phtiaka	Sociology of Education and Inclusive Education	EDU 542	Special and Inclusive Education in Cyprus	3
			EDU 639	Inclusive Education: the new face of special education?	3
			EDU 688	Seminar: Current trends in Special and Inclusive Education	0.5
2.	Simoni Symeonidou	Inclusive Education	EDU 545	Disability in the society and at school	3
			EDU 546	Differentiated instruction in the inclusive classroom	3
			EDU 688	Seminar: Current trends in Special and Inclusive Education	0.5
3.	Charalambos Charalambous	Educational Research and Evaluation	EDU 683	Educational Statistics with Statistical Packages Applications	3
4.	Miranda Christou	Sociology of Education	EDU 550	Education and Social Exclusion	3
5.	Zelia Gregoriou	Theory of Education	EDU 637	EDU 637: Theory and Politics of Multicultural Education	3

6.	Elena Ioannidou	Language Education	EDU 529	Monolingual, Bilingual and Multilingual Education: Attitudes, Trends and Perspectives	3
7.	Eleftherios Klerides	Comparative Education	EDU 603	Comparative Education	3
8.	Eleni Loizou	Early Childhood Education	EDU 563	Supporting Creativity in Early Childhood Education	3
9.	New Member of Staff	Educational Research and Evaluation	EDU 682	Qualitative Research in Education	3

NOTE: The seminar EDU 688 is taught in turns by the co-ordinators, once every academic year.