

Doc. 300.1.2

Date: 11/12/2019

Higher Education Institution's response

- **Higher education institution:**

Open University of Cyprus

- **Town:** Nicosia

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

In Greek: Μεταπτυχιακό πρόγραμμα σπουδών
«Βιοηθική – Ιατρική Ηθική», 120 ECTS, 2
academic years full time, Magister Artium (MA),
Distance Learning

In English: MA in Bioethics – Medical Ethics

- **Language of instruction:** Greek

- **Programme's status**

New programme: Yes

Currently operating: No

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)

Findings

The importance of establishing a postgraduate distance-learning programme in bioethics/medical ethics based at OUC cannot be emphasised enough. The implementation of this kind of programme in this part of Europe responds to a need which the panel believe will be all the more prevalent in the future. In some areas, the panel's findings were influenced by the fact that this is a new programme, and that the identities of the teaching staff were by and large not known. This aspect is further explicated in D. (Conclusions and Final Remarks) and is a significant factor in every area of assessment that follows.

OUC Response:

It is exactly for the above reasons aptly described by the EEC that Open University of Cyprus has decided to suggest the establishment and operation of such a postgraduate programme. The MA in Bioethics – Medical Ethics proposed by a competent Academic Team will be offered by OUC as soon as it gains its accreditation by the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education, and we believe that it will attract a significant number of applicants.

The qualifications and the teaching and research experience of the members of the academic team responsible for the design of the new programme were included in the application form (Annex 3- full CVs). As mentioned during the onsite visit, as well as in the application form, Open University of Cyprus, being a public institution, will announce an open Call for Applications for Adjunct Faculty (Tutors) for the MA in Bioethics – Medical Ethics, as well as for all the other programmes to be offered as of the 2020-2021 academic year. Based on the pre-defined evaluations criteria (i.e. past teaching & research experience, publications, experience in distance learning, availability of the candidate, etc), the best candidates will be selected to teach this programme based on the different fields of expertise its Thematic Units require.

The coordinator of the programme has taken into account all substantial advice accorded by the EEC and will make proper use of all suggestions to ensure the optimization of the programme's operation.

Strengths

The panel were impressed with most of the curriculum, and with the prospective course coordinator's academic credentials. At the same time, the panel felt that there were a small number of changes which would facilitate the programme's success. Notwithstanding the necessary adjustments outlined below, the panel felt that the thematic units *BIH623* (Neuroethics), *BIH615* (Ethics and Pharma), and *BIH612* (Bioethics and Legislation (sic.)) were particularly strong examples of well-drafted course descriptions.

OUC Response:

As evident below, the University and the programme's coordinator have taken into consideration the changes proposed by the EEC and made the necessary adaptations.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The panel recommends that the course descriptions, and particularly bibliographies, for each thematic unit (a) are brought up-to-date and further focused, (b) follow a similar structure and length, (c) take into account reasonable reading times, (d) avoid redundancies (in particular in relation to basic teaching materials, e.g. Beauchamp & Childress), and (e) ensure the balance of recommended literature (i.e. appropriate counterpoints to Singer, Harris, Savulescu, where appropriate).

The panel suggest merging *BIH611* and *BIH614* into one thematic unit entitled "Global Bioethics", which is more in line with internationally visible scholarship in this area.

The panel also suggest changing a number of course titles to better align the course structure to international practices and expectations:

- *BIH511* change from "Introduction to Ethics: Major Moral Traditions" to "History of Moral Theories"
- *BIH527* change from "Ethics and Deontology of Research: Personal Data" to "Ethics and Integrity in Research" (also to be made compulsory)
- *BIH612* change from "Bioethics and Legislation" to "Bioethics and Law"

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H522 change from "Bioethics and Reproduction" to "Bioethics and the Beginning of Life"

- BIH526 change from "Ethics of Reproductive Medicine and Woman's (sic.) Health" to "Ethics and Reproductive Health"
- BIH525 change from "Medical Duty - Medical Deontology" to "Medical Deontology"

Whilst being aware of the side effects to the interdependency of course offerings in this programme, the panel further recommend that the applicants consider changing the programme structure. These changes include making a number of thematic units optional whilst making others compulsory, in order to provide a more consistent learning experience to students.

OUC Response:

All the suggested modifications made by the EEC are fully accepted. Only a minor adjustment was made in the curriculum with regard to BIH623: Neuroethics; this thematic unit had to be turned into Compulsory (common for both academic directions) against the EEC's suggestion that it should be included as optional, because otherwise the ECTS count for academic direction Bioethics couldn't be reached. This modification, however, is also serviceable to the academic purposes of both academic directions. As far as the structure of the programme and the suggestions to change titles of Thematic Units, please note that the new structure is as follows:

Common for both academic directions	
BIH511: History of Moral Theories	Compulsory
BIH512: Human Rights and Theories of Human Rights	Compulsory
BIH521: Ethics and Integrity in Research	Compulsory
BIH611: Neuroethics	Compulsory
BIH701A: Master Thesis I	Compulsory
BIH701B: Master Thesis II	Compulsory
Common Electives	
BIH 621: Global Bioethics	Optional

Academic direction: Bioethics	
BIH513: Introduction to Applied Ethics and Bioethics	Compulsory
BIH522: Bioethics and the Human Genome	Optional
BIH523: Bioethics and the Beginning of Life	Optional
BIH524: Bioethics and Enhancement	Optional
BIH612: Bioethics and Law	Compulsory
BIH622: Bioethics and Health Care Policies	Optional

Academic direction: Medical Ethics	
BIH514: Introduction to Applied Ethics and Medical Ethics	Compulsory
BIH525: Introduction to Clinical Ethics	Compulsory
BIH526: Medical Deontology	Optional
BIH527: Ethics of Reproductive Health	Optional
BIH613: Ethics and the Pharmaceutical Industry	Optional
BIH623: Medical Ethics and Marginal Cases	Optional

The revised study guides, which will be available to all prospective students will include all the suggestions made by the EEC. The revised descriptions of the Thematic Units (course descriptions, bibliographies) are submitted as **Annex I** of this response.

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

Strengths

The panel notes that OUC has extensive experience in offering distance learning courses of this kind and is confident that the institution is capable of delivering this programme.

OUC Response:

The programme's coordinator will work with the competent administrative units of the Open University of Cyprus and the Lab of Educational Material and Educational Methodology to ensure that everything is in place before the operation of the new programme in the 2020-2021 academic year.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

This is a new programme, and the panel assessed a number of criteria by way of matching them against the potential coordinator. It is crucial to the academic quality of this programme that it is ensured that when OUC advertises for and selects adjunct faculty, the appropriate level of research activity and expertise is sought for and present in the successful candidates.

OUC Response:

As mentioned beforehand, the OUC along with the coordinator of the programme will make sure that the best candidates will be selected as Adjunct Faculty (Tutors) for this programme, as with the rest of the programmes offered by Open University of Cyprus. Candidates for the positions of OUC Tutors, according to paragraph (6) of section 18 of the Open University Law (Law 234 (I)/2002), hold a Ph.D. degree from recognized Higher Education Institutions.

Candidates are assessed according to the following criteria:

- Relevance to the Thematic Unit that they are interested in teaching.
- General teaching experience at a university and specific experience in distance learning over the last five years.

- Availability of the candidate, as evidenced by a signed declaration of duties, and ability to use modern technology.
- Research and writing work over the last five years.
- Professional experience related to the subject areas of the programme.

Thus, particular emphasis shall be paid on the research impact of the prospective teaching members and on their familiarity with the use of eLearning teaching methods and tools. Besides, the Thematic Units evaluated by the EEC were prepared by PhD holders and researchers with substantial expertise in the field of their assignment.

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)

Findings

Given that the panel is at this point not aware of the identities of the actual teaching staff, it was not possible to assess the prospective staff's suitability. This is to be expected in the context of distance learning courses offered by OUC and not a matter for concern. Where appropriate, the panel based their assessment on the background of the prospective coordinator, and the written materials provided.

OUC Response:

It is the programme's prospective coordinator's firm belief that the teaching staff to be chosen will meet all the necessary academic and research criteria. This is ensured by the strict selection procedure to be followed by the OUC.

Strengths

The panel note the CVs provided, and was given an opportunity to speak to some members of the team involved in drafting the programme. Based on a review of the written material and discussions with contributors, the panel consider that suitable candidates will likely be available to teach the programme.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The panel reiterate the language requirements for teaching this programme; it is paramount that the staff selected to teach in this programme are competent users of the English language given the proportion of required reading in English, and the need to familiarise the students with the dynamic of international debate in bioethics and medical ethics.

OUC Response:

The OUC and the programme coordinator are fully in line with the EEC's above remark, which shall constitute one of the main teaching staff selection criteria. The proposed MA in Bioethics – Medical Ethics lies in prevalent scientific areas, and excellent command of the English language will be safeguarded. It should be mentioned, however, that the academics/researchers that have prepared the Study Guides of the programme's Thematic Units have published in English and have significant experience in academic procedures requiring the excellent command of a foreign language. In any case, excellent command of the English language is safeguarded when selecting suitable candidates as Adjunct Faculty (i.e. Tutors), based on their research / publications work, academic qualifications, teaching experience, etc.

4. Students (ESG 1.4, 1.6, 1.7)

Findings

As a new programme, the panel's assessment is based on an interview with three current students from other programmes.

Strengths

The students were articulate and extremely helpful. They highlighted the student experience at OUC as particularly positive.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

OUC Response:

It is rewarding for Open University of Cyprus to see that its current students are highly satisfied with the learning experience. Indeed, Open University of Cyprus places great emphasis on student feedback, and this is why the University's Quality Assurance Office asks for students' feedback on a) the Thematic Unit (course), b) the Tutor, c) the University's eLearning Platform and other eLearning Tools, and d) the University's Administrative Services at the end of each semester, prior to the final written exams.

5. Resources (*ESG 1.6*)

Findings

The panel found that the available resources are of high quality and in line with expectations for the provision of a programme of this kind.

OUC Response:

Open University of Cyprus will make sure that all available resources for the newly proposed MA in Bioethics – Medical Ethics are and will remain of high quality and will be constantly updated based on research.

Strengths

OUC's well established eClass system, extensive library resources and other communication tools are likely to provide excellent support to students and teachers.

OUC Response:

We do believe that the eLearning Platform – eClass – used by Open University of Cyprus is state-of-the-art and provides all the necessary tools (educational and communicational) to ensure that teaching and learning experience is of high quality.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

See above (No. 1) in relation to recommendations for the improvement of teaching materials and bibliography.

OUC Response:

As mentioned beforehand, the revised Thematic Units descriptions are presented as Annex I of this report, and the programme's coordinator and the University's Quality Assurance Office shall modify as needed the Study Guides according to the suggestions made by the EEC.

6. Additional for distance learning programmes (*ALL ESG*)

Findings

The nature of the programme is compatible with distance learning delivery and the methodology provided is appropriate for the particular programme of study.

The university's eClass system supports online teaching, learning and administrative processes. This is a Moodle installation with all the basic online services available. The platform specifically provides synchronous and asynchronous tools to support the interaction needs of students with the tutors, the other students and with the materials. The platform also provides e-assessment procedures through quizzes with automatic feedback in order to assess students' knowledge. The provision of more complex forms of e-assessment to assess competences was not shown.

The university has a unit responsible for designing, creating, implementing and evaluating study materials (Information and Communication Technologies Services). This unit addresses the requirements for study materials, interactive activities and formative assessment in accordance with state-of-the-art technological advances and own research activities. A proof of concept of advanced materials based on VR developed by the unit was demonstrated during the on-site visit. The study guide included a suggested time engagement though it was not clear during the evaluation how this time was calculated.

OUC Response:

The suggested time engagement was intentionally more or less the same for all thematic units, so that study cohesion is supported and students are equally devoted to all thematic areas. However, further adjustments and refinement of the study time shall be included in certain thematic units that admit of slight changes.

Academic Coordinator response: Each semester consists of 15 teaching weeks. We have estimated the workload for each course in 250-300 hours, which results in 10 ECTS per course, since 1 ECTS corresponds to 25-30 working hours. The reason we estimated the work load to 250-300 hours is that that the students will have to read an average of 800-1,000 pages both in Greek and English, do their own research, and also write papers. Since these are only rough estimations, the academic administration of the Program will be constantly alert to make any adjustments that

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uld be necessary so as the work load remains within the estimated limits; to this purpose the feedback provided by the students will be extremely significant.

Strengths

More generally, the panel notes that student feedback during the course of the evaluation was very positive in relation to the level of detail usually provided as feedback on written assignments.

OUC Response:

Since Open University of Cyprus places great emphasis on quality assurance, we ask from all teaching personnel to provide detailed feedback on students' written assignments and not only marks. Detailed feedback is available on the University's eClass learning platform.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

OUC must ensure that candidates have the necessary skills and experience for distance learning education.

The panel suggest that, unless already envisaged, a learning analytics component be included in this programme in order to provide students, teachers, and coordinators with useful knowledge which underpins the learning process and facilitates the improvement of the course.

The proposed thematic units have a weekly study guide that includes relevant information: synopsis, aims, anticipated results, reviewed literature, and self-evaluation exercises. These weekly self-assessment exercises would be improved through the introduction of tutor assessments and formative feedback.

Formative assessment and the corresponding formative feedback to students are provided by teachers through compulsory assignments (twice per semester) plus in live (generally online) meetings. The panel recommend that care is taken, that the formative feedback from assignments is provided more regularly, personalized, and in a timely fashion.

OUC Response:

Open University of Cyprus, as already mentioned, launches an open Call for Adjunct Faculty (i.e. Tutors) to teach the Thematic Units of its programmes of study offered each academic year. Its permanent faculty members also teach. One of the selection criteria, as evident from a previous Call for Applications (**Annex II** of this response) is “Distance learning teaching experience in higher education institutions during the past five years, and ability to use state-of-the-art technology.” Therefore, experience in distance teaching is taken into consideration. Moreover, OUC competent Administrative Services (Information & Communications Technology Unit – eClass team) offer training to all newly appointed Tutors for the use of the University’s eLearning Platform (eClass), as well as other eLearning tools used for the purposes of teaching and learning. Webinars are also available, and personalized support is also provided.

Learning Analytics are supported by the University’s eLearning Platform, which is based on Moodle. At this moment, Tutors and Academic Coordinators have access to various statistics and tools to support effective monitoring of the students’ progress, such as statistics of the use of eClass by students (logins, time spend on the Platform, downloading and views of videos/telelectures), as well as alerts on submission of written assignments, self-assessment exercises, downloading of mandatory and elective bibliography, etc. Moreover, Tutors provide detailed feedback on all written assignments, and this is available on eClass for each student to improve their progress. Academic Coordinators also have access to these statistics, so as to safeguard high quality teaching and high quality support to all students. The University’s Educational Material & Educational Methodology Lab, and the University’s eClass team will also work to incorporate additional LA tools, such as to provide feedback to teaching staff on the effectiveness of their teaching practices and teaching plans and design.

As far as weekly Study Guides are concerned, the Study Guides prepared in Greek for the MA in Bioethics – Medical Ethics, as the programme’s teaching language is Greek, provide all the information suggested by the EEC (i.e. synopsis, aim, learning outcomes, mandatory & additional bibliography, self-evaluation exercises). Study Guides will also be reviewed based on the recommendations of the Committee (point 1, change of names, compulsory/optional courses). Tutor assessments and formative feedback shall be included in the assessment procedures, in compliance with the suggestions made by the EEC.

7. Additional for doctoral programmes (*ALL ESG*)

Not applicable, as this concerns a new Master's degree programme.

8. Additional for joint programmes (*ALL ESG*)

Not applicable, as this does not concern a joint programme.

B. Conclusions and final remarks

The panel is grateful for the discussions with the University's and Faculty's leadership during the site visit on 12 September 2019. A particular aspect which impacted the panel's assessment was the fact that this programme is new (i.e. the panel were not able to assess past assignments or theses from students, speak to current students of this programme, or interview teaching staff). In particular, the leadership very kindly and helpfully provided detailed explanations of how OUC advertises and fills vacancies for teaching staff after the approval of a programme, and the panel accept that OUC's processes in this regard are proven and appropriate.

The panel have made several recommendations (all of which the panel believe are easily implementable) pertaining to the course descriptions, the bibliography, the differentiation between compulsory and optional thematic units, the importance of the quality of teaching staff and tutors (including the appropriate language competency). Finally, the panel have made some recommendations pertaining to the distance learning platform in line with appropriate methodology, and on the provision of information to students, for evaluation and monitoring purposes.

The recommendations made in relation to the structure of the programme are intended to stimulate debate and reflection on the part of the programme team. The panel does not consider it an obstacle to approval if the coordinator chooses to retain the existing structure.

Overall, the panel considers that the implementation of a distance learning master's programme in bioethics and medical ethics is timely and important for this region. There is a significant potential for the wider attractiveness of the programme, were it to be offered in English as well in the future.

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UC Response:

In closing, we would like to thank the External Evaluation Committee for the constructive discussion during the onsite visit of the newly proposed MA in Bioethics – Medical Ethics. Moreover, we thank the EEC’s members for their positive comments in the programme’s External Evaluation Report, and for all their recommendations, which we truly appreciate and have taken into consideration and we have modified the programme accordingly as evident in this response. We look forward to a positive decision by CYQAA regarding the accreditation of the programme, as per the recommendation of the EEC.

C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Dr. Evangelos Protopapadakis	Academic Coordinator	
Professor Sokratis Katsikas	Rector	
Professor Yannis Manolopoulos	Vice-Rector, Chair of the University’s Quality Assurance Committee	
Erato Ioanna Sarri	Coordinator of the University’s Quality Assurance Office	

Date: 11/12/2019

TABLE 1: TEACHING STAFF

Fullname	Employee status	SeniorAcademicTitle	TaughtCourse	Course Code
	Eg. Permanent Full-time or Non-Permanent Full-Time or Part-time	Eg. PhDin		

