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ΦΟΡΕΑΣ ΔΙΑΣΦΑΛΙΣΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΠΙΣΤΟΠΟΙΗΣΗΣ ΤΗΣ ΠΟΙΟΤΗΤΑΣ ΤΗΣ ΑΝΩΤΕΡΗΣ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗΣ
CYPRUS AGENCY OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Doc. 300.3.2

Higher Education Institution's Response

(Departmental)

Date: 30/06/2020

- **Higher Education Institution:**
  University of Cyprus
- **Town: Nicosia**
- **School/Faculty: Social Sciences and Education**
- **Department: Psychology**
- **Programme(s) of study under evaluation**
  Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)

Programme 1
In Greek:
Πτυχίο Ψυχολογίας
In English:
Psychology BA

Programme 2
In Greek:
Μάστερ στην Κοινωνική και Αναπτυξιακή Ψυχολογία
In English:
Masters in Social and Developmental Psychology

Programme 3
In Greek:
Διδακτορικό στη Ψυχολογία
In English:
 Ph.D. in Psychology
- **Department's Status: Currently Operating**

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.300.3.1) must justify whether actions have been taken in improving the quality of the department in each assessment area.*

- *In particular, under each assessment area, the HEI must respond on, <u>without changing the format of the report</u>:*

  - *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. 300.3.1).*

- *In case of annexes, those should be attached and sent on a separate document.*

1. Department's academic profile and orientation

Sub-areas

    1.1   Mission and strategic planning
    1.2   Connecting with society
    1.3   Development processes

EEC Comments:1.1. There is a publicly available mission statement focusing on undergraduate education, research and the interconnection of teaching and research with service. This statement is quite generic, as is the strategic planning for the next five years. We believe there is an opportunity to reflect on and plan to enhance the unique strengths of this department and its programs. A more targeted strategy could be usefully translated into plans for the short, medium and long term. To ensure input of stakeholders in the department's development strategy, two different strategies are followed. Students and teaching staff are represented in the departmental board, in which the developmental strategy is designed and approved. Professional and scientific associations are not represented in the board, but members of the department take important roles in these societies and as such guarantee these societies' input in the department's strategy. There may be room for a more formal external advisory board to provide input on the department's mission and strategy.

Response:
The discussion with the EEC and received feedback was valuable in helping the Department think more about its aims. The Department Council has decided to hold a specialized meeting once a semester, during which an external board of experts (including local stakeholders like the Licensing Board, industry and NGOs that could host students for placements and members of international scientific bodies, like the Scientific Affairs Board of EFPA) will be also present, to discuss the specific short, medium and long term aims.

With regards to other specific areas for improvement:

1.3.3. The Department has already made decisions regarding the offering of courses in English to facilitate the recruitment of Erasmus students and to progressively build the ability to take in non-Greek speaking students. Through this approach the English language skills of Greek speaking students will also be enhanced.
Specifically, it has been decided during the May and June 2020 meetings, that at least 5 courses per semester will be offered in English, and that these will not be offered in Greek during alternative semesters or years to ensure that students do not avoid them (which results in class cancellations). Faculty teaching graduate courses are encouraged to offer their courses in English where possible.
It has also been decided that any new Masters programs offered by the Department will be in English. Program committees have been asked to discuss and make recommendation regarding the degree to which they can progressively convert significant parts of coursework into English.

1.1.7. The Department has noted the suggestion to increase data collection within the department on which to base assessments and future improvements. There is already collaboration of the committees with the department administrators to delineate domains where data is needed. As a

first step, there is now a clear data-base regarding all graduate students, their entry date, the time at which they achieved various milestones, and their pending requirements. A similar data base will be developed for the undergraduate students.

Two catalogs including all Department decisions about procedures and requirements 1 for graduate studies and 1 for undergraduate studies are currently being developed, with the first one of these being at an advanced stage of development. These will be finalized after thorough review by all faculty members and student board members. Once final the decision is to post them online for all staff and students to have easy access.

The Council also decided during its June 2020 meeting to collect data on undergraduate and graduate student grades across faculty and instructors to assess reliability of marking and identify and potential deviations from department and university means.

2. Quality Assurance

Sub-areas

2.1 System and quality assurance strategy
2.2 Quality assurance for the programmes of study

Comments by the EEC:

The department adheres to the university-wide quality assurance policy, which comprises both internal and external assurance mechanisms. Whereas there is no doubt about the quality of the department, the specific departmental strategy to ensure quality is implicit rather than explicitly articulated and openly communicated. The strategy is reactive (solving problems as they occur) rather than proactive.

The department has a departmental undergraduate committee and a postgraduate studies committee dealing with teaching quality issues, learning outcomes and the content and structure of the curriculum. Students are represented in the committees. In addition, a coordinator is appointed by the department for each program, who is responsible for monitoring the program results and student counselling, and also, he/she acts as a facilitator between the students and program tutors. The department council oversees and monitors all aspects pertaining to the quality of the programs of study and their outcomes. Quality assurance of the teaching process, however, is rather weak. Student evaluations are performed bi-annually but there is no articulated procedure for using this feedback in the service of improving teaching. New staff members are mentored. Quality assurance of assessment is absent. Staff members autonomically develop and perform assessment procedures without any peer review or monitoring at the level of a program committee or exam committee.

Response: The EEC has noted that the quality assurance strategies should be made more explicit and public. Although this is a challenging task and "work-in progress" the Department has noted this need and is discussing ways to make the regulations and procedures more explicit and consistent, by a) collecting all department decisions and synthesizing them into internal regulations and b) noting areas of potential inconsistencies and setting uniform guidelines by decision of the Council (including student representatives), c) in addition to the regular presence of the student representatives holding a formal meeting each semester between each program committee and a group of student representatives with the explicit aim of exchanging feedback and resolving problems. It should be noted that this procedure is already followed for the Clinical and School Psychology Programs, but it will be adopted by the department's remaining programs. Committees will then inform the Council on any significant areas of concern for which Department decisions are required, and about the measures taken to resolve current concerns.

In addition, the Department has decided to establish an internal Quality Control committee that will address a number of issues including the following, with the aim of greater standardization: clearer guidelines will be set involving the requirements for satisfactory performance at Research Experience courses, Independent Study courses and undergraduate theses and basic requirements for grading in other courses that reflect the course's ECTS.

It should be noted, that according to the current practice student evaluations of faculty and courses are performed every semester and the Chair is notified of all evaluations as per the university regulations. The Chair is responsible and regularly discusses noteworthy issues raises by students, while this feedback is taken into serious consideration when hiring Instructors for

specific courses, as the Chair and Vice Chair typically sit on the hiring committee. Where there are grievances pertaining to courses these are regularly brought to the Council for resolution.

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3. Administration

Comments by the EEC Members of the teaching staff and students participate in the management of the department, through their representation in the departmental council. The administrative staff is not formally represented in the board but in the context of decisions on procedural issues, their input is welcomed. The administrative staff adequately supports the operation of the department, but staffing levels are low given the department's size. Student complaints appear to be dealt with ad hoc.

Response: In the context of formalizing quality assurance procedures (as discussed above), more consistent ways of receiving feedback by students and dealing with complaints are being compiled and have been decided by the Council. Procedures regarding grievances are already in place, involving at first step the academic advisor, at next step the program committee, then the chair and finally the department council, however, we plan to make this procedure explicit and communicated to students from the time of their entry into the department.

4. Learning and Teaching

Sub-areas

4.1 Planning the programmes of study
4.2 Organisation of teaching

EEC comments: There are formal procedures with respect to program development and reform. All programs of study of the department of psychology are prepared by the faculty members of the department of psychology and approved by the department council. However, there is not an articulated view or rationale for the specific curriculum choices made. Across the entirety of its programs, the department tries to cover the major domains of psychology (e.g. cognitive, social, developmental, school...) and because it would not be feasible to devote a program to each domain, domains are combined 19 within a program (e.g., social and developmental). Although this combination may be very interesting and fruitful, it seems that there is room for improvement in terms of the curriculum rationale and focus. In this context specific courses appear to reflect staff interests or student preferences rather than curriculum design. The faculty staff (limited to n=16) takes responsibility for all of these programs. In order to ensure both a sufficient number of students in each course and sufficient options for students within each program, there is a substantial overlap between the programs. Moreover, given the limited number of resources, many courses are taught biannually. This needs clear documentation to inform student choices.
In the international context, student/staff ratio is on the higher side. Despite this, the department runs many classes with student numbers in single figures, and prefers to split classes rather than teach larger numbers. It is rather unclear whether teaching staff routinely provide feedback on student work and which form (written, oral) this takes. Also, it seems that criteria and methods of assessment are not communicated in a very transparent way to the students.

Response: The comments of the committee have been taken into serious consideration. The faculty will increase to 18 as of 2020-2021, which will help with course offerings. There is already an effort to reduce the electives taught mostly by external instructors and offer more consistent electives, more frequently, by permanent staff. This has been discussed as an explicit goal during the June 2020 Council meeting. The graduate programs, consistent with EEC recommendations, are becoming more fixed to avoid large heterogeneities in curriculum content for students.
Smaller classes are not a matter of preference. The Department adheres to UCY standards of 80 students per class maximum, also taking into consideration availability of large auditoriums that are shared by the entire university. Most classes are interactive (without labs and tutors to provide this interactive components) which is easier to achieve in smaller classes.
However, we do agree that, especially given the large number of graduate students, the Department faculty are struggling to meet all teaching obligations and maintain high standards and that faculty numbers are at the low end of international standards. Therefore, the Department will continue to actively seek the support of the university in progressively increasing faculty members. In the meantime, an effort will be made to collapse sections of the same class into one, to be taught by permanent staff.
Curriculum planning for each program is proposed by the program committee and discussed at Department Council. There is substantial thinking that goes into the design of each program. In the future, for revising of existing programs and proposal of new ones, the Department will use existing rubrics to make curriculum goals more explicit within and across courses. The June 2020 Department Council has decided to ask each program committee to undertake the task to study

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each curriculum and how each course fits within the overall scope, brining proposals to the Council for any required changes so that programs become progressively more streamlined. This has already been done for the School Psychology program. In the meantime, all course outlines have been revised to more clearly and in detail reflect the content, aims and learning outcomes and will be posted on the Department website.

5. Teaching Staff

Comments by the EEC: Although the department takes care to find a balance in the ratio of permanent to temporary staff at each level of the program, there is a high reliance on special teaching staff overall, which may threaten sustainability and make planning over the years precarious. One possible reason for the high reliance on non-permanent staff is the proliferation of optional courses across the degree programs. In an attempt to ensure enough options for students at all levels as well as to guarantee small groups in all classes, many more courses are organized than the permanent staff can handle.

The department has 16 faculty members and 2 practicum leaders working full-time and on a permanent basis. None of the special teaching staff works full-time. There are about 1 or 2 visiting professors a year and about 10 to 12 special scientists on lease services per semester across all the programs.

Response: Taking into consideration this feedback there is an effort to reduce offerings of elective courses and make them more consistent across each year. It is expected that the two newly hired faculty will reduce the courses taught by external instructors by 4 per semester. Also, the EEC should have in mind that in addition to the 16 (to be 18) permanent faculty, courses are also taught regularly by the two practicum coordinators who offer 4 courses per year that are typically compulsory.

The hope is that faculty numbers will continue to increase and reliance on external staff will decrease. Also, at least half of the elective courses that are not taught by faculty members are actually taught by Ph.D. students receiving UCY scholarships who are required to teach one course per year, under the supervision of a permanent faculty member who previously has taught the course. Therefore, this teaching staff is "in-house" and involved in department research and goals for a number of years. Although the recommendation to rely more on permanent staff finds us in agreement and is part of our strategic goal, we should note that all external instructors are carefully selected for their high academic credentials and research orientation, all hold PhDs, and for their ability to enrich the program with fresh perspectives, something we consider valuable in a small country.

6. Research

Comments by the EEC: The department has a strong international research presence and successfully acquires both national and international research funding. It benefits from staff with ample international training and experience. Research facilities and infrastructure are up to date and PhD students and postdocs clearly show ownership of their research projects. Students routinely participate in research activities at all levels of their curriculum and learn important research skills there. Although most courses address research skills, this could be better signposted in course documentation. Of importance is the inclusion of current good practices related to research integrity and open science. In spite of this strong research orientation in the programs at all levels, it is surprising that students can obtain a master's degree without having written a thesis. The committee is of the view that having a thesis as compulsory part of the master's program is indispensable to meet international standards. Current (and former) students informed us that they all intend to undertake (or undertook) a master's thesis, so there are indications of the high value and level of interest in this element of the program. We recommend that the program team reviews this as a matter of urgency. We note that there is also an opportunity to consider in the future whether the bachelor's thesis should become compulsory.

Response:
For the Masters in Social Developmental Psychology program the Department Council has already decide to make the Thesis compulsory, as the EEC recommendation finds us in agreement (see program response).
With regards to the undergraduate program an extensive discussion of the topic was included in the June 2020 Council meeting, following up on previous similar discussion is previous years. Although the faculty mostly agree that the undergraduate thesis would best be compulsory we refrain from making this decision due to the very limited resources noted by the EEC in terms of the ability of current faculty to supervise theses. We plan to revisit this issue when faculty numbers increase somewhat. It should be noted, however, that the student representatives on the Council disagree with this proposal as they believe that students who do not plan to continue with graduate studies should be given the option to take more elective courses potentially relevant to their employment, rather than do a compulsory thesis. The student opinion will weigh significantly on this decision that will be considered in future strategic plan meetings of the Council.
Taking the EEC comments into consideration we have asked instructors to make the research components more explicit in syllabi, and this can be seen in the revised course outlines. Also, we are thinking of re-organizing the undergraduate research courses so that the two existing courses more distinctively focus on research methods vs statistics respectively. We hope that the two new faculty members will be able to teach some of these courses consistently (to ensure consistency of content across years) but also contribute to more program-specific research courses that were recently added, such as the Research Methods in School Psychology, and the Epistemology course for the Masters in Social Psychology.

7. Resources

Comments by EEC: Department finances were not formally audited. However, it appears that the departments manage the available budgets adequately. Cuts in the financial budget of the department limit the extent to which the department can fully realize its mission. Also, the department faces problems in obtaining sufficient student scholarships.
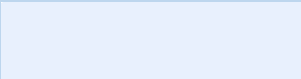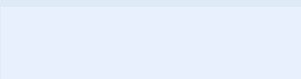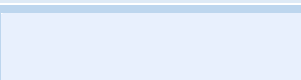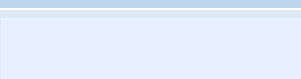
Response:

Department finances are centrally monitored by the UCY budget office. The Department has discussed the need to increase its income through attractive master's programs that it plans to design over the next few years. Funding is currently adequate and UCY has been responsive to specific requests for documented needs. Although the hope would be that ultimately all graduate students will receive scholarships, the Department is content that it receives a fair portion of scholarships available currently at UCY.

B. Conclusions and final remarks

Comments by the EEC: One cannot visit the department of psychology without being impressed. The department has several strong degree programs and a majority of staff with internationally competitive research profiles. The department has close links to Cypriot society and a genuine investment in addressing its needs. When one considers that the department is only 16 years old, its achievements to date speak for themselves. In a sense, the department is coming of age. The comments throughout this document are largely aimed at consolidating and documenting practices which are, by and large, examples of excellent education in psychology. As the department matures and places its feet more firmly on the international stage, it will need to make clear to its students the hows and whys of its curricula and processes. There is also a major opportunity for rationalization, considering carefully which courses should be offered, and in which combinations and languages, in order to offer degrees which are nationally and internationally attractive, and reflect honestly the genuine strengths and unique situation of the department and the university. Some specific and possibly painful changes will be necessary. Some courses might be cancelled; the master's program should include a compulsory thesis. Other changes are likely to emerge as a consequence of more focused strategies around issues such as topic specialization and internationalization. All in all, we are happy to conclude that the department is largely compliant with the regulations of the CAQAAHE and we expect it to go from strength to strength.

Response: We thank the committee for this positive review and for all their helpful comments. They have provided us for food for thought that will guide the Department as it continues to establish itself internationally. We fully agree that now that the Department feels confident in the content of what it offers to students and the community, it can engage in a process of "meta-cognition" to make its aims, curriculum planning and procedures explicit and open to public discourse. It will also aim, in accord with its strategic goals, to make its programs more attractive to both local and international students by bringing out their strengths and appropriately marketing them to their target audience.

C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

Name	Position	Signature
George Spanoudis	Associate Professor, Chairman	
Charis Psaltis	Associate Professor, Vice-Chair	
FullName	Position	
FullName	Position	
FullName	Position	
FullName	Position	

Date: 30/06/2020