

Doc. 300.3.2

07.14.313.012

Date: *Date*

Higher Education Institution's Response
(Departmental)

- **Higher Education Institution: FREDERICK UNIVERSITY**
- **Town: Nicosia/Limassol**
- **School/Faculty: School of Education and Social Sciences**
- **Department: PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**
- **Programme(s) of study under evaluation Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)**

Programme 1

In Greek:

Κοινωνική Εργασία (4 ακαδημαϊκά έτη, 240 ECTS, Πτυχίο (BA))

In English:

Social Work (4 academic years, 240 ECTS, Bachelor (BA))

Programme 2

In Greek:

Κοινωνικός Σχεδιασμός και στην Ανάπτυξη Κοινωνικών Προγραμμάτων (3 ακαδημαϊκά εξάμηνα, 90 ECTS, Master (MA))

In English:

Social Planning and the Development of Social Programs (3 academic semesters, 90 ECTS, Master (MA))

Programme 3

In Greek:

Κοινωνικές Επιστήμες (3 ακαδημαϊκά έτη, 180 ECTS, Διδακτορικό (PhD))

In English:

Social Sciences (3 academic years, 180 ECTS, Διδακτορικό (PhD))

- **Department's Status: Currently Operating**

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



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



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Accreditation of Higher Education and the Establishment and Operation of an Agency on Related Matters Laws of 2015 to 2019” [N. 136 (I)/2015 to N. 35(I)/2019].

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, 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. 300.3.1).*
- *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

Areas of improvement and recommendations

A list of problem areas followed by or linked to the recommendations of how to improve the situation.

- 1.1 Reinforcing the teaching and research staff in the area of social service.
- 1.2 Only about one hundred Students in four Study Programs (BA Social Work 33, Master of Social Planning and Development of Social Programs 20, Bachelor in Psychology 48, PHD in Social Sciences 2) represents a problem for sustainability. It is necessary to take action to become more attractive, by the promotion of education in English, and by reducing the values of fees.
- 1.3 Small Staff. Only 11 academics as staff members, 3 of them with a PhD in Social Work. Reinforcing the staff in the area of social work should be considered.
- 1.4 The poor budget for research (only 299.000 Euros Research Funds between 2017 and 2020) must be reinforced.
- 1.5 Internationalization (international networks, English literature, partnerships with Universities) is a decisive matter of concern, Action must be taken in order to reinforce the participation.
- 1.6 The Department should change the labeling of the MA in Social Planning and of the PhD in Social Sciences to a more focused on social work labeling, while reinforcing the subject matters in which the discipline can gain national and international prestige.
- 1.7 The number of publications is small. The time for research of the teaching staff (about 20%) must be improved in order to allow more competitive publication in high ranking international journals. On the other hand, staff members involved in the research projects can be more oriented to the published products of that research.
- 1.8 Quality of Research (impact, relation to Social Work, cooperation with policy and practice) must be taken as a priority.

1.9 Connection between the four study programs should be made clear. The “umbrella strategy”: starting with disciplinary focus in the two BA studies and getting broader on MA/PhD shows a discrepancy with the mainstream tendencies worldwide.

Department’s Response:

Firstly, we would like to thank the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) for their thorough assessment and invaluable comments and recommendations. In the response, we outline how we address each point raised separately.

1.1 After detailed analysis of all the comments raised by the EEC, the Department decided to announce a position for a senior rank (Full Professor) in the field of Social Work with application deadline 05 April 2021. (Annex 01 – Social Work Vacancy).

For immediate remedial action, the Department has employed two academics with Social Work specialization:

- Professor Theodoros Sakelaropoulos, with specialization in Social Policy, as a Professor in the Department. Prof. Sakelaropoulos will not only assist the Department in an academic domain that the Committee suggested strengthening but is expected to assist significantly in research development and attraction of research funds.
- Professor Agapi Kandyylaki, with specialization in Social Work and Multiculturalism as a Visiting Professor. Prof. Kandyylaki will collaborate in the development of the PhD Program and the expansion of research activities in the Department, both in terms of publications as well as in terms of attracting research funding.

Both academics will commence employment from the Fall 2021 semester. Their CVs are provided in Annex 02.1 and Annex 02.2 of the response.

Additionally, the Department decided to renew the announcement ([Link](#)) for the a Teaching and Research Staff in Social Work for senior positions (Professor or Associate Professor) as the prior announcement became barren due to lack of applications (application deadline, 31st August 2021).

- 1.2 The Department applies an effective strategy of attracting high-quality students from Cyprus and abroad. The committee has raised the issue of the low number, especially of our undergraduate students (BA in Social Work), on several occasions, both during our discussions as well as in their Report. During our discussions, this issue was associated to a certain extent with their suggestion that the Department, and especially the Social Work programs (BA and MA), should expand to attract non-Cypriot students. In this context, the members referred to the possibility of introducing classes in English.

The Social Work academic programs at Frederick University are pioneers in Cyprus. These programs were the first programs introduced, established, and still running in the Republic of Cyprus. Social Work, like other social sciences, has suffered significantly during the past decade due to the economic crisis, but also, as we emphasized in our discussions with the Committee, from the slow process of institutionalization of the profession of Social Work. *In this context, the Department's study programs are just recovering from the low level of student enrollments in the middle of the past decade.*

The matter of sustainability has been discussed in depth with the University management and we are happy to note that we have the full backing of administration to maintain and grow the Social Work programs offered. There is a clear commitment that, unlike other universities, we will not terminate the programs and we expect sustainable growth in the coming years; this is also expressed with the approval of new positions in the specific field.

In relation to offering the programs in English, we believe that this is not the first priority as, given the fees of the program, it will not be easy to attract international students at first. However, the Department is working with the University management to support its efforts for internationalization. Our first priority for program development is offering the master program through distance learning or blended learning, which we believe, will help us attract a significant number of student.

It is further noted that we are progressively noticing a small but consistent increase of new recruits in the Social Work programs over the past couple of years, and we are confident that with the Department growth and the various remedial actions described we expect to have a sustainable increase in the Department's student numbers.

1.3 As noted in item 1.1. above, the Department has already recruited faculty in the field of Social work and proceeded with further announcement of positions. We would also like to note that one of our Special Teaching Staff (permanent position) with specialization in Social Work (Ms Koulla Erotokritou) is in nearing the completion of her PhD, thus further improving the Departmental academic profile. Finally, we would also like to note that, in addition to the recruits made for Social Work positions, the Department has announced academic positions in Psychology ([Link](#)) further increasing the staff numbers. We believe that with the new additions, and taking into account sustainability considerations, the Department size is suitable for a small University, inline with the norms in Universities of Cyprus.

1.4 The Department agrees with the EEC that the budget for research is limited, although it wants to point out that research budgets cannot match the ones often present in North-West Europe. The problem of research funding is further exacerbated with the significant drop in research-funding opportunities, mainly at national but also at international level, for social science disciplines.

To address the lack of funding the following actions were taken:

a. The University proceeded with an Internal Funding Scheme for Research assigning particular emphasis in the evaluation criteria the support for growth in poorly funded departments. We are pleased to note that the Department has been successful in this call with two (2) of its proposal being selected as coordinators, and one (1) as collaborators for funding, namely:

- Observatory of Safe Communities - OSC (Coordinated by Department Faculty)
- 'Parents' and Children's Wellbeing and Psychosocial Interventions for Parents during the Impact of COVID-19' (Coordinated by Department Faculty)
- Building cultural competence capacity for health professionals QR-CCC (Participation in the project by Department Faculty)

- b. The Department has employed senior academics, see answer 1.1 of the response, with significant experience in funding attraction and development of research groups. We believe that in the short-term a significant increase in research income will be achieved through this
- c. The Department has specified specific goals for research proposal submissions and establishment of collaborations with other universities so as to increase research capacity and production.
- 1.5 We agree with the Committee that as the Department grows emphasis should be placed on internationalization efforts and aim for reaching a broader audience. Clearly, for this the offering of the programs of study in the English language is a prerequisite and this is something we aim introducing in the near future; as discussed with the Committee and addressed earlier in the response, it is not prudent to do so immediately. We reiterate that the broader issue of internationalization rests in part with the University's strategic plan and general policy to open up programs of study to other markets.

Specifically, our Department's strategy forms as follows:

Period 2021-22: Stabilizing both the BA and MA programs with a local student pool that will deem them viable and sustainable. In this period, we are only beginning to develop our Ph.D. program, which will increase recognition in society and start getting noticed internationally – especially Greece. During this time, and after considering the committee's suggestion, we will strengthen the Department's English dimension – more on this, see below.

Period 2022-25: In this timeframe, we will try to expand the programs on a more international level and local communities in need of Social Work professionals [e.g., migrants, excluded social groups]. On the first level, we will increase our efforts for more research publications in English. At the same time, more bibliographies in English will be suggested, especially in MA and Ph.D. Programs. Our efforts will also focus on the possibility of offering our Ph.D. program in English.

One dimension which we think will help start the opening-up process is the Erasmus program. In late January 2021, our Department established a new Erasmus collaboration with the B.Sc. in Psychology program of the Mykolo Romerio

Universitetas/Mykolas Romeris University in Lithuania. In general, there are already some courses in English concerning Erasmus students. These will be expanded, and a new dimension of this expansion will be offering Social Work Electives in English for other programs of study of the university itself.

1.6 The Department accepts the Committee's recommendation of providing more narrow focused labels (names) for its MA and PhD programs. Specifically, the programs' names are modified as follows, as per the Committee's recommendations and discussions during the evaluation visit:

- **MA in Social Work and Social Administration.** This reflects the emphasis and focus on the social work dimension of the program
- **PhD in Social Work, Social Policy and Administration:** The name clearly reflects the focused scope of research interest in social work as well as the links with social policy and practice, as recommended by the Committee.

1.7 We agree with the Committee's finding that the number of publications produced by the Department is small. This is something that had already been identified in the Department and remedial actions were taken as well as new actions, as listed below.

- As described, the University has established an internal funding scheme for research. We are happy to note that in its first call, two proposals from the Department were successful and we hope that this funding would prove as seeding for further grant attraction and, as a result, reputable publications
- As noted in answer 1.1 of this response, the faculty has been enriched with experienced professors in the field of Social Work and Social Policy with particular focus on research development, something that will invariably lead to improvement of our publication record
- The Department has developed clear targets for publication expectations in terms of both quantity and quality. In particular, publications in journals/proceedings tracked by internationally accepted aggregators, such as Scopus, are given strong priority.
- The Department will form its first research unit, the Research Center on Resilience, which we hope will become a defining characteristic of our Psychology and Social

Work programs and will bring international research collaborations to the Department.

We wish to point out that some of these actions already started bearing fruits. Specifically, we would like to note that since 2018 department faculty members have published 55 peer-reviewed journal publications and presented their work in 45 peer reviewed international conference proceedings. This has been a significant improvement compared to the previous period and indicates the dedication and focus of the Department to this direction. Importantly, we believe that the committee may not have noticed this since the information presented in the application was outdated, given the gap of more than two years between application submission and evaluation. This is obvious from the remarks noted in item 6.5 of the evaluation report. Having said that, we accept that further emphasis should be given to high caliber publications with international impact, something discussed during the evaluation visit.

- 1.8 We believe the points mentioned in the previous answer, 1.7, adequately address the recommendations of the Committee in relation to quality of research. Furthermore, it is noted that the Department enjoys close links both with the professional body for social workers as well as competent governmental agencies. To this end, focused efforts will be made to enhance cooperation in relation to policy and practice.
- 1.9 We believe that the concerns of the Committee have been addressed as noted in detail on answer 1.6 of our response. We firmly believe that our programs of study have clear and separate objectives. It is evident that the Committee, coming from a clear Social Work background, does not support broadening the graduate programs to cover a wider area of scientific interests the Department addresses – we have accepted this position and adopted the suggestions made.

2. Quality Assurance

Sub-areas

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

Both Sub-areas were deemed by the committee as Compliant

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- 2.1 The assessment of the individual performance should impact on careers and promotion opportunities.
- 2.2 Quantitative goals should be clearly established in the context of a benchmarking policy. The models and good practices to follow must be clear and mobilize the energies of all, students and staff.

1.1 Assessment, as carried out within our Quality Assurance system is aimed at and focuses on continual self-development and common improvement at the department level. We believe that, were individual performance assessments be part of the promotion process, achieving the goals of the quality assurance framework would be impeded. Similarly, career development and remunerations are not linked to this process, in line with the practice in other Cypriot universities. Having said that, it is noted that the external evaluation committees for promotion of academics have access to disciplinary reports, should an academic fail to address noted shortcomings, and recommendations/awards received from high quality performance, as well as of course the full academic record of the individual. Therefore, we believe that the matter is adequately addressed

2.3 Quantitative goals are clearly established to facilitate benchmarking in several procedures. For example, in relation to student assessment, clear quantitative goals were set on performance levels from 5, with less than 3.5 requiring a report on remedial actions and between 3.5 and 4 requiring the matter to be discussed in the annual self-evaluation report. Similarly, through the development of the departmental research plan,

specific departmental quantitative goals have been specified in the selected KPIs tracked. We agree with the Committee's recommendation of enhancing the quantitative goal setting in the various actions of operation, where possible, and as a University we are committed to this.

Specifically, as an example immediate actions include the breaking down of assessment into constituent targets and linking quantitative goals with specific benchmarks. This is linked with supportive feedback so as to ensure that an understanding of the shortcomings is made and improvements are possible. Of course, for such actions to be effective, staff has to be appropriately trained and this is something that has been placed as a priority for the university's staff development program for the new academic year.

3. Administration

Areas of improvement and recommendations

3.1 No problems were seen by the commission. Beside the administrative Support for research, a support strategy for proposals funding possibilities could be considered in future

3.1 As noted in answer 1.4 of our response, an internal funding scheme has already been established under which, in its first call, the Department managed to succeed in two (2) of the proposals submitted as coordinators and one (1) as collaborators.

4. Learning and Teaching

Sub-areas

4.1 Planning the programmes of study

4.2 Organisation of teaching

Areas of improvement and recommendations

4.1 The English skills of students can and must be improved in many ways, ranging from literature supporting courses to promoting English complementary programs, and passing exams and other evaluation materials in English or majored if in English.

Department's Response

- 4.1 This suggestion has been adopted and will be encouraged within the Erasmus program. Additionally, the teaching staff will continue to enrich the bibliography of their classes with texts, books, published papers in the English language. It is noted that communication courses in English are included in the undergraduate program curriculum to further support this goal. These required courses focus, beyond language understanding, on skill development such as participation in discussions and summarizing scientific documents.

5. Teaching Staff

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- 5.1 Lack of a full professor in social work.
- 5.2 In-depth collaboration and involvement to strengthen the professional profile of social work both in practice and in the scientific community.

Department's Response:

- 5.1 We believe the specific suggestion for improvement has been addressed, as described in answer 1.1 of this response.
- 5.2 The Department members have been encouraged to grow their network of external collaborations with colleagues from universities and research centers in Cyprus and overseas by seeking collaborations in research (funded or non-funded) and/or by publishing research papers with colleagues in their area of specialization.

The department is constantly seeking and building international collaboration networks. In this context we have begun communications with the PSA (Psychological Science Accelerator) aiming in establishing a new collaboration with this network. The Psychological Science Accelerator is a globally distributed network of psychological science laboratories (currently over 500), representing over 70 countries on all six

populated continents, that coordinates data collection for democratically selected studies.

The Department has also established a collaboration with the WPRN (World Pandemic Research Network) where we have not only the opportunity to partner in research with other institutions/ research centers but also to disseminate our own research and increase the visibility of the research that is carried out in our Department.

6. Research

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- 6.1 The stimulus to do comparative international research can be a way of stimulating high level research and international visibility.
- 6.2 The PhD (the changing of label has already been recommended) must be clearly research-based.
- 6.3 Resources and support for Staff for publications and participation in international networks.
- 6.4 Strategy to increase the research volume should be reviewed in the future on its outcomes.
- 6.5 Young People should be supported
- 6.6 Comparative and competitive research should increase.

Department's Response:

We would like to thank the Committee for the useful discussions and recommendations on how to improve research engagement and output of the Department. We believe that actions including: the attraction of experienced professors to the department; the introduction of the internal funding scheme for research; the goalsetting and benchmarking of research KPIs; the clarification of the research focus of the doctoral program; and the collaborations with international research networks are in line with what the Committee has suggested. These items are described in detail in answer 1 and answer 5.2 of this response. We would also like to iterate the significant improvement of research output performance over the past 3 years,

as described in item 1, something that shows both the Department's dedication towards research and that it is on the right track with respect to research improvement.

Importantly, we are closing the finalization of an MOU with Democretus University of Thrace concentrating on research collaboration, joint research proposals and exchange of student and staff. This will clearly further help the Department in terms of expanding its collaboration network and research production. The collaboration is of particular interest for our Department as Democretus University operates the only University Department for Social Work in Greece (since before the transformations of TEI to Universities) we expect it will greatly assist our engagement in research collaborations and internationalization.

Furthermore, in relation to our PhD program, we would like to stress that it is a clearly research based one. The program is very young, given that it started its operations in 2018 so therefore an adequate amount of time has not passed in order to exhibit its research production.

7. Resources

Areas of improvement and recommendations

A well thought strategy to increase the number of students is needed.

- 7.1 A strategic investment in research for the staff is highly recommended.
- 7.2 Career planning, especially for younger staff, should be emphasized, i.e., post doc-positions and initiation resources for guest visits to other Universities etc.
- 7.3 The presented involvement to interact with the professional bodies in social work in Cyprus should be emphasized further by the Department and the whole University.
- 7.4 The stimulus to do comparative international research can be a way of stimulating high level research and international visibility.
- 7.5 The PhD (the changing of label has already been recommended) must be clearly research-based.

Department's Response

We believe that points two (2) to five (5) have been addressed in prior parts of our response (recruitment of faculty, research support initiatives, and alterations in the PhD label). With respect to point one (1), in collaboration with the university management, the Department is

enhancing its recruitment strategy. As noted, the recruitment of students in a private university is directly associated with the economy of the country (since students must pay fees) as well as with the employment opportunities when they complete their studies.

- a) Department members are actively disseminating the research work of the department to the public by participating in the public discourse pertaining to their areas of specialization (e.g., Psychological Resilience from the impact of the implementation of lockdown measures). This is part of our effort to make the programs of study more visible to the public.
- b) Department members are actively involved in the institutionalization of the profession of Social Work in the society. The chairman and vice chairman of the Association of Social Workers in Cyprus are members of our department. They attend sessions of the House of Commons trying to pass legislation for more employment opportunities for social workers in Cyprus.

A. Conclusions and final remarks

1. The Department delivers an important contribution to the academic system and the field of social work in Cyprus. This should be further recognized and strengthened by Frederick University.
2. The staff has the academic capability for further research and internalization, and also to take more advantage from current research to produce books, book chapters and papers in refereed indexed journal.
3. “Umbrella strategy” of the study programs should be reconsidered in line with progression of education levels in social work. This implies the revision of the labels of MA and PhD programs under evaluation.
4. The increase of students, mainly in the PhD program seems to be essential to the growth in research and also for sustainability reasons
5. Internationalization is a key issue to attract students from Greece or from abroad, and also to improve the prestige of the University and of the social work area.
6. More research is needed to gain reputation through research related publications. English parts of the curriculum are important as well as an evidence-based teaching

Department's Response

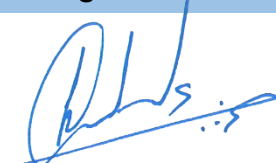
We would like to take this opportunity to thank the committee members for their constructive and helpful feedback in the form of comments, remarks and suggestions for the improvement of certain and specific areas of operation of our department of Psychology and Social Sciences as well as the frank and in-depth discussions held throughout the visit.

We believe that we have responded adequately to the Committee's suggestions and addressed the key concerns regarding the departmental staff profile and the initiative to support research. As indicated in the response, we believe the research performance of the department has significantly improved over the recent years and the remedial actions adopted in this report will further assist in that direction. Also, we have fully adopted the Committee's recommendation of rescinding the "Umbrella strategy" as mentioned and modified the labels of the postgraduate programs as indicated to offer a clear focus. We fully agree that the existence of a doctoral program is paramount for the raising of the academic caliber of the Department. Clearly this is something that has yet to develop, being running for just 3 years, and we are very hopeful that in the near future positive contributions from its operations will be realized.

We are working hard to ensure that the student recruitment increases in the coming years and it is evident that in the programs of study assessed a small but increasing trend has been noted.

Finally, we are particularly thankful that the Committee realized that "the Department delivers an important contribution to the academic system and the field of social work on Cyprus", something we commit, as a Department and as the university in general, to maintain and improve.

B. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Prof. George Demosthenous	Rector	

Date: 01/06/2021

