1. Please list existing national regulations and policies establishing norms and standards for quality of education in your country. Please also include any guidelines on the quality of education.

Article 20 of the Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus refers to the basic right of education for every person residing on the island. Law 24 (I) Of 1993 lays down the following provisions for education:

- Attendance in primary school and lower secondary school (gymnasium) is compulsory until a pupil graduates from gymnasium or reaches the age of 15.
- Education is provided free of charge in public primary and secondary schools (that is kindergarten, elementary school, gymnasium, lyceum and technical schools).

In 2008, the House of Representatives approved the new regulations concerning the operation of the public schools in which the Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for the administration and the operation of public schools (kindergartens, primary schools and special education schools). The regulations specify that both the curriculum and the timetable for primary schools are determined by the Council of Ministers, based on proposals from the Ministry of Education and Culture.

At the beginning of a new century, educational systems all over the world are facing increased demands for the provision of quality education for the good of all. This applies for the Cyprus Educational System as well. In the quest for achieving quality education, reforms and innovations form an integral part of this dimension. Within this context, the Government of the Republic of Cyprus has initiated an ambitious educational reform program, inviting dialogue among all stakeholders (political parties, teacher unions, parents associations, pupils associations and the Government, represented by the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Planning Bureau) with a view to turn into reality the vision of a better and more modern educational system that would meet the needs and challenges of the 21st century. This initiative was launched in 2005, following a report by the Committee of seven academics who identified the weakness of the system and the areas in need of reform and made recommendations.

The reform is an effort for a comprehensive introduction of changes and innovations at all levels and all aspects of the system. Its main objective is to create a democratic and pupil-focused educational system, which includes all pupils irrespective of social, racial or ethnic background, gender, or physical or mental ability and offers high quality education to everybody, thus assisting them to maximize their potential and acquire the key competences which will enable them to become active and democratic citizens.

The Education Directorates are responsible for providing the necessary skills, abilities and personality traits that are necessary for pupils to progress to the following stages in the educational system and
society in general. Since education is the main stage and the basis for developing an all-round personality, ensuring the continuous upgrading of the quality of education is imperative. The Ministry of Education and Culture recognizes that quality improvement is a complicated and multifaceted issue that requires the development of specific policies, processes, mechanisms, programs and infrastructure in a systematic and structured way. To this end several measures have been promoted for ensuring quality assurance and improvement of education. Such measures include the provision of staff development programmes, the upgrading of instructional material, the increase in the number of special education teachers, the development of intercultural programmes and the introduction of Information and Communication Technology in all primary schools.

The Ministry would like to underline that the quality improvement of the educational system is an ongoing process that must be guided by clear goals, strategies, policies and procedures, monitored systematically and evaluated regularly so that the necessary remedial measures can be taken on time.

2. Please describe briefly applicable norms and standards and minimal requirements especially with regard to the following:

a. School infra-structure

The Technical Services is the department of the Ministry of Education and Culture responsible for the school infra-structure, while school Boards are responsible for the maintenance of school buildings. The main activities of the department are related to the following:

- Architectural, structural, electrical and mechanical studies,
- Implementation and supervision of construction projects and material control,
- Upgrading of school building structures,
- Contract management,
- Local authority support on private school projects,
- Technical and economical support to School Boards Committees and Parents Associations,
- Sports facility studies,
- Surveys and cultural projects.

The Technical Services annual budget includes new construction projects of school units, the upgrading of existing buildings and sport facilities and extensions of existing school units.

School Boards are established in municipalities, villages or neighboring communities where schools operate and they are responsible for the primary and secondary schools under their authority, as assigned by the Council of Ministers. School Boards are responsible for the maintenance and improvement of school buildings, as well as for securing, managing and maintaining school equipment, submitting suggestions to the Ministry of Education and Culture regarding the allocation of pupils to
both primary and secondary schools and ensuring pupils' welfare and safety, in cooperation with the parents' associations.

b. **Class size and pupil-teacher ratio**

In the last years there has been a systematic effort to reduce the maximum class size in the public education sector. Since the school year 2003-2004, the maximum class size in all grades of public schools was gradually reduced by decision of the Council of Ministers. Within the framework of the educational reform, two decisions of the Council of Ministers further reduced the size of the class from 30 to 25, beginning with Grade 1 and gradually extending it to Grades 2-3, while from 2010-2011 the maximum number of pupils in each class in all grades of primary schools does not exceed 25 and 20 for multi-grade classes. Currently (school year 2011-2012), the pupil-teacher ratio for primary schools is 1:12, for kindergartens is 1:15 and for special schools is 1:2. The maximum number of students in lower and upper secondary education is 25 and the pupil-teacher ratio for common core subjects is 1:8, 25. In vocational education the maximum number has been set as 25 but most class have only 15 students and the pupil-teacher ratio is 1:8.

c. **Teacher qualification**

The authority that bears the responsibility for appointing teachers is the Educational Service Commission, an independent five-member body appointed by the Council of Ministers for a period of six years. The Commission applies a highly centralized and bureaucratic procedure for appointing teachers, mainly to preserve the objectivity and impartiality of the system. Qualified teachers, i.e. holders of a Bachelor degree are placed on a waiting list and are appointed in strict order. All teachers are initially appointed under probation and their appointment becomes permanent after two years. With the accession of Cyprus in the European Union in 2004, all necessary steps were taken so that European citizens have the same rights and responsibilities with Cypriot citizens.

d. **Working conditions for teachers and their professional development**

Working conditions for teachers in primary education have improved greatly since the independence of the Republic of Cyprus in 1960. Teachers work for 38 teaching periods a week, from 7:30 am till 1:05 pm. Their salaries compared to salaries of other civil servants are at the same level. The official retirement age is 60 years old and the minimum retirement age with full pension entitlement to completion of the number of years of service required is 55. The Ministry of Education and Culture gives great importance to the high-quality training and professional development of teachers, since it is a keystone to the quality of education and to the status of the profession. Primary school teachers receive an all-round pre-service education, as well as in-service training throughout their careers. The Pedagogical Institute, in cooperation with the Inspectorate, is responsible for the training provided to teachers and thus prepares a number of seminars each year. Nevertheless, attending these seminars is not mandatory and therefore depends on the willingness of teachers and not to the needs of the school. Head-teachers receive in-service training for one year after they are promoted to be able to respond to the requirements of their post. In addition to the in-service training programs already carried out by the
Pedagogical Institute, a new program has been introduced for on-the-job training, mentoring and assistance of newly appointed teachers.

Teachers in low and upper secondary education start off with 24 teaching periods per week which are reduced to eighteen after 12 years of service.

e. **School curricula content and pedagogical materials**

The modernization, restructuring and upgrading of the national curriculum from pre-primary education to upper secondary general technical and vocational education, with the aim of better addressing the needs of the pupils, is one of the major issues of the educational reform. The objective is to create an integrated continuum within the levels of education and for this purpose special emphasis is given to defining aims and key contents of different subjects and thematic entities in order to form a more unified educational approach. The new core curriculum for primary and lower secondary education has been developed so as to provide all pupils with the opportunity for individual choice and provision of supporting services, including supplementary instruction in areas of need. The key competencies that pupils should acquire to enable them to adapt to changes have been effectively addressed as well. In 2008, a Committee made up of experts in curriculum issues was appointed by the Minister of Education and Culture with the mandate to set out general objectives and outcomes for the design of new curricula from pre-primary to secondary education. This Committee submitted its suggestions and then a number of sub-committees were appointed by the Ministry made up of experts and practitioners in the field of education with instructions to design new *curricula* per subject/area. The sub-committees submitted their suggestions to the Minister of Education and Culture, who forwarded them to all parties involved in the on-going dialogue for the revision of the current education system and the new curricula took their revised form. A new timetable has also been approved by the Council of Ministers and has been introduced in primary schools from the current school year (2011-2012). New pedagogical materials and resources are currently under preparation from the various committees that have been set up for the various school subjects to support the effective and efficient implementation of the new curricula.

A series of seminars for teachers, educational psychologists and other specialists in the area of education on issues of general pedagogy, teaching a particular subject and transversal topics (e.g. environmental and health education) are designed, organized and offered by the Pedagogical Institute. *Induction courses* are offered to newly appointed teachers in Primary, Secondary and Secondary Technical Education. The program focuses on mentoring newly appointed teachers in order to help them develop their personal and professional competences, so that they become active members of the broader educational community. The content of the program includes training of newly appointed teachers and their mentors and school-based activities initiated by newly appointed teachers supported by their mentors and a teacher trainer from the Pedagogical Institute.

Further to the above, the Pedagogical Institute has been offering to teachers in all levels of education a specifically designed training program on the application of the New Curricula. The program emphasizes the promotion of a democratic and human centered school.
f. Teaching-learning processes

With regards to the teaching-learning processes, teachers are expected to take into account when organizing their work the following principles:

- Schools are places in which all children are accepted as they are, with their own capabilities and weaknesses and are treated as individual personalities with particular needs and talents, which must be met accordingly.
- When planning their lessons, teachers are expected to define their aims in the context of the broader aims of education and their pupils' abilities.
- It is important to promote an interdisciplinary approach in order to provide consistency in education.
- Teachers should create a pleasant, friendly and encouraging working environment, offering each child the opportunity to succeed.

The Ministry of Education and Culture does not prescribe guidelines for teaching methodologies. As all teachers are university graduates, they are expected to be familiar with modern teaching methodologies and techniques and to utilize the best methods according to the needs of their pupils and the requirements of the curriculum. In addition, every year the Pedagogical Institute offers seminars for teachers to ensure that they are kept up-to-date with the latest developments. Furthermore, the inspection system ensures that teachers are using appropriate and up-to-date classroom methodology in their teaching.

g. School management, including student and parents participation

In Cyprus educational administration as well as the school management are centralized. The highest authority of the Ministry of Education and Culture is the Minister (political position), followed by the Permanent Secretary (civil servant position). Education is offered into four main stages (primary, secondary, technical and vocational, higher and tertiary) and other departments and services help the overall functioning of the system. At the local level, the School Boards and the schools themselves have some level of autonomy in a number of issues. The Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for the administration of education, the enforcement of educational laws, the preparation of educational bills, the prescription of curricula and textbooks, the regulation and supervision of educational institutions and the construction of school buildings (as indicated before the maintenance and equipment of school buildings is a shared responsibility of the Ministry with the local School Boards).

Parents' associations, teachers' unions and pupils' councils are actively involved in the decision-making processes in their schools. Each school unit cooperates closely with their local School Board to assess the school's needs and apply for funds to the Ministry of Education and Culture. Parents, pupils and
teachers also cooperate with the management of the school and with the School Board for the day-to-day administration of their school.

Local parents' associations are regulated by Law and relevant regulations. Their primary role is to make suggestions for improvement to the head-teacher of the school, improve communication between the management of the school and the parents, and organize functions to bring together teachers and parents, give advice to parents and provide economic support. Parents' associations may, for example, employ a person to provide after school hours activities, or provide funds for the welfare of pupils. In each school a central pupils' council is made up of members elected by the members of each class committee with the aim of promoting democratic procedures and fostering self-control, discipline and cooperation between pupils. Pupils also participate in forming the code of behavior of their class and are actively involved in the daily school life by undertaking various responsibilities.

h. Methods to evaluate student performance and assess learning outcomes

Teachers are required to adopt a systematic approach for the evaluation of their pupils' abilities and they are expected to use a variety of assessment techniques. The evaluation process is considered an integral part of teaching and its aim is not the selection or rejection of pupils, but the provision of support to them, so that they can reach their full potential. Currently three different types of evaluation are required, depending on the time at which evaluation takes place:

- Initial evaluation – diagnostic: The aim of this type of evaluation is to discover the child's ability at the beginning of the school year or term. It takes place throughout the school for all grades and forms the basis for planning.
- Continuous, formative evaluation: This kind of evaluation is given special emphasis as it is expected to provide direct feedback to both teachers and pupils. It takes place throughout teaching and is considered an integral part of the process.
- Final evaluation: This takes place either at the end of a school term or at the end of the year and the aim is to ascertain pupils' progress.

Usually teachers use a variety of techniques such as written tests, observation, communication and self-evaluation to evaluate the abilities of their pupils in each subject. Evaluation is usually based on a combination of the child's participation in class, his/her scores in written tests and any projects that he/she has been working on. In order to ensure the effective use of the evaluation results, teachers are expected to record them in a systematic way, although the Ministry of Education and Culture does not require teachers to complete specific forms in order to achieve this. Each teacher is encouraged to keep a record that will best serve his/her particular goals. Overall, the assessment of the quality of education provided in Cyprus is a conjunction of the evaluation of the educational system as a whole, the evaluation of pupils during their studies and the evaluation of the teaching personnel.

At the end of upper secondary education students who wish to continue their studies in high and higher institutions of educations take a common test known as the Pancyprian Examination. Depending on
their grades students can gain access to public universities and higher education institutes in Cyprus and Greece.

3. Please identify the institutional mechanisms in your country used to collect and process information and to assess adherence to norms and standards established to ensure quality education.

In 2008 the Council of Ministers has decided to upgrade the existing research unit of the Pedagogical Institute into a Centre for Educational Research and Evaluation (CERE). The aims of the CERE are to promote research and evidence based policy in the educational system, to monitor the educational system towards progress and to assure quality in education. The responsibilities of the CERE are:

- Internal evaluation – according to the Ministry’s needs and priorities, based on current innovations and interventions in the educational system
- Research on local and international level – cooperation with other organizations, universities etc.
- Data banks for the educational system – for monitoring pupils’ progress
- Evaluation and documentation of research
- Creation of a research culture and support of research activity at the school level (e.g. action research)
- Evaluation of all the applications for research in schools (by students, academics, other centers).

Functional illiteracy is a serious problem of modern societies making social adjustment difficult and leading pupils to delinquency, self destructive behavior and the use of addictive substances, psychological and health problems. To address this problem the CERE has developed a project to identify pupils at risk of literacy and numeracy problems when they finish primary education at the age of 12. A secondary purpose of this project is to assess the knowledge and skills that should be acquired by the end of primary education. Tests have been developed which focus on the foundation of knowledge and skills needed for secondary education and not the whole curriculum. Results for pupils are reported back to their schools and similar diagnostic tools are being considered for lower grades in order to identify issues sooner. Pupils at risk to face literacy problems are invited to join the specially designed programs which aim to address their needs.

Since the establishment of CERE Cyprus participates in various international researches such as TIMMS and PISA.

4. Please provide information on other relevant initiatives and developments aiming to promote quality in education.

In order to meet today’s challenges and the complexities of contemporary educational provision, there is a need to work with all stakeholders: pupils, teachers, parents the academic community, political parties, together in a spirit of understanding and cooperation, joining our efforts and potentials for the successful implementation of the ambitious reform initiatives which are currently under way. In
conclusion we could say that the aim of the legal framework, the structure, the curriculum, the staffing and the practices is to raise the quality of education. The Ministry of Education and Culture in Cyprus is committed to the provision of quality education for all pupils and towards this direction is concentrating its efforts for fulfilling this ambitious goal.