

Doc. 300.1.2

Higher Education Institution's Response

Date: 22 March 2021

- **Higher Education Institution:**
University of Cyprus

- **Town:** Nicosia

- **Programme of study
Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)**

In Greek:

Πτυχία στα Οικονομικά (4 έτη, 240 ECTS, Bachelor)

In English:

BSc Economics (4 years, 240 ECTS, Bachelor)

- **Language(s) of instruction:** Greek
- **Programme'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 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].

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

- At the Department level, the Undergraduate Studies Committee (USC) is the pillar coordinating unit of the programme. The committee is comprised of 5 members of staff. The USC is in charge of monitoring the operation of the programme and of all aspects of quality assurance. The USC is also responsible of proposing changes to the structure and content of the programme. Any proposals for changes are ratified by the Council of the Department.
- The structure of the programme is flexible, offering students the option to either pursue a general degree in economics or to specialize by choosing either a major (Economic Theory and Econometrics or International, European and Economic Studies) or another minor. The structure of the programme is coherent, follows a logical sequence and adheres to international standards.
- The programme offers a combination of courses in the core areas of economics (Micro, Macro, Maths/Stats/Econometrics) and a wide range of electives that cover all fields of the discipline and neighbouring disciplines. In addition, students take courses in English and computer programming.
- The degree offers a solid foundation in the core area of economics in years 1 and 2, upon which students can develop a more focused and in-depth understanding of the subfields of economics in years 3 and 4. The degree culminates in a thesis that students write in year 4.
- The syllabus of the courses contains up-to-date material and methods.
- Information about the programme can be found in the form of a detailed prospectus on the department's website. The structure, curriculum, list and description of courses, and degree requirements are clearly laid out in this document and are accessible to current and prospective students.
- The Department Council has 6 student members thereby offering the opportunity to student to be involved in the development of the content of their studies.
- Student teaching evaluations are administered by the Centre for Teaching and Learning, which is an independent entity within the University of Cyprus. The results are shared with the instructor and Chair of the Department who is responsible for monitoring and identifying any issues. Instructors use the evaluations for critical reflection and self-improvement.
- The graduation rates and time it takes to complete the degree that were presented to us during the visit seemed healthy and do not raise any concerns.

Strengths

- It is evident that the programme is under constant monitoring by the Department and that corrective actions are being taken to ensure that it meets student needs in the best way.
- The structure of the programme is coherent, and offers a good balance of workload across semesters and years of study.
- The programme emphasizes the development of strong analytical and quantitative skills that are highly sought after and rewarded in the labour market.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- In our meetings with the members of staff, we were told that the Department recently carried out a survey of its recent graduates. We would encourage for the continuation of this practice so that the Department obtains a solid picture of the destination of its students. More generally building a closer relationship with alumni can be very productive and inform the design and updating of the programme to align with the needs of the labour market.
- Because the language of instruction in the programme is Greek, the programme attracts only students from Cyprus and Greece. By offering a version of the programme in English, the Department could attract international students and enrich the learning experience of all the students.



We are really thankful for the detailed assessment of our undergraduate program of studies and for the thoughtful suggestions that will help us to further improve. As pointed out in the report, the program is coherent, adheres to international standards and emphasizes the development of strong analytical and quantitative skills. We are also pleased that the report highlights our continuous efforts in maintaining the program's high quality and in meeting student needs in the best way.

With respect to the two comments of the External Evaluation Committee about areas of improvement and recommendations, we have the following remarks:

1. We highly appreciate our alumni and we will continue taking their views into account in order to identify any deficiencies of our program and to further equip our students with sought-after qualifications.
2. We are committed to the internationalization of education and we were the first department in the University of Cyprus to offer a graduate program of studies in English. The introduction of foreign-language undergraduate programs in public universities is currently under discussion in the parliament. In case of positive developments, we are planning to offer an undergraduate program of studies in English, most likely a joint program with the other two Departments of the Faculty of Economics and Management.

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

Findings

- The programme incorporates a range of delivery modes (large group lectures, small group seminars, computer laboratories).
- The programme is supported by a Web-based course-management platform (Blackboard) that facilitates online learning. It is also used to provide students feedback on coursework that they have submitted and to facilitate online group discussions.
- Teaching follows international practices. The assigned textbooks are modern, appropriate and in line with what students in similar programmes in top international Universities would be exposed to.
- Practical training is offered for credit in the curriculum during the summer months. Students who complete an internship of at least six weeks can get the credit equivalent of a course (6 ECTS).
- Students undertake a research project in their fourth year under the supervision of a faculty member. This enables students to develop the analytical and organizational skills needed towards independent research and to work as a professional economist.
- Assessment is based on a variety of methods following a model of continuous assessment. Every course involves at least 2 pieces of assessment, which always includes a final exam, includes at least one midterm exam, and might also include other types of assessment (e.g. problem sets).
- The programme has a system of appeals in place, whereby a student can request for his/her exam paper to be re-assessed.

Strengths

- The programme makes use of a variety of formative and summative assessment methods.
- The teaching staff have PhDs from prestigious international Universities and are active researchers. This ensures that the most up-to-date research methods and findings are incorporated into the teaching material.
- The teaching staff are provided with guidelines for marking, a practice that ensures consistency in the process.
- The students that we met expressed high satisfaction with their learning experience in the programme.
- The teaching curriculum includes courses focusing on issues of interest to the economy of Cyprus. This prepares students to contribute to the national debate around the economic problems and challenges that the country is facing.
- The Department seems to have an active programme of academic visitors in place. Visitors could be encouraged (required?) to guest-teach at least one lecture and to interact with students in the undergraduate programme.
- Teaching in the programme has adapted to the conditions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Delivery has transitioned to a mode of blended learning. Teaching staff and students have demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability during this trying period to make the transition possible.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The programme could consider introducing checks and measures to ensure that marking is consistent and fair without adding too much burden on the teaching staff. For example, a system of light touch marking moderation could be adopted, whereby a member of staff not involved in the marking looks at a representative sample of marked exam papers to ensure that the marking is robust.

- Broad marking criteria by year of study could be developed and offered to the students in advance as a guideline as to what is expected of them.
- The programme has incorporated an internship option that students can take over the summer months. This is a very good step toward expanding the practical training offer for the students. To further capitalize on this perhaps opportunities for students to undertake internships for longer periods (e.g. a semester) could be entertained.
- The department could offer more opportunities for the students to engage in research by involving them in applied projects carried out by the Economic Research Centre.

At the outset we would like to thank the External Evaluation Committee for the excellent review of our processes concerning teaching, learning and student assessment. As pointed out in the report, we follow international practices with respect to teaching and learning and we use a variety of assessment methods.

With respect to the four constructive comments of the External Evaluation Committee about areas of improvement and recommendations, we have the following remarks:

1. The Department of Economics has a number of procedures to safeguard academic standards about consistent marking. For example, (i) written guidelines about marking are provided to all faculty and special scientists, (ii) experienced faculty members act as mentors to new instructors and (iii) detailed data about marks are collected each semester and any irregularities are discussed in the Departmental Council. The suggestion about moderation is much appreciated and we will attempt to implement alternative systems that will not add too much burden on the teaching staff.
2. Some courses, such as the senior thesis, already provide such guidelines to students and we plan to move towards a general adoption of such criteria.
3. The placement of students in organizations is a recent addition to the academic curriculum and aims at offering them professional experience to complement their academic knowledge. As pointed out in the report, internships are currently offered only during the summer months so as to allow students to complete their studies in 4 years, but — depending on the availability of funds and the interest of both students and employers — we could consider the option of longer periods of placement.
4. The Economics Research Centre employs undergraduate students as research assistants on a regular basis and we will continue this practice so as to encourage students to become involved in research on subjects of interest to the Cyprus economy.

3. Teaching Staff (ESG 1.5)

Findings

- The teaching load is fixed at four courses per year (in line with common international practice), regardless of rank or other circumstances. The load does not have to be equally distributed across the two semesters in an academic year, but it cannot be concentrated in one semester.
- All of the teaching staff have PhDs and are active researchers. This ensures that the most up-to-date research methods and findings are incorporated into the teaching material.
- Courses are assigned to academics on the basis of their expertise. This ensures that students get exposed to instructors with a deep understanding and enthusiasm for the subject matter.
- The number of teaching staff is adequate to support the student intake in the programme of study. The student to staff ratio offers good opportunities for interaction.
- In our meetings with the teaching staff and the students in the programme, it was evident that the staff are dedicated to their teaching and perform their duties with the highest level of professionalism. Students on their side felt that the staff is accessible and that they were well-supported by them.

Strengths

- The Department has recently set up a Peer Review Committee to monitor teaching quality and provide guidance and support to teaching staff for improved teaching performance.
- Students evaluate courses at the end of each semester. The results are sent to the instructor and the Department Head and are used to identify potentially problematic areas.
- With regards to the hiring and promotion of the teaching staff, in our discussions with them what transpired is that while there are some rigidities imposed by the University's regulatory framework, overall, the processes are clear and colleagues feel supported and contented.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- To further recognize and promote good teaching practices, the Department could consider introducing a "best teacher award" decided by student voting.
- The programme could benefit from the presence of some members of staff that are focused on the delivery and administration of teaching and on providing pastoral and mentoring support to students. This could enhance the learning experience of students and free up some time for the research-oriented members of staff.
- More opportunities for the teaching staff to engage in teaching-skills training and development would be welcome.
- The gender composition of the teaching staff is rather unbalanced. This of course is a wider issue with the profession and not necessarily reflective of inadequate care of the Department. Nevertheless, steps toward redressing this issue when hiring would be welcome (e.g. ensuring that women are included in hiring committees and that female candidates are given adequate attention).

We are very pleased that the External Evaluation Committee acknowledges the qualifications of our teaching staff and the efficiency of our practices concerning teaching.

With respect to the four comments about areas of improvement and recommendations, we have the following remarks:

1. Following your advice, we plan to include a "best teacher" question in our survey of graduates and to introduce a Departmental Teaching Excellence Award.



2. We are already implementing your suggestion; our new Special Teaching Staff (Dr Raoukka) is a former Deputy Head of Teaching at the University of Bristol and she assists in the administration of teaching and the mentoring of students.
2. The adoption of teaching skills and methods that correspond to modern needs has always been a priority for our Department. Members of staff are regular participants in the educational seminars and workshops organized by the Centre for Teaching and Learning of the University of Cyprus. Some of the recent seminars/workshops covered topics such as modern teaching approaches, the design of lessons and schemes of work and the use of online teaching tools.
4. We acknowledge that women are underrepresented and thus we encourage applications from qualified women who want to join our Department. We are working towards making the gender composition of our teaching staff more balanced, which is evident in our recent appointments: the new lecturer (Dr Aristodemou), the new Special Teaching Staff (Dr Raoukka) and four (out of nine) Special Scientists are women.

4. Students

(ESG 1.4, 1.6, 1.7)

Findings

- Students are admitted into the programme on the basis of University entry examinations organised by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Entry into the Economics program requires examinations in four subjects: two mandatory (Greek and Mathematics) and two electives (from Economics, Accounting, Physics, Informatics, English).
- The Department has a clear set of criteria and processes for the recognition of previous studies and credit transfers.

Strengths

- Entry requirements are transparent and fair as they are set by a national exam administered by the Ministry.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- A significant share of high school students in Cyprus graduate from private high schools that prepare their students for UK universities. The programme cannot admit these students at the moment, as to do that would require an alternative admission process for students with A-levels. This seems like a missed opportunity to attract more students.

We are very pleased that the External Evaluation Committee found our rules and processes concerning student admission, progression, recognition and certification consistent, fair and transparent.

Concerning the areas of improvement and recommendations, we totally agree with the remark of the committee and we would like to point out the continuous and persistent efforts of the University authorities in order to amend the provisions of the law regarding admittance. We hope that there be a change soon and that we will be able to admit students with alternative qualifications, such as GSE A-levels.

5. Resources (ESG 1.6)

Findings

- The Department assigns to each student an Academic Advisor, who is a member of the Department's Teaching and Research Staff. The advisor follows the academic progress of the student and provides guidance particularly in connection with any problems faced in their academic performance.
- All academics hold regular office hours when meetings are arranged with the students regarding matters relating to their studies.
- The Department offers academic support to students with disabilities and special needs through the appointment of Academic Support Staff and in collaboration with the Student Welfare Service. When needed specialized services and special equipment is arranged. Teaching staff are informed about the enrolment of students with disabilities in the course and of any support that should be provided.
- The Centre for Mental Health provides counselling guidance and support to students who experience psychological difficulties or problems during their studies.
- The Department participates in the Erasmus exchange programme and has a dedicated member of staff assigned with the responsibility of coordinating the programme.
- The learning resources offered by the library seem adequate.
- Administrative support to students is provided by two experienced and motivated administrative staff.
- Students have access to computer labs connected to a range of economic and financial dataset, which they can use in their studies.

Strengths

- While not able to witness up close the facilities, the feeling we got from the virtual tour is that they are modern and provide students with a welcoming environment within which to study.
- A brand-new library with all necessary books and journals is available for use to the students.
- All premises, buildings and equipment seem modern and adequate to support the teaching and research activities of the program.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

No suggestion

We are really thankful for the detailed and well-explained review of the External Evaluation Committee about our resources.

As pointed out in the report, the teaching and learning resources, the physical resources and the human support resources are student-centered and specially designed to accommodate all needs. Moreover, all undergraduate students have academic advisors who follow closely their progress, provide guidance and deal with any problems faced during studies.

As the External Evaluation Committee made no recommendations for improvement, we would like to reassure you that we will continue to provide a welcoming environment to our students.



6. Additional for distance learning programmes (ALL ESG)

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7. Additional for doctoral programmes (ALL ESG)

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8. Additional for joint programmes (ALL ESG)

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B. Conclusions and final remarks

- The structure of the programme is flexible, coherent, follows a logical sequence, and adheres to international standards.
- The programme offers a combination of courses in the core areas of economics (Micro, Macro, Maths/Stats/Econometrics) and a wide range of electives that cover all fields of the discipline and neighbouring disciplines. In addition, students take courses in English and computer programming.
- The degree offers a solid foundation in the core area of economics in years 1 and 2, upon which students can develop a more focused and in-depth understanding of the subfields of economics in years 3 and 4. The degree culminates in a thesis that students write in year 4.
- It is evident that the programme is under constant monitoring by the Department and that corrective actions are being taken to ensure that it meets student needs in the best way.
- The programme emphasizes the development of strong analytical and quantitative skills that are highly sought after and rewarded in the labour market.
- We would encourage the Department to continue to systematically survey their recent graduates so that the Department obtains a solid picture of the destination of its students. More generally building a closer relationship with alumni can be very productive and inform the design and updating of the programme to align with the needs of the labour market.
- The teaching staff have PhDs from prestigious international Universities and are active researchers. This ensures that the most up-to-date research methods and findings are incorporated into the teaching material.
- The students that we met expressed high satisfaction with their learning experience in the programme.
- The programme could consider introducing checks and measures to ensure that marking is consistent and fair without adding too much burden on the teaching staff. For example, a system of light touch marking moderation could be adopted, whereby a member of staff not involved in the marking looks at a representative sample of marked exam papers to ensure that the marking is robust.
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- The department could offer more opportunities for the students to engage in research by involving them in applied projects carried out by the Economic Research Centre.
- In our meetings with the teaching staff and the students in the programme, it was evident that the staff are dedicated to their teaching and perform their duties with the highest level of professionalism. Students on their side felt that the staff is accessible and that they were well-supported by them.
- To further recognize and promote good teaching practices, the Department could consider introducing a “best teacher award” decided by student voting.
- The programme could benefit from the presence of some members of staff that are focused on the delivery and administration of teaching and on providing pastoral and mentoring support to students. This could enhance the learning experience of students and free up some time for the research-oriented members of staff.
- More opportunities for the teaching staff to engage in teaching-skills training and development would be welcome.
- The gender composition of the teaching staff is rather unbalanced. This of course is a wider issue with the profession and not necessarily reflective of inadequate care of the Department. Nevertheless, steps toward



redressing this issue when hiring would be welcome (e.g. ensuring that women are included in hiring committees and that female candidates are given adequate attention).

- A significant share of high school students in Cyprus graduate from private high schools that prepare their students for UK universities. The programme cannot admit these students at the moment, as to do that would require an alternative admission process for students with A-levels. This seems like a missed opportunity to attract more students.

Once again, we would like to thank the External Evaluation Committee for taking the time to review our program. We have really benefited from the thorough assessment and constructive remarks.

Our mission is to provide world-class education that (i) helps students to develop strong analytical skills and to acquire the ability to critically assess economic issues, (ii) prepares students for graduate studies in some of the best universities in Europe and the USA and (iii) equips students with qualifications that make them attractive in the job market. We pursue these objectives through a rigorous teaching program covering mainstream subjects based on contemporary methods of economic analysis.

The program is under constant monitoring and adaptation so as to maintain its high quality. For this purpose, we will make the effort to adopt the suggestions of the External Evaluation Committee concerning: graduate survey, marking criteria, longer periods of internships, student engagement in research projects of the Economic Research Centre, “best teacher award”, teaching-skills training and the gender composition of the teaching staff.

The two suggestions concerning the language of instruction and the admission of students with alternative qualifications (e.g., GSE A-levels) cannot be implemented without amendments to the University Law, but we expect positive developments in the near future.



C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Sofronis Clerides	Professor and Department Chair	
Andros Kourtellos	Associate Professor and Department Vice Chair	
Nikolaos Ziros	Associate Professor and Director of Undergraduate Studies	
Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	
Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	
Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	

Date: 3/12/2020

