

External Evaluation Report (Departmental, Doc. 300.30.1)

Programme: Electrical Engineering (4 academic years/ 240 ECTS, Bachelor)

Programme: Electrical Engineering (3 academic semesters/ 90 ECTS, MSc)

Programme: Electrical Engineering, Computer Engineering and Informatics (EECEI) (3 academic years/ 180 ECTS, Doctorate)

The present report is provided in order to answer the comments raised buy the committed on the section Areas of improvement and recommendations and these are given below as follows. The comments of the committee are provided in italics while our answers in normal font style.

First:

We would like to thank all the Committee members for the thorough and comprehensive report and for all their efforts taken to perform this evaluation for the department of Electrical Engineering, Computer Engineering and Informatics (EECEI), in the Cyprus University of Technology, Limassol, Cyprus.

1. Department's academic profile and orientation (ESG 1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9)

Consider a proactive strategy for attracting more MSc students

Answer: We are considering the following tactics as strategy for attracting more MSc students:

- Better publicity of the MSc programmes through advertisements in popular social media channels like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, smart email etc. The university has already formed an office dedicated to promoting our programs. Also, produce attractive leaflets, brochures and posters that prospective students can share with their families.
- Engage undergraduate students to encourage them to continue their studies in the MSc programme. This can be accomplished during their final year project course with presentations about the MSc showcasing thesis projects aimed to motivate them to join the programme.
- Offer the MSc programme in English to attract foreign students. This is subject to approval of the Cyprus government.
- Offer the ability to take courses remotely to facilitate working students.
- Keep our alumni engaged to emphasize the importance of getting a graduate degree.
- Keep university metrics updated to increase confidence on our MSc programmes quality

2. Quality Assurance (ESG 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8)

The panel was also informed that within the department, there exists informal support for junior faculty members for their career development. More formal performance dialogs, such as annual review meetings, between the faculty members and the management group of the department can also be useful for this purpose.

Another potential improvement is to have more bi-directional communications between the students and the department, which is particularly important to quality assurance. Currently, the department has some mechanisms for students to feed their opinions back to the department, but the department may also want to introduce some mechanisms to allow students to be aware the changes made by the department. For such a purpose, regular staff-student meetings during the semesters can be quite useful.

Answers:

1. A mechanism of a formal mentoring of junior faculty will be enacted. This can be done either at an individual basis or in groups where juniors can meet either with senior faculty or with the department chair for mentoring.
2. Students already have 3 elected representatives in the department's council. They participate all meetings and act as a communication channel between the student body and the department and they are aware of everything happening at a high level. Furthermore, the student surveys at the end of each course provide feedback. We will encourage the appropriate office of the University to modify the survey system to allow the students to provide more feedback by allowing them to write their own comments and suggestions. Additionally, the department already has academic advisors assigned to each student.

3. Administration (ESG 1.1, 1.3, 1.6)

The EEC suggest that the University Administration evaluates positively the request of the Department for more staff.

Answer: We thank the committee for their positive suggestion and we hope that the Administration will take it seriously. From our side, we will be more aggressive in demanding new positions.

4. Learning and Teaching (ESG 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.9)

1. Teachers pressure students to provide feedback.

Answer: Yes, and we will continue encouraging the students to provide feedback a means of improving.

2. Don't have a chance to re-take the exam in September and take it the following year, instead lose a year of studies (5 or 6 years instead of 4).

Answer: This is a University policy that we cannot change it in the department. There have been in the past several debates at the University level about the pros and cons of the "second chance". The department is monitoring situations where students are running the risk of losing a year for 1-2 courses and tries to prevent this from happening.

5. Teaching Staff (ESG 1.5)

1. There should be provision to improve publication records for some faculty members, in order to align with the expectations for a modern university.

Answer:

- The University already has a research reward program in place where faculty who publish regularly receive funding for research activities (travel etc.). The EECEI department will examine the possibility of providing additional funding rewards to encourage publishing.

2. Staff members should be encouraged to target high-impact journals that provide visibility and prestige to the Department. This will also improve the citation counts, in total.

Answer: In the University research reward program mentioned above publications in high-impact journals is rewarded with additional funding. Furthermore, during the mentoring of junior faculty it will

be stressed out the importance of “quality vs. quantity”, even though we believe that most faculty clearly understand this.

3. Though the programs of study are for the current period sufficiently supported, the Department should be considered as understaffed. New hiring’s (4 positions) are in the selection process, but this expansion in academic staff should continue in the coming years to counterbalance anticipated retirements.

Answer: As mentioned earlier we will be more aggressive in demanding new faculty positions to counterbalance both growth and upcoming retirements. The recommendation of the EEC will be used as additional leverage in getting additional new positions.

4. Positions of visiting professors (for instance one every year or semester) with high qualifications and international reputation should be considered for teaching specific topics, in-line with the Department’s needs.

Answer: Guest lectures from scholars of international reputation visiting Cyprus are periodically taking place. With the current financial difficulties there is no budget available for visiting professor positions. However, when things improve financially we will pursue such positions as it for the benefit of the department.

6. Research (ESG 1.1, 1.3, 1.5, 1.6)

The department may want to establish a formal series of departmental seminars, where distinguished speakers from industry and academia can be invited to physically visit the department (or via a remote manner during the pandemic) and provide talks and seminars. Such seminars are important to students, particularly those on MSc and PhD programmes, to know the latest development in their fields of studies. In addition, such extracurricular activities are also important for staff development as they provide an effective way to improve the research visibility of the department.

In addition, the EECEI department may also want to organize annual/biannual workshops, which can introduce interactions among staff and students, and provide students, particularly PhD students, a chance to build their presentation skills.

Answer: The EECEI department will establish frequent seminars from local and international speakers. Attendance will be mandatory for PhD students and recommended for MSc students.

A research colloquium where PhD students to present their work to their peers will be regularly.

The department will organize and host annual workshops at the end of each academic year, where PhD students will present their year progress and interact with faculty and other researchers.

7. Resources (ESG 1.6)

1. Available space is limited, and this is considered as one of the biggest issues. The university lacks a campus, and the Department is fragmented between several rather small buildings, spread in the city. The lack of space is a serious obstruction for the future development of the Department if it is to expand to other research directions and admit more students.

Answer: Unfortunately this is how the University was established in the centre of the old town and the EECEI Department or even of the University Administration cannot change. Every effort is made to keep relevant facilities at close proximity. We hope that with the strategic planning of the University, a unified campus will be established at the outskirts of the city.

2. *The number of academic staff is rather low and advertisement of new positions should continue in the coming years.*

Answer: As we have mentioned earlier we will aggressively continue requesting new positions and we thank the EEC for their suggestions which provide additional leverage achieving this.

3. *Administration is also understaffed. Though various IT system are available for administrative purposes (portal for students, financial IT system), there are also IT systems that are missing or need further development. Possibly reorganize administration personnel in such a way that many departments can be served from the same team of employees; this can better utilize their time and provide more efficient services in peak periods.*

Answer: We agree with the committee's comment and this is an ongoing request by the EECEI department to the School and University level. The comments of the committee will be forward to reiterate and support our requests.

4. *More actions should be taken to attract excellent students, national as well as international. There is competition at national level between the Cypriote universities for attracting the top students, and in this direction the Department in collaboration with the university should improve its marketing strategy, advertise its strengths and convince top-students to enrol. For attracting international students, a prerequisite is to fully teach in English.*

Answer: The CUT, along with 7 other European universities, have recently formed the European University of Technology (<https://www.univ-tech.eu/>). As part of this new entity, courses are gradually being transferred to English-teaching and will be made available for EUt+ students. As a result, the visibility of the department's programmes will increase and attendance will be bolstered through the student exchange program. Finally, the MSc degrees will be advertised to the EUt+ students.

- The EECEI department will seek ways to advertise itself better by itself though actions like presentations in high-schools.
- The department believes that this situation will improve gradually as only recently the university hired personnel specifically for this purpose that is to improve its marketing strategy and improve its profile to community.
- The university along with other social institutions has taken measures that are in progress, so as to reduce cost of living in Limassol which is also an obstacle in attracting more students (and consequently top-students as well). Soon enough a better level of student housing, with cheaper rents, will be achieved that will help the whole university and the EECEI department towards this direction.
- The EECEI department will seek cooperation with other department of school of engineering so as to organize a campaign about attracting better students through certain measures that will be decided.

D. Conclusions and final remarks

The members of the EEC committee found the department to be compliant in all examined aspects. The existing course offerings provide a balance between engineering fundamentals and practice. Moreover, active learning is encouraged through lab work and other means presented by the faculty.

Answer: We thank the committee for the positive assessment and your comments are highly appreciated. We will follow-up with every comment for further improvements.