

Doc. 300.1.2

Higher Education Institution's Response

Date: 30/March/2021

- **Higher Education Institution:**

University of Nicosia

- **Town:** Nicosia

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

In Greek:

Διοίκηση Επιχειρήσεων MBA (18 μήνες / 90 ECTS,
Μάστερ, Εξ Αποστάσεως)

In English:

Master in Business Administration (18 months, 90
ECTS, Master, Distance Learning)

- **Language(s) of instruction:** English, 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].

0. Introduction and overall assessment

We refer to the report of the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) for the evaluation-accreditation of the program of study: 'Master of Business Administration DL', which was prepared following a virtual visit at the University of Nicosia by the members of the EEC on November 13th, 2020.

We would like to thank the EEC members for their thorough and insightful questions and comments during the evaluation of the MBA (conventional and DL) program and their recommendations in this report. Furthermore, we appreciate the collegial and constructive approach with which they conducted their evaluation. Most of the full-time faculty teaching in the programme were present during the designated parts of the online evaluation. Visiting faculty and Adjunct Faculty were also available as well as administrative staff, students and alumni of the MBA Programme.

The EEC report is extremely positive with very high scores and very positive comments. As reported by the members of the EEC, the program is *high-quality, having involved key stakeholders in quality assurance, including students and external industry representatives, resulting in very positive students' progression and professional success* and based on this report, we are looking forward to the accreditation of the program.

We do appreciate the committee's recommendations for improvement, which will enhance the quality of our program and we will be addressing those in the corresponding section of this response.

In the following sections we break down the comments and suggestions of the committee and we provide our comments (if any) and the actions taken to address the comments. In order to simplify and make this response report easier to read, we state the EEC findings and strengths for each section together and then we summarise the constructive feedback by EEC and our response.

1. Study programme and study programme's design and development

(ESG 1.1, 1.2, 1.8, 1.9)

Findings

The Department appears to follow the university regulations that exist in relation to quality assurance expectations and based on the written reports and our virtual visit these appear to be largely in line with what one would expect for the programmes of study. There appears to be a strong desire by the leadership and faculty on a collective basis to work together on having high-quality programmes being offered to students. In addition, other key stakeholders have involvement in quality assurance including students and external industry representation. There are overall programme objectives in place for all programmes, along with associated learning outcomes at both the programme and module levels though there is scope for reviewing these in context of being able to assure/measure student achievement of these. Student progression and success appeared to be very positive across the programmes under consideration.

Strengths

*Programmes follow the university regulations on quality assurance processes
Employability rates of students across the programmes appear strong ranging from >85% on BBA to >90% for MBA. Pass rates appear to be very strong which is unsurprising given the exceptional level of support offered by staff. Modules within the programme appear to be largely kept current and updated regularly*

Areas of improvement and recommendations reported by the EEC

*Greater clarity on how much assessment exists across the programme is needed and its relevance to the programme learning objectives. An assessment matrix for both the BBA and MBA programmes are recommended and in so doing consider explicitly how assessment maps to the programme learning outcomes. Consider revising both programme and module learning outcomes so that they are more easily discernible in terms of student meeting them or not
Consider reducing the number of learning outcomes in some modules in particular. There is a wide range from 5 or 6 to upwards of 15 in some modules and based on the hours involved in teaching and expected student learning hours it is not clear how all could be key learning outcomes.
For the number of students and the number of staff, the number of courses offered seem to be on the high end. It might make sense to revisit the number of courses offered in all level and to consider rationally if it makes sense to offer this number of courses in all taught programmes and levels. It is recommended that the Department undertake more reflective reviews where they identify specific areas of focus in the short and medium term.*

ACTION/RESPONSE:

- We thank the EEC for their positive overall comments and the constructive feedback.
- We would like to acknowledge that all recommendations in relation to the MBA programme's learning goals and objectives, courses' learning outcomes and assessment plan have been fully endorsed.
- In sum, we report that the MBA Concentrations and Free Elective Courses have been reviewed by the Programme Manager, the Department Head and the Dean, selected faculty,

external stakeholders and a student representative. A total of seven (7) courses have been removed from the path. Additionally, four (4) courses have been transferred into the Free Elective option of the path. Syllabi have been updated and courses outcomes have been revisited. All these changes have been approved by the School Council and notified to the Curriculum Affairs Committee of the Senate of the University. A revised English and Greek pathway reflecting these updates is attached in the supporting Appendix document as Appendix A and all updated syllabi, have been provided via a shared google drive.

- As per EEC's general directions, the MBA programme has now four major Learning Goals/Competencies, that is to promote:

LG1: Sustainable Leadership

LG2: Strategic Decision-Making Abilities

LG3: Business Transformation Abilities

LG4: Effective Communication

Each Learning Goal/Competency has two Learning Objectives, outlined as follows:

LG1: Sustainable Leadership

Students will demonstrate knowledge of frameworks for sustainable leadership.

LO 1.1: Students will demonstrate that they are ready to act based upon knowledge of principles, operational guidelines, and sustainability.

LO 1.2: Students will be able to analyse organisational environments, understand and recommend actions that improve long-term organizational effectiveness.

LG2: Strategic Decision-Making Abilities

Students will successfully apply and integrate the functional areas of business to improve strategic decision making.

LO 2.1: Students will be able to integrate a comprehensive knowledge of the business environment, theories and practices and develop recommendations for the strategy of an organization.

LO 2.2: Students will be able to make strategic decisions to create value in an environment that is impacted by accelerating technological change.

LG3: Business Transformation Abilities

Students will demonstrate an appreciation of technological change for business transformation in a global environment.

LO3.1 Students will be able to use analytical frameworks and technological tools to evaluate the factors impacting organisations and the global economy.

LO3.2 Students will be able to apply knowledge of the global economy and international business to make informed business decisions.

LG4: Effective Communication

Students will develop effective communication skills to synthesize complex business ideas.

LO4.1 Students will demonstrate the ability to convey and report complex business problems using quantitative and qualitative methods, statistical analyses, and information technology.

LO4.2 Students will be able to work and communicate effectively with diverse team members.

The curriculum map that outlines outcomes of compulsory courses to the MBA programme's Learning Objectives and as a result to the Learning Goals/Learning Competencies is shown in Table 1:

Table 1: MBA and MBA DL Curriculum Alignment Matrix

Learning Goals/ Competencies	Learning Objectives	MBA Courses (Compulsory)										
		603	609	611	612	622	667	671	672	685	895A	895B
LG1	LO1.1	√	√	√				√		√		√
	LO1.2				√	√	√	√		√		√
LG2	LO2.1		√	√	√	√	√			√		√
	LO2.2					√		√	√	√		√
LG3	LO3.1	√						√	√			√
	LO3.2	√		√				√	√			√
LG4	LO4.1	√						√	√		√	√
	LO4.2	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		

Table 2 outlines the assessment plan for the MBA programme, including how the Learning Goals/Competencies and Learning Objectives will be assessed through selected courses, following various direct assessment methods at periodic time intervals. Table 2 augmented with additional findings will be also useful in the School's Assurance Of learning (AOL) process. It must be noted that the selected assessment methods, which are typical of those employed consistently in the MBA programme (conventional and DL) also demonstrate the interactivity promoted between learners and content and learners and peers. Rubrics that will be used for assessing simulation assignments, case study analysis and marketing/business plans are also available, upon request.

Table 2: MBA and MBA DL Assessment Matrix

Learning Goals/ Competencies	Learning Objectives	How Assessed	Where Assessed	When Assessed
Direct Measures				
LG1	LO1.1	Simulation	MBAN-671	1st year
	LO1.2			
LG2	LO2.1	Project	MBAN-685	2 nd year
	LO2.2			
LG3	LO3.1	Case Study Analysis	MBAN-672	2nd year
	LO3.2			
LG4	LO4.1	Oral Presentation	MBAN-895B	1st year
	LO4.2	Teamwork	MBAN-667	2nd year



In conclusion, we thank the EEC for their thoughtful and constructive comments that have been addressed as detailed above. We provided clarity on course assessment with regards to the overall Learning Goals and Learning Objectives of the MBA programme. At course level, all our assessment methods are aligned with the requirements of Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education as well as DOATAP guidelines in Greece. An assessment matrix for the MBA programme has been detailed above and it has been outlined how each Learning Goal and Learning Objective is assessed as well as whether required performance levels are met. We have revisited the Learning Outcomes of MBA courses and updated the syllabi to comply with the recommendations of EECs. To ensure optimal allocation of resources to the programme, we revisited the concentrations and free election courses. We proceed with better utilization of Visiting Faculty and Adjunct Faculty for the MBA DL programme, in line with the provisions of the Quality Assurance Agency proposed regulations. Furthermore, the restructuring of the School -which is about to be completed- will provide for more effective and efficient administrative structure, releasing people from administrative duties (e.g. three Heads of Department instead of five and three Associate Heads instead of five) and providing for a better utilization of teaching schedules, thus reducing teaching workload and increasing time for research.

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

Findings

The Distance Learning programme of study seems to be well structured and it can take advantage of very well developed distance learning infrastructure. The technical infrastructure needed (Moodle, WebEx software etc.) is provided to all students. Students also stated that they became proficient in these online tools fairly easy.

Strengths

The University of Nicosia has several years of experience in delivering distance learning programs and courses. In addition to the necessary technological infrastructure continuous support is offered to the students. Peer-reviewing is used often. There are 6 concentration fields and even an option not to select a specialization. This offers great module versatility and degree customization for the students.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Peer-reviewing can be used more since it facilitates the adoption of student-centered tasks and strengthens communication and co-operation among students in a natural way. By the way of mutual criticism and evaluation it supports learning from the exchange of experiences and knowledge. The fact that full-time and part-time students are blended in a single cohort is an area of improvement. Having different cohorts for full-time and part-time students could add value to both. Usually part-time students are already experienced professionals that would gain more value by interacting with similarly experienced people instead of newly graduated students.

The issues of fraud have to be considered more. The distance and especially the use of ICT tools for evaluation imply some special risks.

ACTION/RESPONSE:

- MBA students undertake control of their learning process through a number of learner-centred interactive strategies, outlined herein. Also, it must be noted that rubrics for grading assignments are given to students so that they can perform self-assessment and then to compare it to the evaluation of their lecturer. Most courses include group assignments that build upon students' prior knowledge, interests, attitudes, and knowledge. Problem-based learning is encouraged at the University of Nicosia and consequently at the MBA programme. We implement PBL primarily through in-class activities, but for MBA DL students the experience is replicated through the use of break-out rooms in WEBEX sessions. MBA students analyse case studies often and are invited to answer open-ended questions, connecting the case study context with their prior knowledge and expertise. Within the process of case study analysis, MBA students form groups and prepare to debate for or against a disputed decision to promote critical thinking, creativity and autonomy. Fellow students are called to reflect on the debate and declare the winning team. Several MBA courses include a group project and in some cases this takes the form of executing a simulation. In such a context, a winning strategy involves structured simultaneous interactions among team members, interdependence and at the same time accountability for

one's suggestions and analysis. Finally, MBA students are encouraged to undertake risks, through their participations in competitions at University, national and transnational level including but not limited to the MFA competition, E-nnovation, Digital Championship and Go Green - Go Digital competitions. We thank the EEC for the recommendation regarding peer-reviewing, which we plan to employ further to promote autonomous learning.

- The MBA programme is truly flexible and enables students most of whom are full-time professionals to undertake ECTSs subject to their time availability for each semester. Hence, it is possible for a student to alternate between Full-Time and Part-Time status throughout his studies. As a result, it is difficult to form cohorts that maintain consistency with regards to academic workload and employment status. However, effort is directed to form groups of students who will complete assignments together in a way that benefit from the experience and knowledge of peers.
- The University of Nicosia is a founding member of the European Network for Academic Integrity. The MBA Programme Coordinator has participated as a researcher in two Erasmus+ projects that focus on promoting policies, best practices and awareness actions on academic integrity. As a result, publications, case studies and an online gaming environment for the prevention of plagiarism have been developed. An online short course on academic integrity has been developed and it is offered to our students in an effort to prevent, detect and limit breaches of academic integrity. Our efforts extend beyond the School of Business and address the academic community of the University of Nicosia as well as other Universities in Cyprus and internationally. As an indicative example we would like to note that in early Fall 2019, the School of Business has successfully organised a Summer School on Academic Integrity with presenters from 11 countries and students from undergraduate and graduate programmes of the University as well as from other Schools of the University of Nicosia and three other Universities in Cyprus.

In conclusion, we thank the EEC for its positive comments. All sub-areas of this category were considered as compliant.

3. Teaching Staff (ESG 1.5)

Findings

The teaching staff are found to have the necessary qualifications to run the distance learning programme.

Strengths

Training and continuous support regarding distance learning is offered to the teachers. Participation in this education is compulsory. The teaching staff has diverse fields of expertise and seems to be cooperating efficiently.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The Department needs to recruit more academic staff. The numbers do not justify the large number of concentrations (6).

Courses for the training of teaching staff should focus more on the pedagogical aspects of distance learning, especially the advantages and possibilities offered by technology for successful distance learning.

ACTION/RESPONSE:

- We thank the EEC for its positive comments and constructive feedback.
- Recruitment and development are strongly and directly related to strategic academic development. Obviously, Departments with programs that are popular and have great student interest will have increased need for new faculty and faculty development. The success of each Department thus depends on its ability to respond to external needs and re-orient itself to a new reality. Every year, the specific needs for specialized faculty are delineated for each programme and request for staffing is then put forward at Departmental and School level. The Dean presents the case to the Senate of the University and upon approval the decision for financial approval rests with the Council. The whole process is explicitly described in Chapter 6 of Internal Regulations of the University of Nicosia. The point for additional hiring is addressed in the reply of the Department of Management.
- The MBA DL is constantly striving for further improvement of teaching where new teaching forms as online teaching and blended learning will be more present. The MBA programme has been a pioneer in the DL delivery using 'Moodle' LMS for a number of years. WebEx video conferencing system is utilized by all lecturers to communicate between each other and peers. Also, the MBA faculty collaborates with the University of Nicosia's E-learning Pedagogical Support Unit (ePSU) and the Technology Enhanced Learning Centre to advance its teaching and learning skills. Following our University's long-standing policy for promoting teaching excellence, faculty professional development and pedagogical support, and in line with the recommendations and requirements set by the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education, the Senate and the Council of the University, approved the offering of a 36-hour professional development seminar, in the areas of

contemporary teaching methods, new technologies in learning and online education, as detailed in Appendix B.

- The MBA programme is supported by faculty across all three Departments of the UNIC School of Business, including but not limited to the Department of Management. The programme also benefits from contributions of Visiting Faculty primarily from state Universities in Greece and selected Adjunct Faculty with professional experience most of whom maintain relevance and currency through intellectual contributions in Scopus indexed outputs. Respectfully, we maintain that any recommendations for faculty recruitment identified at Departmental level should not be automatically applied to the MBA programme, although we acknowledge that the programme could benefit from talented new faculty members. We would like to outline that the MBA faculty consists of:
 - 25+ Full Time Faculty Members across from UNIC School of Business, six of whom have been hired in the last three years;
 - 12 Visiting Faculty from Universities, abroad;
 - More than 10 Adjunct Faculty who maintain academic relevance through research and/or industry expertise;
 - The academic community involved in the delivery of the MBA programme has been extremely active in publishing and maintaining relevance of research to teaching. In addition to the statistics provided during the presentation we are happy to report that as of the end of the third quarter in 2020 the number of Scopus-index publications by our faculty has shown an impressive increase, as documented in Table 3.

Table 3: Intellectual contributions of MBA Faculty at UNic

Scopus-Indexed Publications by MBA Faculty	2018	2019	2020
Total number of papers	85	82	111
Number of faculty publishing between 1-10 papers	25	18	13
Number of faculty publishing between 11-20 papers	1	1	3
Number of faculty publishing 21+ papers	1	0	1
Source: Scopus			

- At the same time, the quality of intellectual contributions of the MBA faculty has shown a notable growth rate over the last few years. During this period, on average 55% of the Scopus-indexed papers are in Scopus Q1 quadrant, 13% in Q2, 23% in Q3 and the remaining in Q4. An indicative sample of the latest publications by MBA Faculty is listed in Appendix B.
- Another evidence of the impact of the intellectual contributions of the MBA faculty is the growing number of citations they receive, namely more than 5800 citations in Scopus and more than 10000 in Google Scholar (end of 2019).
- The University of Nicosia is ranked 301 to 400 internationally in the subject of Business and Economics (https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2021/subject-ranking/business-and-economics#!/page/0/length/25/sort_by/rank/sort_order/asc/cols/stats). To a great extent this achievement is attributed to our talented faculty members (research and citations). The MBA programme is the one among all offered programmes that employs the greatest number of faculty at the School.
- As explained in Section 1, the MBA programme has eliminated a number of courses and established economies of scale for other courses to optimise faculty requirements.
- Furthermore, the imminent restructuring of the School provides for more effective and efficient administrative structure, releasing faculty from administrative duties (e.g. three HODs instead of five and three Associate HODs instead of five) and providing for better utilization of resources for teaching and research.
- We also proceed with better utilization of Visiting Faculty and Adjunct Faculty for the MBA DL programme, in line with the provisions of the Quality Assurance Agency proposed regulations.

In conclusion, we appreciate the EEC for its recommendation. Respectfully, we view the comments that relate to faculty hiring to be relevant in relation to the accreditation of the Department more than specific to the MBA DL programme that is supported by an extensive academic community that overflows the boundaries of the hosting Department. The academic community involved in the delivery of the MBA DL programme has been extremely active in publishing and maintaining relevance of research to teaching. The quality and impact of the intellectual contributions of the MBA faculty are remarkable as evidenced by the rankings of the journals in which they are published and the citations they have received. Detailed data have been provided, above and we remain at the disposal of the EEC for any additional clarification.

4. Students

(ESG 1.4, 1.6, 1.7)

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Findings

There are clear admission requirements for the programme enrollment. Also, recognition and certification are in place.

Strengths

There is student diversity in terms of age, culture and ethnicity.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Given the size of the institution one could consider whether there is overregulation. The requirements for admission could be slightly higher in order to elevate the level of educational interaction.

ACTION/RESPONSE:

- We thank the EEC for its positive comments. The MBA programme follows the policies of the University which ensure compliance with the high standards of the Cyprus Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education.

In conclusion, we thank the EEC for its positive comments. All sub-areas of this category were considered as compliant.

5. Resources

(ESG 1.6)

Findings

The experience of the University of Nicosia in distance learning and in using communication and co-operation technology makes a solid ground for a successful integration of this technology in the different learning activities of the programme.

Strengths

e-Learning Pedagogical Support Unit provides continuous support to the students.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

A more explicit plan for the continuous adaptation of technology tools to new and revised learning activities could be implemented.

ACTION/RESPONSE:

In an effort to offer state-of-the-art infrastructure and IT tools to our faculty and students, a plan for migrating in-site infrastructure to cloud - based services is being implemented. Cloud-based services are easily scalable and can accommodate fluctuating demands in storage and/or processing power. Moreover, they can be replicated to support specific processing needs. With technically unlimited storage and computational power (including CPU and GPU), research in Deep Learning, Data Mining, Forecasting and Business Intelligence has been greatly facilitated while, at the same time, total cost of ownership for ICT is kept under control. Currently, faculty and students of UNIC School of Business have access to the following cloud services:

- Big data processing
- Machine Learning and AI applications, including text mining, transcribing, etc.
- Various flavors of Business Intelligence Tools (Data Warehouses, ETL, Dashboards)

Currently, annual expenses for the cloud services at the University of Nicosia is approaching 200K. It is estimated that the expenses related to IT infrastructure will have 10-15% annual growth rate.

We thank the EEC for their thoughtful and constructive comments that have been addressed as detailed above.



6. Additional for distance learning programmes

(ALL ESG)

THE WHOLE RESPONSE IS FOR THE MBA DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMME

7. Additional for doctoral programmes

(ALL ESG)

NOT APPLICABLE

8. Additional for joint programmes

(ALL ESG)

NOT APPLICABLE



A. Conclusions and final remarks

Overall, we find that the programs evaluated were well-managed and that both students and teaching staff were committed to the learning process. This also goes for the distance learning programmes. We have pointed at some weaknesses of the current focus on pedagogical training in using distance learning tools, however, the department overall seems very fit in respect to these activities.

ACTION/RESPONSE:

We appreciate EEC's conclusive remarks and we underline that in alignment with EEC members' suggestions the MBA programme has been modified in relation to number of points as detailed above. All decisions have been the outcome of discussions with internal and external stakeholders to fulfill Assurance of Learning for our students and achievement of strategic priorities at Departmental and School level. We are looking forward to the decision for the re-accreditation of the MBA programme at the University of Nicosia to continue to offer exemplary learning experiences to our MBA DL students.

B. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	
Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	
Prof. Angelika Kokkinaki	Dean, School of Business / Program Coordinator	
Prof. Despo Ktoridou	Head, Department of Management	
Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	
Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	

Date: 30 March 2021

