

Doc. 300.1.2

Date: 21/12/2021

Higher Education Institution's Response

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

- **Town:** Nicosia

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

In Greek:

Μηχανική Ηλεκτρονικών Υπολογιστών (4 έτη, 240 ECTS, Πτυχίο)

In English:

Computer Engineering (4 years, 240 ECTS, Bachelor of Science)

- **Language(s) of instruction:** English
- **Programme's status:** Currently Operating
- **Concentrations (if any):** N/A

In Greek: Concentrations

In English: Concentrations



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 or 300.1.1/2 or 300.1.1/3 or 300.1.1/4) 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 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 or 300.1.1/2 or 300.1.1/3 or 300.1.1/4).*
- *In case of annexes, those should be attached and sent on a separate document.*

0. Introduction

The Computer Engineering faculty and the programme coordinator would like to thank the members of the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) for their professional and thorough work during the online evaluation of the BSc programme in Computer Engineering as well as three other programs of the Department of Engineering (BSc Electrical Engineering, MSc Electrical Engineering and PhD Electrical Engineering) on September 13-15, 2021. We would also like to express our appreciation for the collegial and constructive approach with which they conducted their evaluation. During the visit, the EEC members were given presentations about the University of Nicosia, the Department of Engineering, and the BSc Computer Engineering programme. The members of the EEC have met, in separate meetings, the faculty and staff supporting the programme as well as current students and alumni of the programme. Furthermore, the EEC members were given a live video tour of the laboratories used by the programme.

Overall, the administration and faculty members of the Department and specifically those supporting the BSc Computer Engineering programme are very pleased to welcome the positive report with all 18 out of 18 quality indicators receiving the rating of “**Compliant**”. At the same time, we appreciate the EEC members’ feedback for specific indicators and express our commitment to utilise them in order to further improve the quality of the programme.

Towards this direction, we will specifically address all recommendations of the members of the EEC in the following sections of this response.

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

(ESG 1.1, 1.2, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9)

We appreciate the EEC's assessment of this area for all quality indicators/criteria as "Compliant" and welcome their recommendations.

Positive comments made by the EEC:

- *"The ECC has found that Programme of Bachelor in Computer Engineering has been well structured, follows well established principles, and reflects best practice. It meets the standard expected at international universities."*
- *"The content to be delivered is appropriate to the scope and the objective of the evaluated programme."*
- *"There is a sufficiently efficient mechanism for feedback, where for each course, students provide their feedback via formal questionnaires and faculty members can adjust their teaching according to this feedback."*
- *"The students have also been offered good opportunities for industry placements and internships."*
- *"In addition, the faculty members have tried to bridge the gap between teaching and research, by feeding their research to their teaching."*
- *"The department has a well organized administrative team, which support students and staff well."*
- *"Furthermore, the department and the university have established the internal evaluation committee to ensure a reasonable procedure of quality assurance."*
- *"The ECC has found that Programme of Computer Engineering has been well maintained by the Department of Engineering at the University of Nicosia. In particular, the programme has been bi-yearly reviewed by the department, where both internal and external assessors have been involved. As a result, this programme has been offered to students at international standards for topics, quality of teaching, resources and infrastructures."*
- *"The faculty members and the administrative staff have spent a great amount of efforts to build a supportive and friendly culture, which takes student feedback into account, and well support students for their studies. This has been particularly important during the Covid-19 pandemic, where the department has provided various good practices to avoid too much disruptions to the students' learning."*
- *"The student-to-staff ratio is low, which means that students are provided with sufficient support."*

Areas of improvement and recommendations made by EEC:

1.1. *“Currently, the department has provided a formal channel for students to feed their opinions and suggestions for individual courses back to the department. However, it is not clear to students how the department has taken this feedback into consideration. As such, the department may want to build a regular staff-student meeting, which not only helps the students to understand the actions taken by the department towards the student feedback, but also helps the department to detect any potential issues at a very early stage, instead of waiting until the end of each term. Furthermore, such a staff-student meeting can ensure that students are involved in the development of the programme and the update of the curriculum.”*

Response/Action:

Prior to the pandemic the programme used to hold a Board of Studies meeting (BoS) with the students at least once a year. These meetings were informal and all faculty supporting the programme as well as all students enrolled in the program were invited to attend. The purpose is to provide a forum for the students to express their views about any aspect of the programme of study including the content of the curriculum, the running of classes (especially the electives), the organization of the lab courses, the availability of the laboratories, field trips, student clubs and societies, etc.

As of the Fall 2022 semester, the department plans to enhance this set-up as follows:

- Establish a continuous, online BoS on the student intranet where students can raise issues and receive formal feedback, describing all actions taken to address them.
- Hold a face-to-face BoS twice a year in the middle of each semester (6th week of classes) for each programme separately, including Computer Engineering.
- Each BoS will be announced two weeks in advance together with a call for subjects to be included in the agenda.
- The agenda will always include a briefing by the programme coordinator regarding new developments/changes in the programme as well as an update on issues raised by students during the semester and the corresponding actions taken by the department to accommodate them. It will also conclude discussion of subjects proposed by students or faculty.
- The minutes of the BoS will be posted on the student intranet providing access for all the students of the programme.

1.2 *“During the visit, the panel was informed that a student is allowed to complete her/his senior project by using two semesters (Semesters 7 and 8), due to the heavy workload of this course. However, the credits assigned to this unit, Senior Year Project, is the same as that of other one-semester units. Therefore, the department may want to provide some corresponding changes to reflect the workload of this particular unit.”*

Response/Action:

We welcome the suggestion for increasing the number of ECTSs assigned to the Senior Year Project (SYP). This change has been considered in the past in order to reflect the actual workload of the SYP and have the appropriate weight in the student CPA (Cumulative Point Average). However, increasing the number of ECTS for SYP will result in



reducing the number of other courses, most probably elective courses. The Department Council feels that this reduction will affect the quality of the programme and also create a number of side effects such as the registration of programmes graduates with the Cyprus Technical Chamber. Hence, the decision was to continue with 6 ECTS for the SYP. The programme coordinator will bring this subject again in the next meeting of the Department Council to reconsider the issue and take a final decision by the end of the academic year so that any change will be effective as of the Fall 2022 semester (academic year 2022-23), following the approval of the Senate as well.

2. Student – centred learning, teaching and assessment (ESG 1.3)

We appreciate the EEC's assessment of this area for all quality indicators/criteria as "Compliant" and welcome their recommendations.

Positive comments made by the EEC:

- *"The Department clearly benefits from its relatively small staff and from an appropriate staff/student ratio, enabling a high-quality learning and teaching environment to operate in."*
- *"Teaching methodologies in use are appropriate. The course portfolio includes a mixture of theory and practical work across various courses."*
- *"Student feedback suggests they find interactions between faculty members and students satisfactory, especially due to relatively small classes."*
- *"Faculty members are readily available to students, including specific office hours."*
- *"The process for student assessment is evaluated appropriate."*
- *"Industrial internship opportunities are available to BSc students."*
- *"The educational outcomes of this study program are well defined in the document Application for Evaluation – Accreditation Program of Study. For each of the courses (compulsory and elective), there is a clear specification of a) course purpose and objectives, b) learning outcomes, c) prerequisites, course content, bibliography, teaching methodology, and assessment."*
- *"Student feedback on teaching is directly received and considered by faculty members to improve course delivery and exam."*
- *"Appropriate size of department."*
- *"Good staff/student ratio."*
- *"Commitment of staff to their programmes and students."*
- *"Commitment of staff in use innovative teaching methods, including hybrid systems during the pandemic situation."*

Areas of improvement and recommendations made by EEC:

- 2.1. *"Consider getting student feedback during the term/semester to benefit the students and courses in the ongoing term/semester."*

Response/Action:



We welcome the EEC's suggestion which will be implemented as of the Spring 2022 semester. The student questionnaire will be managed by the Departmental Quality Assurance Committee and given to the students following the return of the graded midterm examination in order to have a comprehensive mid-semester feedback from the students regarding both the instructor and the course.

3. Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

We appreciate the EEC's assessment of this area for all quality indicators/criteria as "Compliant" and welcome their recommendations.

Positive comments made by the EEC:

- *"Teachers at the programme are qualified. Most of them hold a PhD degree and have years of teaching and research. Many of them have obtained their PhD abroad and have a notable experience in teaching or research in different countries. Most of teachers use the English language often and they can communicate with their international students very well."*
- *"Their teaching duties are mostly mixed with their research duties. Their involvement into the research activities related to research founders from home and from abroad is stimulated at the university. The stimulation is applicable for getting the research projects from industry and abroad and for publishing the research achievements. Therefore, they publish their research results in different publications, where the largest focus is given to the scientific journals with the impact factor. Teaching is well related with the fields of research."*
- *"Teaching is also related with experiments, which are conducted in the laboratories within their teaching. Teachers, in addition to giving lectures to the students, conduct also the laboratory measurements and experiments, so a general impression for an observer is that the students see some important practice during their study."*
- *"Mostly, the teachers are employed for the full time."*
- *"Teachers are evaluated by the students and the student assessment is also one of the criteria for their remuneration/habilitation. Practice shows that the students are happy with their teachers and the evaluations generally confirm this. The feedback for a potential bad teacher exist and the improvement or replacement is possible."*
- *"The teachers conduct their teaching in a way that it is comfortable to students and a two way that a dialogue with students is possible, which is appreciated by the students."*
- *"A core list of experienced professors represents a good background for the education of students."*

Areas of improvement and recommendations made by EEC:

- 3.1 *"The teachers are faced with small groups of students, because the study is not attractive to a large number of students. An important reason lays in a fact that this is a private study, which does not get the public funding and students have to have substantial funds to enrol to the study programme. Presentation of studies could be perhaps performed occasionally at high schools, which are a potential for future students."*



Response/Action:

We appreciate the EEC's comment/recommendation. The Department presents all its programmes occasionally in high schools after receiving invitations. The Department will ask the university's marketing department to extend the marketing plan for 2021-2022 so that appropriate requests are made to public and private high schools/technical schools to host presentations of the Computer Engineering programme. Also note that in the 2020-2021 marketing plan, the Department had introduced an action called "Meet the Engineering Labs" where students from high schools/technical schools visited the university premises and faculty members from each programme presented the laboratory facilities and relevant laboratory courses to them.

4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification (ESG 1.4)

We appreciate the EEC's assessment of this area for all quality indicators/criteria as "Compliant" and welcome their recommendations

Positive comments made by the EEC:

- *"There are appropriate plans and teaching advisors to monitor and support student progression."*
- *"A range of entry requirements is accepted in order to support various educational backgrounds."*
- *"Connection of theory and practice is ensured through hands on laboratories and introduction of an internship program to enhance industry related skills."*
- *"The degree program receives recognition through the accreditation process by national and international bodies, including the Technical Chamber of Cyprus (ETEK), which is the engineering regulatory body in Cyprus."*
- *"The EEC has observed a high level of satisfaction among students, regarding the program and the support they receive."*

Areas of improvement and recommendations made by EEC:

4.1 *"Developing an action plan leading to an increasing number of students, would be beneficial in many ways."*

Response/Action:

We appreciate the EEC's recommendation that is continuously implemented through the Department's strategic plan and includes both local as well as international student recruiting. Student recruiting is coordinated centrally by the university's Marketing Department in cooperation with the Office of Admissions and the Recruiting Unit. The Department of Engineering supports through the organizing of an annual Summer School for high school pupils, presentations in open days, webinars, workshops, visits to high schools, etc.

5. Learning resources and student support (ESG 1.6)

We appreciate the EEC's assessment of this area for all quality indicators/criteria as "Compliant" and welcome their recommendations.

Positive comments made by the EEC:

- *"According to the virtual tour video of the University that the EEC has seen, it seems that the university has modern campus laboratories and facilities."*
- *"Good student services including tutors and councillors are available to support students both in terms of academic and personal well-being."*
- *"According to the students' evaluation process, the department kept the high level teaching during the pandemic."*
- *"Online Library is available to students."*
- *"Good communication between professors and students."*
- *"Hardworking, helpful and flexible to solve student's problems academic staff."*
- *"Physical presence in labs during pandemic."*

Areas of improvement and recommendations made by EEC:

5.1 *"To have students providing more timely feedback – not just at end of semester."*

Response/Action:

Please refer to Section 2 (point 2.1) above for a thorough explanation of the actions intended to address this.

5.2 *"The EEC believes that by providing clear admission criteria and requirements to students, such as Maths and Physics in secondary school, will assure the admittance of students with the appropriate academic background, and hence reduce possible dropout cases."*

Response/Action:

We appreciate the EEC's comment/recommendation. Currently, the admission requirement is to have 75% average grade on the High School Leaving Certificate and adequate level of English language (as specified in terms of scores in one of many different international standardized exams). Requiring additionally applicants to have 75% on Maths and Physics as well will result to denying admission to the programme to a number of students who, despite having grades on Maths and/or Physics which are lower than 75%, have demonstrated in the past that they are able to cope with the programme and graduate. As



mentioned during the visit, applicants who are not ready for Calculus I are asked to take an extra course in Algebra and Trigonometry before taking Calculus I. Furthermore, students who have deficiencies in Maths and Physics may ask for complementary tutoring through the Student Success Centre.

Data from past years shows that students who drop out either (a) face financial problems, (b) transfer to overseas universities, or (c) decide to get a job instead. Furthermore, as mentioned during the visit, many local students study on a part-time basis and, therefore, end up graduating after 5-6 years. Very few students drop out because of Maths/Physics deficiencies.



6. Additional for doctoral programmes

(ALL ESG)

N/A



7. Eligibility (Joint programme) (ALL ESG)

N/A

B. Conclusions and final remarks

The faculty and the coordinator of the BSc Computer Engineering programme would like once more to thank the members of the EEC for their professional and thorough work during the online evaluation as well as other three programs of the Department of Engineering (BSc, MSc and PhD in Electrical Engineering) on September 13-15, 2021. We would also like to express our appreciation for the collegial and constructive approach with which they conducted their evaluation. During the visit, the EEC members were given presentations about the University of Nicosia, the Department of Engineering, and the BSc Computer Engineering programme, met the faculty and staff supporting the programme, and had a separate meeting with current students and alumni of the programme. Furthermore, the EEC members were given a live video tour of the laboratories used by the programme.

Overall, the administration and faculty members of the Department and specifically those supporting the BSc Computer Engineering programme are very pleased to welcome the positive report **with all 18 out of 18 quality indicators receiving the rating of “Compliant”**. At the same time, we appreciate the EEC members’ feedback for specific indicators and express our commitment to utilise them in order to further improve the quality of the programme.

Finally, we welcome the EEC’s extremely positive evaluation of our BSc Computer Engineering programme and the final conclusion which states: ***“The members of the EEC committee found the academic programme in BSc in Computer Engineering 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.”***

C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Dr George Gregoriou	Dean, School of Sciences and Engineering	
Dr Stelios Neophytou	Head, Department of Engineering	
Dr Stelios Neophytou	Programme Coordinator	
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