

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:

Πολιτική Μηχανική και Μηχανική Περιβάλλοντος (4
έτη, 240 ECTS, Πτυχίο)

In English:

Civil and Environmental 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

We would like to thank the members of the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) for their professional and thorough work during the online evaluation of the Civil and Environmental Engineering program on September 27th, 2021. We would also like to express our appreciation for the collegial and constructive approach with which they conducted their evaluation.

We would like to note that the report of the committee is **extremely positive** with all 18 out of 18 quality indicators receiving the rating of “Compliant” (amongst the choices of: Compliant/partially compliant/non-compliant).

More specifically, the EEC states, amongst other:

- *“The Degree is in very good alignment with the accreditation requirements of Cyprus Scientific and Technical Chamber (ETEK).”*
- *“The admission rules are clearly defined. Pre-defined student progression rules are well stated.”*
- *“The programme is well run.”*
- *“Teaching staff are committed to providing an excellent education for the students.”*
- *“Nicely equipped facilities including laboratories for teaching to ensure hands-on experience and opportunities for inquiry-based learning.”*
- *“Students get the opportunity to be involved in activities associated with both practical works along with appropriate theoretical grounding.”*
- *“Staff and the University senior management take teaching seriously and have the support available (IT systems and administrative staff) to help teaching staff achieve success in teaching.”*
- *“The University clearly provides several mechanisms to support students' academic and social life during their studies.”*

We do appreciate the committee’s recommendations for improvement, which will enhance the quality of our Programme and we will be addressing those in the corresponding section 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. We note that **all quality indicators/criteria were assessed as "Compliant"** (amongst the choices of: Compliant/partially compliant/non-compliant).

Positive comments made by the EEC:

- *"Professionally accredited degree to directly practice civil engineering in Cyprus."*
- *"Nicely equipped facilities including laboratories for teaching to ensure hands-on experience and opportunities for inquiry-based learning."*
- *"Students get the opportunity to be involved in activities associated with both practical works along with appropriate theoretical grounding."*
- *"Full-time students get to finish on time their academic degree (about 4 years)."*
- *"Course offerings in English attract a good portion of international students (about 40-50%)."*

Areas of improvement and recommendations made by EEC:

1.1 *"Consider improving certain elements for testing facilities that can facilitate the research activities of existing and future faculty by engaging in research proposals."*

Response/Action:

Among the future plans of the Department is the extension of the Civil and Environmental (CEE) laboratory, as well as the enhancement of the existing testing equipment for conducting experimental research studies. Therefore, beside the annual budget requests from the institution's management (University Council), the faculty members will increase their efforts for research funding through coordinating and/or participating in research proposals either through the European Union's research and innovation program "Horizon Europe", or through national funding calls coordinated by the Research and Innovation Foundation (RIF). The faculty members are committed in selecting appropriate calls that include funding for infrastructure, to contribute to the expansion and maintenance of the existing laboratory facilities.

1.2 *"An alumni center could be eventually established to follow up on graduates. However, some efforts exist in this direction through the university's career center."*

Response/Action:



Additional to the University's efforts to keep in touch with its graduates through, e.g., UNic Alumni (<https://www.unic.ac.cy/alumni/>), the Civil and Environmental Engineering programme aims at establishing a regular communication with its graduates. To that end, the programme aims at taking various actions, such as creating a page on social media, launching a new webpage, and publishing a dedicated newsletter to inform its graduates about the programme's news, accomplishments, planned seminars and events. In addition, the programme aims at inviting former graduates to give presentations (physical or online), building in this way communication bridges between current students and graduates and maintaining at the same time close communication with the faculty.

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

We appreciate the EEC's assessment of this area. We note that **all quality indicators/criteria were assessed as "Compliant"** (amongst the choices of: Compliant/partially compliant/non-compliant).

Positive comments made by the EEC:

- *"Well-equipped laboratory facilities for teaching."*
- *"Assessment methods appear to be working fairly well including constant feedback to students."*
- *"Field visits are regularly organized and are highly appreciated by students."*

Areas of improvement and recommendations made by EEC:

2.1 *"The department should consider increasing the length or amount of practical training offered to the students. It is anticipated that in this case students will be encouraged to do more internships particularly during the summer period."*

Response/Action:

The programme is continuously expanding the collaboration with various companies of the CEE industry, where the students can work as interns in the frame of the elective course offered (CEE-493 Internship). Additional to the Internship course, the programme is planning to establish new collaborations with companies in Cyprus that will allow students to get involved in various CEE projects during the summer period. Moreover, acknowledging the importance of offering students more practical training, it is our aim to encourage them to undertake Final Year Theses that involve practical experience.

3. Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

We appreciate the EEC's assessment of this area. We note that **all quality indicators/criteria were assessed as "Compliant"** (amongst the choices of: Compliant/partially compliant/non-compliant).

Positive comments made by the EEC:

- *"The faculty approach was collaborative, with a number from different specialisms teaching on the course."*
- *"Those from outside the subject area (e.g. background in mathematics) focussed their teaching on Engineering or Civil and Environmental Engineering as appropriate."*
- *"Staff and the University senior management take teaching seriously and have the support available (IT systems and administrative staff) to help teaching staff achieve success in teaching. In particular their plans for teaching during the COVID disruption, and the plans for exams during lockdown were well thought out."*

Areas of improvement and recommendations made by EEC:

- 3.1 *"Additional permanent Civil and Environmental Engineering focused teaching and research staff and additional research laboratory equipment would strengthen the programmes, but this may be linked to additional student recruitment (either at BSc or MSc level)."*

Response/Action:

We take on board the recommendation by the EEC and will act accordingly when we introduce a Masters' programme or when there is an increase in the number of students that will necessitate this.

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

We appreciate the EEC's assessment of this area. We note that **all quality indicators/criteria were assessed as "Compliant"** (amongst the choices of: Compliant/partially compliant/non-compliant).

Positive comments made by the EEC:

- *"The very effective ratio of students per lecturers."*
- *"The admission rules are clearly defined."*
- *"Pre-defined student progression rules are well stated."*
- *"A mixture of several educational tools (individual or team classworks or projects, lab or field assignments, participation, midterm and final exam) is used in the marking process."*
- *"There are provisions for extra tutorials for low performance students in their early stage of their studies."*
- *"The Degree is in very good alignment with the accreditation requirements of Cyprus Scientific and Technical Chamber (ETEK)."*

Areas of improvement and recommendations made by EEC:

4.1 *"The number of students being admitted to the program annually is rather moderate. The Committee believes that the Department should intensify its national and international campaign to increase this number. The issuing of an MSc program may help towards this direction."*

Response/Action:

The Department is taking various actions for increasing the number of students admitted to the programme, including:

- More effective international advertisement.
- Promotion of the program through seminars.
- Engineering training summer schools for high school students.
- Improvement of promotional material.
- Launching a new webpage for the programme.

Additionally, one of the short-term plans of the Department is to offer a new MSc programme in Civil Engineering. This will give the opportunity to the BSc graduates to continue their studies at the University, while at the same time attract additional students to the undergraduate programme and the Department.

4.2 *“The weighting scheme for marking is needed to be pre-defined and be included in the syllabus of each course.”*

Response/Action:

The weighting scheme for student assessment is already included in the Course Outline of each course, along with the weekly schedule and other important information. The Course Outline is handed out to the students at the first meeting at the beginning of each semester.

4.3 *“The committee believes that several faculty members should be engaged as Academic Advisors.”*

Response/Action:

Following the suggestion of the Committee, the Programme Coordinator will assign all CEE full-time faculty members as Academic Advisors. The students will be grouped according to the year of study and a faculty member will be assigned as Academic Advisor to each group. This will facilitate the continuous and effective monitoring of students' performance and, at the same time, will provide guidance and advice to the students on their specific needs in a timely manner.

5. Learning resources and student support (ESG 1.6)

We appreciate the EEC's assessment of this area. We note that **all quality indicators/criteria were assessed as "Compliant"** (amongst the choices of: Compliant/partially compliant/non-compliant).

Positive comments made by the EEC:

- *"The University clearly provides several mechanisms to support students' academic and social life during their studies. This is well evidenced by the students' satisfaction regarding supporting services."*
- *"The well-equipped classrooms support the student-centred learning procedure."*
- *"Almost all of the program's premises are concentrated in one building."*

Areas of improvement and recommendations made by EEC:

5.1 *"The existing laboratory and its equipment cannot fully support advanced experimental research activities. A strategic plan for seeking for additional lab facilities and purchasing advanced laboratory equipment in the near future is advisable (especially in the case of issuing a new graduate program). The Committee suggests that strengthening the collaborations with other European research groups might further increase the research status of the group thus allowing faculty members to increase the applications for European funding and therefore allocating budget for expanding and maintaining the existing laboratory facilities."*

Response/Action:

One of the plans of the Department is the expansion of the Civil and Environmental (CEE) laboratory, as well as the enhancement of the existing testing equipment for conducting experimental research studies. Therefore, beside the funding requests from the institution's management (through the budget submitted to the University Council), the faculty members will intensify their efforts for research funding through coordinating and/or participating in research proposals either through the European Union's research and innovation program "Horizon Europe", or through national funding calls coordinated by the Research and Innovation Foundation (RIF). The faculty members are committed to selecting appropriate calls that include funding for infrastructure in order to contribute to the expansion and maintenance of the existing laboratory facilities.

5.2 *"A more detailed plan for students' mobility opportunities can also be implemented by the Department to enhance the centrally operated mobility office."*

Response/Action: The programme and the Department will further encourage students to take advantage of mobility programmes, such as Erasmus+. To that end, mobility programmes will be introduced to freshmen in order to plan in advance. Representatives of mobility programmes, as well as students that participated in such programmes will be invited to talk



about the different opportunities and share experiences. It is noted, however, that many international students outside the European Union are facing difficulties obtaining a visa for European countries, thus making the student mobility programmes difficult to employ. Nevertheless, the student mobility programmes can work very well for local students as well as students from EU countries.



6. Additional for doctoral programmes

(ALL ESG)

N/A



7. Eligibility (Joint programme) (ALL ESG)

N/A

B. Conclusions and final remarks

We would like to thank the members of the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) for their professional and thorough work during the online evaluation of the Civil and Environmental Engineering programme. We would also like to express our appreciation for the collegial and constructive approach with which they conducted their evaluation.

We welcome the EEC's positive evaluation of our BSc Civil and Environmental Engineering programme and the final conclusion which is full compliancy in all of the assessed areas.

More specifically, the EEC states at its "Conclusions and final remarks" section in the report:

- *"The Department adheres to University processes for admissions, student support, standards, assessment and awarding of degrees, and these processes are well developed and coherent."*
- *The programme is compatible with the Bologna agreement cycle 1. There is practical training embedded through laboratory classes, field trips, and the option for internships (as an optional module)."*
- *"Teaching staff are committed to providing an excellent education for the students, and staff recruitment and promotion procedures are clear and transparent."*
- *"Student admission and progression rules are well defined, and there is support in place for students with either intake levels slightly below the requirement, or for other students struggling with the programme."*
- *"The assessment includes a range of activities including laboratory reports, design and other coursework, midterms and final exams."*
- *"The Degree is in very good alignment with the accreditation requirements of Cyprus Scientific and Technical Chamber (ETEK)."*
- *"The University clearly provides several mechanisms to support students' academic and social life during their studies. This is well evidenced by the students' satisfaction regarding supporting services."*
- *"The low student and staff numbers ensure students and staff know each other."*
- *"The well-equipped classrooms support the student-centred learning procedure."*

Additionally, the programme will seriously consider all the improvement suggestions of the Committee. We would like to address suggestions for improvement made by the EEC in the “Conclusions and final remarks” section (section D of the EEC’s report):

B1 *“There is practical training embedded through laboratory classes, field trips, and the option for internships (as an optional module). Options for more (or longer) practical training should, however, be considered by the programme team.”*

Response/Action:

This remark was raised in section A2 and response is given in point 2.1.

B2 *“The small number of permanent Civil and Environmental Engineering staff does increase the pressure on these staff, and does pose a risk to the programmes if one or more staff were unable to teach at short notice. Increasing student numbers is likely to be the most effective means for justifying increases in staffing.”*

Response/Action:

This remark was raised in section A3 and response is given in point 3.1.

B3 *“Increasing the number of students studying Civil and Environmental Engineering (though increasing number on the BSc or starting a new MSc) is likely to be beneficial as it will allow more teaching staff to be employed.”*

Response/Action:

This remark was raised in section A4 and response is given in point 4.1.

B4 *“It will also allow more research to be conducted which could further increase international standing, but this may require additional laboratory space and research equipment (current laboratory equipment is focussed on teaching rather than research).”*

Response/Action: This remark was raised in Section 1 and response is given in point 1.1.

Concluding, we would like to thank once more the members of the External Evaluation Committee for their valuable feedback and their **extremely positive evaluation** of the BSc Civil and Environmental Engineering programme.



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 Panayiotis Polycarpou	Programme Coordinator	
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