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External Evaluation Report (Conventional-face- to-face programme of study)

- **Higher Education Institution:**
American College
- **Town:** Nicosia
- **School/Faculty (if applicable):** Hospitality and Tourism
- **Department/ Sector:** Hospitality and Tourism
- **Programme of study- Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)**

In Greek:

Δίπλωμα στη Διοίκηση Ξενοδοχείου, 2 έτη/120 ECTS;

In English:

Diploma in Hotel Management, 2 Years / 120 ECTS

- **Language(s) of instruction:** English
- **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. Introduction

This part includes basic information regarding the onsite visit.

The EEC online visit to the American College to evaluate the Diploma in Hotel Management took place on the 16th of November 2020. The American College submitted a report and the EEC had the opportunity to read and analyse it in advance. The report includes important information, and it is clear and well organized.

During the online visit the EEC had the opportunity to ask questions to the Directors, teaching and administrative staff and students. The meetings took place in a warm and fruitful atmosphere; all questions asked were effectively replied and any additional information requested was immediately provided by the College.

B. External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>University</i>
Carlos Costa	Full Professor in Tourism, Head of School	University of Aveiro, Portugal
Andreas Papatheodorou	Full Professor in Industrial and Spatial Economics with Emphasis on Tourism, Deputy Head of School	University of the Aegean, Greece
Wai Mun Lim	Associate Professor of Service Management	University of Plymouth, UK
Panagiotis Chrysanthou	Student	University of Cyprus

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

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

Findings

This evaluation is based on the application documentation submitted by the College and the External Evaluation Committee's (EEC) video conference meetings with the various teams. The Diploma programme in Hotel Management was last evaluated and accredited by SEKAP and targets both Cypriots and international students with a Secondary School Leaving Certificate or equivalent, aiming to acquire a career in the hospitality sectors. The programme is positioned as an opportunity for students to seek employment at supervisory levels within the hospitality sector, by equipping students with a range of technical skills and knowledge.

During the evaluation meeting, the Internal Evaluation Committee of the College provided an overview of the College and an insight into the quality assurance practice for the programme under evaluation. According to the College's submitted application in the Structure of the Programme of Study and the presentation by the Programme Manager, all modules listed were electives. The EEC panel sought confirmation, where upon the College responded that there were core modules. The EEC panel then requested for accurate documents reflecting the core modules.

The EEC highlighted that there was a discrepancy in the composition of the ECTS on the college's website, the application document and the programme manager's PowerPoint presentation. On the College's website and the 1st part of the programme manager's PowerPoint presentation the Diploma in Hotel Management composed of 36 ECTS of General Education courses + 24 ECTS of Business Core Requirements + 60 ECTS of Major Requirements. However, the application document and the 2nd part of the program manager's PowerPoint presentation presented 42 ECTS of General Education courses + 12 ECTS of Business Core Requirements + 66 ECTS of Major Requirements.

The EEC was informed that the Diploma students attend the classes with the students from the first two years of the Bachelor's students. While one of the programme's Intended Learning Outcomes was for students to acquire 'training experience', the EEC learns that it is not mandatory for students to undertake internships and placements. The EEC also noted that the Diploma has one technology-based module, CSC102 Computer Applications and is listed as an elective. Critically, there are no further digital/ technology-based modules that reflect the latest operational trends of the hospitality industry.

The College has submitted a Quality Assurance Annex 4b as part of the application document, however it is unclear if this document is adopted by the College as guidelines/policy for the quality assurance of the programme.

The six (6) students interviewed by the EEC were from Nepal, India and the Philippines. The students had expressed their satisfaction from the academic delivery and support services of the College in general.

Information in relation to the Diploma is currently available on the College's website, where the Program Goals and Courses are identical to the Bachelor Degree programme <https://www.ac.ac.cy/en/programs-of-study/bachelor-in-hotel-management764>

Strengths

The College appears to support the involvement of external stakeholders such as: inviting potential employers to their popular Job Forum event, and by contributing to the community via its 'Community Service and Volunteerism' initiative. Additionally, the application document suggests that the College has established an 'American College Alumni Association (ACALA)' to receive employment and career development information from their graduates.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Minor changes are recommended by the EEC as follows:

- In accordance to the above 'Public Information' standard 1.3, the following information could be made more readily accessible (published) on the College website: (i) teaching, learning and assessment procedures, (ii) pass rates and (iii) graduate employment information.
- As the College's Alumni Association is established, it would advance the College's interest to publicise this positive initiative on its website and documented accordingly.
- To augment the policy for Quality Assurance policy of the Diploma in Hotel Management programme as mandated by the Ministry of Education in Cyprus, the EEC recommends that the College should compile a Student Handbook and a Faculty Handbook to support students and the teaching staff respectively, in taking responsibility in quality assurance.
- As the Review and Evaluation of the programme is conducted every 2 years via a programme co-ordinator's report (as stated in Page 350 of the application document), the EEC

recommends that these forms are collated and monitored at Academic Committee and Quality Assurance meetings, and minuted accordingly.

- To add or replace the current module CSC102 'Computer Applications' with modules that reflect current trends and demands. For example, Hospitality Technologies, Digital Marketing for Hospitality.
- Curriculum content for some of the Business Core Requirements should be a lot more contextualised, for example in Accounting, Entrepreneurship, Economics.
- To consider adding moderation and/or second marking to assignments and examinations. This would not only support the quality assurance of a module/programme but helps to safeguard academic integrity.
- To remove or rephrase the Intended Learning Outcome (in documentation) to 'Acquire a training experience within the hospitality industry putting theory into practice', as there is no mandatory internship or placement module that is credit-bearing.
- As the Intended Learning Outcomes and Programme purpose and objectives/goals are slightly different, the EEC recommends that the College considers differentiating the Bachelor Degree in Hotel Management and Diploma in Hotel Management programmes on its website (public information).

Please select what is appropriate for each of the following sub-areas:

Sub-area		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
1.1	Policy for quality assurance	Compliant
1.2	Design, approval, on-going monitoring and review	Partially compliant
1.3	Public information	Partially compliant
1.4	Information management	Compliant

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

Findings

Teaching and Learning principles seem to be at the forefront of the College's strategy and philosophy. Mention was made of the student centeredness of the programme. Indications were made about the use of lecturing and case-based learning in the classroom. Nonetheless, the EEC is slightly concerned about the structure of the curriculum from a teaching and learning point-of-view. This concern arises from the fact that the various modules in American College are offered to mixed audiences, i.e. students reading for the Diploma in Hotel Management are not offered modules specifically dedicated to them but have to attend modules/classes, which are simultaneously offered to students reading for the BA in Hotel Management but also for other business-related programmes. While it is acknowledged that American College needs to run a financially sustainable business by generating economies of scale, it is very important, at the same time, not to treat different student groups/cohorts in the same way as this may set the learning experience at risk. The College's management team argued that the lecturers can provide sufficient contextualization based on the specific interests/specialization of their student audience – nonetheless, the EEC believes that several generic business modules should be designed to become sector-specific and offered solely to Hotel Management students to advance the student experience. Moreover, it is important to structure the curriculum in a concrete way as providing too much flexibility and choice may end up becoming a disadvantage for young, international students who are usually in need of solid orientation and guidance.

Students are provided with opportunities to undertake an industrial placement during their period of study. This is usually done in collaboration with hotels in Cyprus, which gives students the opportunity to gain first-hand experience in the industry. Nonetheless, the industrial placement is not a credit-bearing module thus students may not be sufficiently incentivized to perform well in it. According to the College's management team, the rationale behind not having a credit-bearing placement-related module was that not all students may qualify and/or be able to secure a placement during their studies because e.g. of work-permit issues. The EEC, however, strongly believes that adding a credit-bearing placement-related module would be of added value to the programme; if for some reason, students are unable to undertake the placement, then they can be exempted and granted the opportunity to take another module instead.

From the discussion with members of academic staff, the EEC concluded that sufficient effort is undertaken to combine theory with practice and use research to inform the curriculum where applicable. Students are not actively involved in research, but this is rather expected at a Diploma level. There are also modules which provide elements of practical training during the study. Classes in kitchen/production, food and beverage service, wine tasting were all mentioned. Student assessment seems well organized from the administrative as well as the test takers side. Different types of assessment strategies are used at American College. Projects, essay-based written exams as well as true/false and multiple-choice questions and role plays are set. Face to face exams are normally taken at the end of the semester, proctored by Administrative and Faculty.

Assessment approaches appear mainstream and in line with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). Moreover, weights of different assessment modes seem to vary across the curriculum. The EEC believes that this is a good practice as it may prove to the benefit of students

with different abilities and skills. Second/double marking of assignments is not a standard practice at American College but is applied only when students formally complain about their marks. Judging, however, from the responses provided by the interviewed students to the EEC questions, the level of such complaints seems to be rather low. Plagiarism software is used to detect academic dishonesty, which is penalized accordingly.

American College seems to use teaching and learning technologies in a successful way. Asynchronous and synchronous distance learning platforms have been used extensively since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic period thus ensuring a smooth transition to an online teaching environment. When asked, interviewed students were satisfied with module delivery both online as well as onsite arguing that their lecturers show active care and address their problems in a very satisfactory manner.

Strengths

Regarding the Process of Teaching, Learning and Assessment:

- The use of case-based learning;
- The use of role plays in the classroom;
- Students are taken on field trips in the industry;
- Lecturers participate in research seminars;
- Lecturers are professionally developed through conference visits and presentations;
- Projects are undertaken in conjunction with industry partners, who interact with the students.
- Synchronous and asynchronous distance learning technologies have been successfully implemented by the College during the COVID-19 pandemic period to the benefit of students' learning experience.

Regarding Practical Training and Placement:

- Industrial Experience;
- In-class practical programmes in culinary skills, food and beverage service skills and wines and spirits.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

1. The curriculum should be structured in a more concrete manner to provide young, international students with better orientation and guidance.
2. Several generic modules should be redesigned to become hotel-sector specific and be offered solely to Hotel Management students
3. Placement should become associated with a credit-bearing module to incentivize students accordingly.

The general process of teaching and learning as employed at American College in the Diploma in Hotel Management programme is valid. It was noted that in the classroom, methods of course material delivery are generally still frontal. Lectures are still used as the main form of transmitting information to students. Case Based Learning was mentioned as a tool used in the classroom. A College such as American with relatively small student cohorts would benefit from pedagogical principles such as Problem-Based Learning where the students are taught to take greater control of their learning and steer the process in smaller groups. Student-centred learning requires the student to be in the central focus of the learning process.

The development of transversal skills is crucial for students to succeed in the so-called “VUCA World”. Higher Education Institutions (HEI) are required to help students become ready for a Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous World, caused by the technological, political, economic and health situations experiencing today. In 2016, the World Economic Forum identified the following top ten skills as essential to be addressed by HEI by 2020, i.e. complex problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, people management, coordinating with others, emotional Intelligence, judgement and decision-making, service orientation, negotiation and cognitive flexibility. At the same time, tertiary education curricula should explicitly focus on contributing to the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as suggested by the United Nations. On these grounds, the EEC would recommend explicit actions by American College to include clear strategies to develop the competencies mentioned above in the learning outcomes. Practice sessions in a Professional Development seminar for all students can resolve this issue through coaching. Assessment tools such as Empowerment Principles, Learning Styles, Personality, and Behavioural Coaching would also prove of great added value. Moreover, a clear indication of assessment method suited for assessing practical skills development is needed.

Please select what is appropriate for each of the following sub-areas:

Sub-area		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
2.1	Process of teaching and learning and student-centred teaching methodology	Partially compliant
2.2	Practical training	Partially compliant
2.3	Student assessment	Compliant

3. Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

3.1 Teaching staff recruitment and development

The data available in the report and the information collected during the visit allows concluding that the American College contracts staff which is suitable for the programme. Teaching staff is qualified for achieving the teaching objectives of the Programme. They are fluent in languages. They are recruited by advertisement or through a database available in the College.

Some innovative teaching technologies have been introduced, namely because they have been pushed ahead as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, more must be done in the area since innovation cannot be seen just by the increasing number of online sessions.

Guest/invited speakers are selected from the industry.

3.2 Teaching staff number and status

The teaching staff attached to the Programme is enough both in number and qualifications. Most of the staff gained their degrees from abroad from well-established universities. Their background is in accordance with the needs of the Programme. Part-time staff does not exceed the number of permanent staff.

3.3 Synergies of teaching and research

The academics of the American College unveil good scientific production, in terms of papers, books, chapters, etc. Their scientific output is overall within the area of the Programme.

When asked about the way research is organized in the College the EEC was told that there is a relevant 'department' in the College and funding is made available to the staff according to the requests. The EEC made reference to the need of creating a research centre with a well-identified research policy, research targets, outputs, and budget to achieve the research objectives.

Links between research and teaching are not clearly established. It is not enough to use the staff's publication in the Programme. Clearer links should be set up in order to optimize synergies between the two areas.

Findings

- The American College has recruited qualified teaching staff, covering the areas of the Programme. The qualifications of the staff are in accordance with the programme. Most of them gained degrees from abroad in specialised schools and are fluent in languages.
- The Directors have shown a very professional approach during the EEC visit and demonstrated to be engaged in the programme.

- A more professional research policy and clearer ways of linking teaching and research should be brought into the Programme

Strengths

- .Qualified staff
- .Quantity and quality of research for the level of the Programme

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The College should be more innovative in terms of teaching methods.
- The College should create formally a Research Centre with an identified scientific plan containing details about objectives, outputs, and allocation of resources.
- The College should set up a plan explaining more clearly how tourism research may be linked to improve the quality of the taught programme.

Please select what is appropriate for each of the following sub-areas:

Sub-area		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
3.1	Teaching staff recruitment and development	Compliant
3.2	Teaching staff number and status	Compliant
3.3	Synergies of teaching and research	Partially compliant

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

Findings

The Diploma in Hotel Management is an established programme of American College attracting about twenty (20) students per year. The objectives set by the College are well communicated for the students' academic progress, counselling, Erasmus+ mobility, etc. Progression rates are rather expected. In particular, the percentage of students who withdraw after Year 1 is about 30% and the percentage of students who progress from Year 1 to Year 2 is 70%. Similarly, the percentage of students who fail in Year 2 is 16% and the percentage of students who finally graduate 84%.

Admission criteria and processes are in place and appear to be transparent and appropriate. Interestingly, the same admission criteria apply for both the Diploma and the BA programme in Hotel Management. Given that the two degrees are of different levels, American College may think about differentiating the admission criteria considering of course government regulations. Nonetheless, the EEC understands that at present all modules are simultaneously open to both Diploma and BA in Hotel Management programme; thus, a possible differentiation of admission criteria should also take this into account.

Holders of a Diploma in Hotel Management from American College can continue their studies at a Bachelor's level in a seamless way having all the common modules/credits of the two programmes recognized. Moreover, students from other institutions can transfer their credits into American College based on a standardized academic procedure. Prior work experience can also be recognized and lead to an exemption/waiver of up to three (3) modules corresponding to eighteen (18) ECTS.

Student certification regulations are in place. American College provides a Diploma Supplement, which is in line with European and international standards.

Strengths

The American College appears to have years of experience in managing different academic and professional programmes. The admission requirements for the study programme are clearly communicated to potential applicants and the College seems to have an inclusive and open policy. The students' prior preparation/educational background is assessed for both Cypriot and international students. In the case of students with inadequate English language skills, the College offers preparatory courses in the context of a Foundation programme. The College also provides students with personalized counselling services and has introduced processes/facilities to address the needs of people with either learning (such as dyslexia) or mobility difficulties.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The EEC would like to propose that the College should consider differentiating admission criteria between the Diploma and the BA Programme in Hotel Management.

Please select what is appropriate for each of the following sub-areas:

Sub-area		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
4.1	Student admission, processes and criteria	Compliant
4.2	Student progression	Compliant
4.3	Student recognition	Compliant
4.4	Student certification	Compliant

5. Learning resources and student support (ESG 1.6)

5.1 Teaching and Learning resources

The College provides students and staff with infrastructure and facilities suitably adjusted to the functioning of the programme. The facilities are modern and comfortable.

The methods of teaching follow international standards. The school should improve student-centred learning and flexible modes of learning and teaching. In nowadays' world and bearing in mind an increasingly volatile and changing society, such methods may prepare students better for the future.

5.2 Physical resources

The IT infrastructure is suitable for the programme purposes

The library also offers good conditions, but it is recommended that additional books on hospitality & tourism should be acquired by the college. Also, the College should buy the database of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in order to facilitate the access to the tourism information. This information will also be important to support the expansion and qualification of the research centre.

5.3 Human support resources

The administrative staff is very professional and motivated.

The number and qualifications of the administrative staff is adjusted to the needs. Staff perform both academic and integrative functions, which are critical for overseas students to adjust to the island.

5.4 Student support

The College offers students welcome sessions that allow them to gain knowledge about the services available and the way they can accommodate outside the school. During the meetings it was found that students are highly satisfied with the support provided by the College.

Some members of the staff organize students' trips abroad.

Even if the teaching methodologies include modern approaches (electronic platforms, power points and videos), student-centred learning and flexible modes of learning and teaching, should be utilised more frequently in the future.

Strengths

Suitable infrastructure and IT

Students are allocated a tutor

Academic staff very professional and motivated

Areas of improvement and recommendations

.More international exchange mobility programmes should be offered by the College

.Student-centred learning and flexible modes of learning and teaching, should be utilised more frequently in the future

Sub-area		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
5.1	Teaching and Learning resources	Compliant
5.2	Physical resources	Compliant
5.3	Human support resources	Compliant



5.4	Student support	Compliant
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6. Additional for doctoral programmes (ALL ESG) – N.A.

7. Additional for joint programmes (ALL ESG) – N.A.

8. Conclusions and final remarks

The EEC is of the opinion that the Diploma in Hotel Management may be accredited by the CYQAA. However, it is also recommended that several ameliorations should be introduced before the reaccreditation of the Programme. In particular, the EEC would like to draw attention to improvements that ought to be introduced in the Study Programme (section 1), in the Curriculum (sections 2.1 and 2.2) and also in the link that has to be established between teaching and research (section 3.3)



C. Signatures of the EEC

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Professor Dr Carlos Costa	
Professor Dr Andreas Papatheodorou	
Associate Professor Dr Wai Mun Lim	
Student Panagiotis Chrysanthou	

Date: 23.11.2020