

sDoc. 300.3.2

Date: 18/3/2021

# Higher Education Institution's Response

(Departmental)

- **Higher Education Institution:**  
Cyprus University of Technology
- **Town:** Limassol
- **School/Faculty:** Geotechnical Sciences & Environmental Management
- **Department:** Agricultural Sciences, Biotechnology and Food Science
- **Programme(s) of study under evaluation**

**Program 1** (BSc, 4 years, 251 ECTS)

**In Greek:** Πτυχίο Γεωπονικών Επιστημών, Βιοτεχνολογίας και Επιστήμης Τροφίμων

**In English:** BSc in Agricultural Sciences, Biotechnology & Food Science

**Program 2** (MSc, 3 semesters, 107 ECTS)

**In Greek:** Μάστερ στη Γεωπονική Βιοτεχνολογία

**In English:** MSc in Agricultural Biotechnology

**Program 3** (PhD, 3 years, 182 ECTS)

**In Greek:** Διδακτορικό στις Γεωπονικές Επιστήμες, Βιοτεχνολογία και Επιστήμη Τροφίμων

**In English:** PhD in Agricultural Sciences, Biotechnology & Food Science

- **Department'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. 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.300.3.1) must justify whether actions have been taken in improving the quality of the department 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 deficiencies noted under the quality indicators (criteria)*
  - *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. 300.3.1).*
- *In case of annexes, those should be attached and sent on a separate document.*

## 1. Department's academic profile and orientation

### Sub-areas

- 1.1 Mission and strategic planning
- 1.2 Connecting with society
- 1.3 Development processes

### *Findings*

The profile of the, relatively young, highly motivated teaching staff is broad and excellently suited to carry out the study programs. Since Digital Agriculture is one of the major strategic focal points of future research (and teaching), expertise in this area is still largely missing. The same holds true for Agricultural Economics, Management, and Agricultural Engineering.

Agricultural research farms have been established recently, which will be highly instrumental for the research base teaching approach in the study programs and for translational research carried out in the Department.

The teaching staff is unnecessarily heavily occupied with many administrative and technical support activities which largely distracts them from their core business: high-level teaching, research, and research fund acquisition. The EEC noticed that many administrative activities related to teaching, but also to lab management and ordering of consumables for research through a highly bureaucratic system which consumes a lot of the time of the teaching staff. These are activities that should be handled by an administrative clerk dedicated to the department.

### *Strengths*

The Department harbors 16 well-educated teaching staff with a good research background.

The Department acquired research funds from EU, and partly also from non-EU (private) sources.

The Moodle platform at the University level is functioning well.

The Department recently acquired two experimental research farms, which will be highly instrumental in future research and teaching programs.

### *Areas of improvement and recommendations*

A Key Performance Indicator (KPI) – System at University level is not visible.

Shortcomings in the fields of Agricultural Economics and Agricultural Engineering (Mechanization) as well as Bioinformatics staff could be included in the Academic staff body (could eventually and temporarily covered by invited lecturers from Greece).

Permanent technical staff is missing for operating the Research farms and laboratories with high-end equipment.

More technical support staff could / should be linked to academic staff in order to efficiently run and manage the facilities.

Administrative support should be linked to the Department to carry out administrative duties related to teaching administration, lab management, and ordering of consumables for research.

More detailed feedback from the EEC on the indicators/criteria is provided in Doc. 300.3.1/1: the External Evaluation Report (Programmatic within the framework of Departmental Evaluation).



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

Sub-area	<i>Non-compliant / Partially Compliant / Compliant</i>
1.1 Mission and strategic planning	Compliant
1.2 Connecting with society	Compliant
1.3 Development processes	Compliant

## R1: Departmental Reply to EEC comments on Department's academic profile and orientation

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

We thank the EEC for its thorough evaluation of the Department and its study programs. We provide below replies to the valuable points raised by the EEC. Detailed responses are also provided in the document 300.1.2. "Higher Education Institution's Response".

**Key Performance Indicator System:** The University has established a key performance indicator system in its Strategic Development Plan 2016-2020. The document is available in Greek ([https://www.cut.ac.cy/digitalAssets/75/75070\\_100strategic-plan-2016-2020.pdf](https://www.cut.ac.cy/digitalAssets/75/75070_100strategic-plan-2016-2020.pdf)). The key performance indicator system is not part of the new Strategic Plan of the University, and there are ongoing discussions to include it in the University Quality Assurance Policy. Indicators for inclusion in the performance system cover the areas of Education (e.g. student / teacher ratio, teacher evaluation grades by students), Research, Innovation and Entrepreneurship (e.g. number of spin-off companies, number of peer-reviewed publications), University Development and Financial Independence (e.g. number of Faculties and Departments, ratio of administrative to teaching staff), Internationalization (e.g. number of doctoral titles awarded to international students, number of bilateral agreements with international universities), Student Wellbeing and Development (e.g. student employment rates, percentage of students continuing for post-graduate studies), Modern Governance and Effective Management (e.g. employee satisfaction, customer satisfaction) and Public Image and Social Contribution (e.g. number of articles by staff members in newspapers, number of staff members participating in national scientific/technical committees). The suggestion of the EEC has been forwarded to the University Quality Assurance Committee for evaluation, and implementation where feasible.

**Fields of Agricultural Economics, Agricultural Engineering, and Bioinformatics:** Following the evaluation by the EEC, the Department has formed an ad-hoc committee to plan its future development and faculty expertise needed to carry out its mission. The areas proposed by the EEC (Bioinformatics, Agricultural Economics and Agricultural Engineering / Digital Agriculture) are highly relevant and will be discussed at the deliberations regarding the hiring priorities of the Department both at the ad-hoc committee and the Departmental Council, where a final decision will be made, taking into consideration the regulations applied in Cypriot public Universities related to hiring of teaching and research staff.

**Permanent technical staff:** The Department has requested the allocation of permanent technical staff to its laboratories for several years now. Unfortunately, because of the financial crisis and budgeting limitations, this was not possible up to now. In a meeting with the Rector of the University in February 2021, the Council of the Department was informed that the University authorities plan to assign one permanent technician position to the Department in the next hiring process, hopefully within the coming year. In addition, in a formal letter sent to the University authorities in February 2021, the Committee of Agricultural Farms of the Department has requested a permanent position for the development and maintenance of its Agricultural Farms.

**Administrative support:** The Department has been raising the issue of inadequate administrative support to University Authorities through the years, including in the Departmental self-evaluation report completed two years ago. The Rector of the University informed the Department in a formal meeting in February 2021 that he expects that the Faculty of Geotechnical Sciences and Environmental Management will receive the support of one administrative officer in the coming months. The officer will allocate half of their time to the



ABF Department and half of their time to the Chemical Engineering Department, the other entity in the Faculty of Geotechnical Sciences. In addition, to further support the administration of Department, the Chair of the Department requested the allocation of part-time student-employees to the Department to help with administrative tasks. The part-time student-employee program has been employed by the University for many years now, but the student employees were assigned to the administrative services rather than to the Departments. The assignment of part-time student employees will help alleviate the administrative burden allocated to the Department.

## 1. Quality Assurance

### Sub-areas

- 2.1 System and quality assurance strategy**
- 2.2 Quality assurance for the programmes of study**

### Findings

The Department follows the CUT Quality Assurance Policy, which is dedicated to excellence in order to be established in the international academic and scientific environment as a pioneering center of excellence in research and teaching, continuously contributing to social progress and culture. Very good quality assurance policies are in place for teaching and learning, and the study programs, while quality assurance policies for research, connection with society and management, administrative, and technical support services are less clear.

The Department provides high-quality learning and research resources at a high international standard. The recent acquisition of experimental farms will be very important for future quality of both teaching and research. The library functions at an excellent level. The rooms for theoretical and practical lab sessions are of high quality, but shared with researchers. This is economically efficient, but care should be taken that this does not become a limitation for the student capacity in the future. Academic support of the researchers and students is at an excellent level, but administrative and technical support needs to be improved to the benefit of the teaching and research quality.

### Strengths

Good quality assurance policies in place for the study program related activities of the department. Highly educated teaching staff, in relatively early phase of career, highly motivated to run high-quality teaching and research program.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

Both the Department's research and study programs could benefit from a more structured interaction with stakeholders from society. The Department could think of a bi-annual university-meets-industry meeting to showcase its research and study programs and collect feedback and suggestions on a more regular basis. To safeguard quality of the teaching and learning process in the study programs the administrative support needs should be better monitored by the university and a system should be in place to maximize the time that the teaching staff can devote to their core business: teaching and research.

To safeguard the quality of an efficient, effective, and safe research and teaching environment, it will be important that the university monitors whether technical support is adequate for maintenance, management, and daily running of research facilities and high-end equipment, controlling safety in the lab, and technical support of students and teachers.

More detailed feedback from the EEC on the indicators/criteria is provided in Doc. 300.3.1/1: the External Evaluation Report (Programmatic within the framework of Departmental Evaluation).

<b>Sub-area</b>	<b>Non-compliant / Partially Compliant / Compliant</b>
2.1 System and quality assurance strategy	Compliant
2.2 Quality assurance for the programs of study	Compliant



## R2: Departmental reply to EEC comments on Quality Assurance

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

**University meets industry meeting:** We recognize the importance of continuously striving to attract more public-private partnerships and we will intensify our efforts to seek additional collaborations from the private sector. Actions under consideration to increase collaborations with the private sector include mapping of the industry needs by the Research Service of the University, as well as visits by Departmental staff to relevant companies to showcase the potential for synergies. We agree with the EEC proposal on the organization of a bi-annual meeting to showcase the research of the Department to local stakeholders, and will implement it from 2022 onwards.

**Safeguarding the quality of the teaching and learning process through adequate administrative and technical support:** The issue of placing administrative staff in the Department has been communicated to the University authorities for several years now. In a meeting with the Rector of the University in February 2021, the Council of the Department was informed that the University authorities plan to assign one administrative support position to the Faculty of Geotechnical Sciences in the next hiring process, hopefully within the coming year. We recognize that the allocation of 0.5 FTE of an administrative support position to the Department (the position will be shared with the Department of Chemical Engineering – the second Dept. in the Faculty) will not solve the problem, but it will be an improvement over the current situation. In addition, to further support the administration of Department, the Chair of the Department requested the allocation of part-time student-employees to the Department to help with administrative tasks. The part-time student-employee program has been employed by the University for many years now, but the student employees were assigned to the administrative services rather than to the Departments. The assignment of part-time student employees will help alleviate the administrative burden allocated to the Department.

The Department has requested the allocation of permanent technical staff to its laboratories for several years now. Unfortunately, because of the financial crisis and budgeting limitations, this was not possible up to now. In a meeting with the Rector of the University in February 2021, the Council of the Department was informed that the University authorities plan to assign one permanent technician position to the Department in the next hiring process, hopefully within the coming year. In addition, in a formal letter sent to the University authorities in February 2021, the Committee of Agricultural Farms of the Department has requested a permanent position for the development and maintenance of its Agricultural Farms.

### 3. Administration

#### Findings

The quality of the Department's administration in terms of structure, decision making, and quality control is in order. However, the administrative workload is too much on the shoulders of the teaching staff. Administrative support should be focused on alleviating administrative workload of the teaching staff.

#### Strengths

Administrative structures and procedures are well in order, resulting in a well-organized Department in terms of study programs and research. The highly qualified, motivated, relatively young teaching staff is supported by highly qualified, more senior staff in management roles.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

The EEC advises to appoint administrative clerk support within the Department. In this way, the administrative support has short lines with the teaching staff and can be better positioned and directed to perform administrative duties that alleviate the work load of the teaching staff and the Department's management.

More detailed feedback from the EEC on the indicators/criteria is provided in Doc. 300.3.1/1: the External Evaluation Report (Programmatic within the framework of Departmental Evaluation).



### **R3: Departmental reply to EEC comments on Administration**

#### *Areas of improvement and recommendations*

**Placement of administrative support within the Department:** Please see our reply to the comment on adequate administrative support in section 2 of the current document.

## 4. Learning and Teaching

### Sub-areas

#### 4.1 Planning the programmes of study

#### 4.2 Organisation of teaching

### Findings

Monitoring and revising program of study follows the established University Rules also involving the stakeholders and students. The content of programs of study as well as assignments and exams correspond to the EQF. The programs of study integrate effectively theory and practice due to number of practicals in teaching laboratories as well as low student/teacher –ratio in general. There seems to be a need for English language teaching, especially at MSc and PhD programs of study.

The student admission criteria and credit transfer follow the University Rules and are in line with international practice. The number of students in the teaching rooms is suitable for lessons. The communication between students and teachers is effective and learning and teaching as well as feedback is to large extent based on communication between them. Criteria and assessment methods are published in advance and demonstrate the learning outcomes.

### Strengths

The students are actively involved in development of the program of study. This has been a strength, especially since the programs are quite new. The created programs of study have a strong integration of theory and practice, which will improve the students' ability to step into business. The continuous assessment practice allows students to evaluate their learning outcome achievements.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

Improvement could perhaps be achieved if decreasing the bureaucratic steps of designing and revision of programs of study were considered. Perhaps also direct evaluation of program of study by students could be considered, for example at or sometime after graduation.

It could be considered to make the criteria and especially scoring for doctoral student admission more transparent.

We recommend to offer the MSc and PhD programs in English language.

More detailed feedback from the EEC on the indicators/criteria is provided in Doc. 300.3.1/1: the External Evaluation Report (Programmatic within the framework of Departmental Evaluation).

Sub-area	<i>Non-compliant / Partially Compliant / Compliant</i>
4.1 Planning the programs of study	Compliant
4.2 Organisation of teaching	Compliant

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Improvement could perhaps be achieved if decreasing the bureaucratic steps of designing and revision of programs of study were considered. Perhaps also direct evaluation of program of study by students could be considered, for example at or sometime after graduation.

It could be considered to make the criteria and especially scoring for doctoral student admission more transparent.

We recommend to offer the MSc and PhD programs in English language.

More detailed feedback from the EEC on the indicators/criteria is provided in Doc. 300.3.1/1: the External Evaluation Report (Programmatic within the framework of Departmental Evaluation).

Sub-area	<i>Non-compliant / Partially Compliant / Compliant</i>
4.1 Planning the programs of study	Compliant
4.2 Organisation of teaching	Compliant

## R4: Departmental reply to EEC comments on Learning and Teaching

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

**Study program revision bureaucracy and graduate feedback:** We recognize that the design and approval process for innovations or new courses goes through substantial bureaucratic procedures, which is viewed as a means of ensuring the quality of the academic programs. While the procedures required for the inclusion of new courses is beyond the control of the Department, we have forwarded the recommendation made by the EEC to the appropriate University bodies (Quality Assurance Committee, Studies Committee) for further evaluation, and where possible for actions aiming at simplifying the procedures. We also agree with the suggestion by the EEC to request an evaluation of the study program by graduates. While we have been receiving and considering the feedback of graduates on the study program, we see the value in establishing a more structured feedback communication system with our graduates and we will implement it on a five-year basis, to coincide with external evaluations or whenever the Department revises any of its study programs.

**Doctoral student admission criteria:** The Department accepts the suggestion of the EEC and is working on developing a transparent scoring system for admission of PhD students similar to the one for MSc students (see Application for Evaluation of MSc Program).

**English language teaching:** We recognize the importance of a good command of the English language for the career prospects of our graduates, as well as for the appeal of the program to international students. The Department will investigate the possibility of either offering a number of MSc courses in English, or offering the MSc program in the English language. A concern about offering the MSc in English only is that it will discourage Greek speaking students who are not comfortable with the English language. Unfortunately, it is beyond the capacity of the Department to offer the MSc in both English and Greek. PhD students with a Master's degree are not required to take courses and therefore they can complete the PhD program in English, as the University allows the submission of PhD dissertations in English. The majority of Greek speaking PhD graduates have already elected to submit their dissertation in English.

## 5. Teaching Staff

### Findings

Teaching staff and special teaching staff are highly qualified and experienced teachers. They are also highly productive both in teaching and research. All representatives of the permanent staff have PhD and nearly all special teaching staff. The ratio of courses taught by permanent vs non-permanent staff fulfills nearly the 70-30% rule. The student/teacher ratio is low enough to ensure high quality teaching and learning in the programs of study. The programs of study include animal, food, and plant sciences, and some disciplines seem to be better covered among the teaching staff than others. The University has a common system to collect student feedback regarding teaching. On the top of that, there are informal student-teacher discussions in which feedback is given directly.

### Strengths

The teaching personnel is not only highly qualified but also highly motivated. They have excellent publication records and they have excellent success in attracting especially international research funding. The student/teacher ratio allows an environment of high-quality teaching and learning. The informal student-teacher discussions are used in practice to adjust the teaching.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

It is recommended to re-evaluate whether the teaching load of the permanent staff could be adjusted as it is rather high, and for example take into account supervision and other ways of teaching instead of only lecturing as teaching.

Some disciplines, e.g. animal science, which have very few representatives among teaching staff, could be strengthened. Furthermore, there is need for assistance in laboratory practicals, which could be fulfilled with skilled technical staff. That would also improve the working safety.

More detailed feedback from the EEC on the indicators/criteria is provided in Doc. 300.3.1/1: the External Evaluation Report (Programmatic within the framework of Departmental Evaluation).

Assessment area	Non-compliant / Partially Compliant / Compliant
5. Teaching Staff	Compliant

## R5: Departmental reply to EEC comments on Teaching Staff

### Areas of improvement and recommendations:

**Teaching load of permanent staff:** We agree with the EEC that the teaching load of permanent staff is rather high, and it does not include other important forms of teaching, such as student supervision. Currently, all members of the permanent staff teach more than the 12-hour minimum teaching load (Table 4 of the PhD Evaluation Document), without considering the time for the supervision of undergraduate, MSc and PhD students. The hiring of two new permanent staff and two new special teaching staff in the coming months / year will reduce the teaching load of staff members. We agree with the EEC that alternative forms of teaching such as student supervision needs to be considered, and we have forwarded the recommendation to the University Quality Assurance Committee for evaluation and implementation where feasible.

**Representation of animal science staff members:** The low representation of animal science staff members will be rectified in the coming months / year. Currently, a special teaching staff position in Animal Science has been advertised and expected to be filled in the coming months. In addition, the Department ranks high in its priorities the hiring of another permanent staff in Animal Science.

**Technical staff:** Please see our reply on technical staff in section 2 of the current document.



## 6. Research

### Findings

It is mentioned in the SER that research in the field of interest is done and appreciated by the Faculty staff. Different financial funds are used for financing of such research: EU-sources, CUT-sources, and sources from private companies from the Agricultural and Agribusiness sectors. The amounts of research funding is included in the individual CV of the Faculty staff members. It has been mentioned during the remote on-site-visit that applied research in collaboration with private companies and even with student involvement is conducted on a regular basis (this has been confirmed by the students/graduates in the respective discussion).

There is collaborative research and implementation of research results also to teaching. This has been confirmed by teaching staff and graduates/students as well. Besides sufficient laboratory capacities also the Experimental research farms have the potential to contributing and to foster research activities. However, the international network for collaborative research could/should be strengthened and expanded. Teaching staff studies and publications are closely related to the programs courses and can be regarded as indicators for research activities in the field of interest. There is a comprehensive listing of all publications by academic staff of the Department under evaluation in Annex 3a\_Full CVs\_academic staff\_ABF.

### Strengths

Resources for executing up to date research in the field of interest are available and currently sufficient. Besides laboratory space also Experiment farms are part of such resources. However, resources and financial funds for research could/should be expanded, particularly in making use of the International partner network which is linked to the Department and its staff members. Very good English language proficiency among members of all status groups would be supportive in this respect. An expansion of the network and intensification of collaboration would also allow to apply for financial research sources from International donor organizations (Non-EU).

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

As mentioned above the International research partner network could/should be further developed and expanded. However, additional resources, particularly financial resources, would be required in doing as such. Very good English language proficiency among members of all status groups would be supportive in this respect and should be used to foster more and intensified research. Research funds should be expanded to other International (Non-EU) donor organizations. Permanent technical staff for caretaking in Experimental farms and additional academic staff (e.g. Bioinformatics, Agricultural Economics, Agricultural Engineering, Digital Agriculture) would be requested to also cover highly complex but up to date research topics (e.g. such as Climate Change impacts, Improved resource use efficiency, Digitalization, Structural change etc.).

More detailed feedback from the EEC on the indicators/criteria is provided in Doc. 300.3.1/1: the External Evaluation Report (Programmatic within the framework of Departmental Evaluation).

Assessment area	Non-compliant / Partially Compliant / Compliant
6. Research	Compliant

## R6: Departmental reply to EEC comments on Research

### Areas of improvement and recommendations:

**Expansion and development of the international research partner network:** The Department values international collaborations and has one of the strongest international outlooks among University Departments, with a substantial number of international research proposals, organization of international conferences and participation in international committees and societies (outlined in sections D3 and D5 of the Departmental Evaluation Report, as well as staff member CVs). We recognize that there is room for improvement in the international outlook of the Department, through additional research / other collaborations. Staff members will continue and intensify their work with international partners in an effort to further develop and expand the international research partner network of the Department.

**Permanent technical staff:** Please see our reply in section 2 of the current document.

**Additional academic staff:** The Department is in the process of hiring two academic staff and two special teaching staff. We anticipate that in the coming two to three years, the Department will have the opportunity to hire another two to three academic staff, which will reduce the teaching burden placed on the current staff members. Following the evaluation by the EEC, the Department has formed an ad-hoc committee to plan its future development and expertise needed to carry out its mission. The areas proposed by the EEC (Bioinformatics, Agricultural Economics and Agricultural Engineering / Digital Agriculture) are highly relevant and will be discussed at the deliberations regarding the hiring priorities of the Department both at the ad-hoc committee and the Departmental Council, where a final decision will be made. A number of staff members are already working on Climate change impacts and improved resource use efficiency, and we expect this work to increase in the coming years.

## 7. Resources

### Findings

There are nearly adequate financial resources for consumables and equipment in the laboratories, although the budget cuts have limited purchases slightly. The management is effective and transparent, and financial resources are used effectively, with the aim to ensure and maintain a high level of teaching and research. The budget management follows strictly the regulations and is under the University Council. The budget is limited as it comes to maintenance and strategic planning, for example maintenance of equipment, and management of the Experimental Farms and Greenhouse facilities. The programs of study are carefully assessed periodically and feedback is collected from students and stakeholders. Support facilities and services fitness for their purpose is evaluated periodically.

### Strengths

The financial management of the department has been successful despite budget cuts. The department has taken a strategic view, due to limitations regarding field work until now, to equip the laboratories according to the requirements of biotechnological research in the field of agriculture, which has proven to be a successful choice. The strategy is to invest in future to the farms and greenhouse facilities.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

Laboratories are well equipped, but there is lack of skilled technicians to operate the equipment and assist researchers and students for example in troubleshooting. There are now experimental farms and greenhouse facilities, which can be utilized both in teaching and in research, however, there exists no operational management for those facilities. Moreover, development of those facilities requires further financial input, which could be considered. Thus, extra funding should be allocated in the budget to cover the consumables for teaching purposes, maintenance of equipment, employment of laboratory technicians as well as farm and greenhouse management.

Even though, the support services are reviewed periodically, there seems to be a gap between the secretarial needs and demands. Thus, it is suggested that secretarial services are adjusted according to the raising needs.

More detailed feedback from the EEC on the indicators/criteria is provided in Doc. 300.3.1/1: the External Evaluation Report (Programmatic within the framework of Departmental Evaluation).

Assessment area	Non-compliant / Partially Compliant / Compliant
7. Resources	Compliant



## R7: Departmental reply to EEC comments on Resources

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

**Technical staff:** Please see our reply in section 2 of the current document.

**Budget for the agricultural farms and greenhouse:** In response to a request by the University authorities a budget covering major development costs for the two agricultural farms of the Department and the greenhouse was submitted in February of 2021. The Department expects that significant amounts of the requested budget will be covered by the University in the next three years.

**Secretarial support:** Please see our reply in section 2 of the current document.

## B. Conclusions and final remarks

### C. Conclusions and final remarks

Summarizing the above indicated evaluation results on a single standard basis it can be stated that the Department under review should be accredited without major doubts.

The Department of Agricultural Sciences, Biotechnology & Food Science is responsible for a high-level, well-balanced, state-of-the-art curriculum in Agricultural Sciences, Biotechnology and Food Science. The department serves an important national purpose as it organizes the only broad university-level curriculum on Agricultural Sciences and Agri-Food in Cyprus. The Department's academic profile is of high standard and can match with comparable universities internationally. The Department performs well on the indicators for Quality Assurance, Administration, Resources, and Learning and Teaching. The Department has an excellent teaching staff who are highly devoted to the study programs. The Department's research profile is of a good standard and links her research activities to the study programs.

However, there is potential for improvement. The most important recommendations are mentioned below (and are in line with the recommendations outlined in Doc. 300.3.1/1 (External Evaluation Report – Programmatic within the framework of Departmental Evaluation) :

1. A comprehensive and uniform Key Performance Indicator-system could be established at the University level.
2. Concerning the research programs and the related teaching contents of the study programs, there could be a stronger emphasis on Bioinformatics, Agricultural Economics, Agricultural Engineering, and Digital Agriculture.
3. Teaching personnel could be offered the possibility to improve their skills and knowledge in higher education. A central university system for obtaining higher education teaching qualifications is recommended. This would both lift teaching skills of academic teachers and could provide a system acknowledging the equal value of teaching over research.
4. The Department could encourage students to take more responsibility in their learning and teaching starting from BSc level up to PhD level. This could include student tutors, student peers, and learning activities organized by students. This could help to alleviate the teaching demand for the teaching staff.
5. Consider offering activities and teaching contents in the English language, particularly at the MSc and PhD level. This would provide potential to attract a larger share of students from international origin.
6. The administrative workload of the academic teaching staff should be relieved. Many administrative activities could be allocated to designated administrative support staff, which should be housed in the physical vicinity of the teaching staff for efficient and effective interactions. More time for teaching and research would immediately have a positive impact on these core businesses of the university.
7. Revisit the complexity of the rather bureaucratic procedures within the university to reach a better balance between quality assurance and workload.
8. Considering that maintaining the high-quality study programs of the Department relies on the motivation and dedication of the academic teaching staff, the EEC recommends to appoint more permanent staff at the Department, academic staff and, importantly, technical staff to support the high level scientific infrastructure (e.g. equipment and experimental university farms). This would also increase safety at the work floor.

## Departmental reply to EEC Final Remarks

**1. Key Performance Indicator System:** The University has established a key performance indicator system in its Strategic Development Plan 2016-2020. The document is available in Greek ([https://www.cut.ac.cy/digitalAssets/75/75070\\_100strategic-plan-2016-2020.pdf](https://www.cut.ac.cy/digitalAssets/75/75070_100strategic-plan-2016-2020.pdf)). The key performance indicator system is not part of the new Strategic Plan of the University, and there are ongoing discussions to include it in the University Quality Assurance Policy. Indicators for inclusion in the performance system cover the areas of Education (e.g. student / teacher ratio, teacher evaluation grades by students), Research, Innovation and Entrepreneurship (e.g. number of spin-off companies, number of peer-reviewed publications), University Development and Financial Independence (e.g. number of Faculties and Departments, ratio of administrative to teaching staff), Internationalization (e.g. number of doctoral titles awarded to international students, number of bilateral agreements with international universities), Student Wellbeing and Development (e.g. student employment rates, percentage of students continuing for post-graduate studies), Modern Governance and Effective Management (e.g. employee satisfaction, customer satisfaction) and Public Image and Social Contribution (e.g. number of articles by staff members in newspapers, number of staff members participating in national scientific/technical committees). The suggestion of the EEC has been forwarded to the University Quality Assurance Committee for evaluation, and implementation where feasible.

## 2. Emphasis on Bioinformatics, Agricultural Economics, Agricultural Engineering, and Digital Agriculture.

Following the evaluation by the EEC, the Department has formed an ad-hoc committee to plan its future development and expertise needed to carry out its mission. The areas proposed by the EEC (Bioinformatics, Agricultural Economics and Agricultural Engineering / Digital Agriculture) are highly relevant and will be discussed at the deliberations regarding the hiring priorities of the Department both at the ad-hoc committee and the Departmental Council, where a final decision will be made.

**3. Establishment of a teaching qualification scheme:** The establishment of a teaching qualification scheme will add to the teaching capabilities of teaching staff. We see the value of the proposal made by the EEC and we have forwarded the recommendation to the University Quality Assurance Committee for further evaluation, and implementation if feasible.

**4. Student involvement in the learning process:** The inclusion of student tutors in the learning process is already implemented at the University level. Such student tutors act on a paid-basis to support students with learning disabilities. We see the value of involving students as peers in the learning process and we will evaluate further options of applying such a scheme. For instance, students who have successfully passed a course with a high grade can help in the teaching of laboratory sections of courses. PhD students participate as teaching assistants in virtually all laboratory sections of Department courses. Teaching assistants are evaluated by students for their performance. Following the EEC recommendation, the Department will increase the participation of PhD students in teaching in the theoretical part of the course through invited lectures, under the guidance of the instructor, where this is possible.

**5. English language teaching:** We recognize the importance of a good command of the English language for the career prospects of our graduates, as well as for the appeal of the program to international students. The Department will investigate the possibility of either offering a number of MSc courses in English, or offering the MSc program in the English language. A concern about offering the MSc in English only is that it will discourage Greek speaking students who are not comfortable with the English language. Unfortunately, it is beyond the capacity of the Department to offer the MSc in both English and Greek. PhD students with a Master's degree are not required to take course work and therefore they can complete the

PhD program in English, as the University allows the submission of PhD dissertations in English. Several Greek speaking PhD graduates have already elected to submit their dissertation in English.

**6. Administrative support:** The issue of placing administrative staff in the Department has been communicated to the University authorities for several years now. In a meeting with the Rector of the University in February 2021, the Council of the Department was informed that the University authorities plan to assign one administrative support position to the Faculty of Geotechnical Sciences in the next hiring process, hopefully within the coming year. We recognize that the allocation of 0.5 FTE of an administrative support position to the Department (the position will be shared with the Department of Chemical Engineering – the second Dept. in the Faculty) will not solve the problem, but it will be an improvement over the current situation. In addition, to further support the administration of Department, the Chair of the Department requested the allocation of part-time student-employees to the Department to help with administrative tasks. The part-time student-employee program has been employed by the University for many years now, but the student employees were assigned to the administrative services rather than to the Departments. The assignment of part-time student employees will help alleviate the administrative burden allocated to the Department.

**7. Simplification of bureaucratic procedures:** The problem is beyond the reach of the Department. The recommendation of the EEC has been forwarded to University authorities, who recognize the problems arising because of the highly bureaucratic procedures. Unfortunately, some of the procedures result from State laws and regulations, which cannot be directly influenced by the University.

**8. New faculty positions and Permanent technical staff:** The Department is in the process of hiring two academic staff and two special teaching staff. We anticipate that in the coming two to three years, the Department will have the opportunity to hire another two to three academic staff, which will reduce the teaching burden placed on the current staff members. The Department has requested the allocation of permanent technical staff to its laboratories for several years now. Unfortunately, because of the financial crisis and budgeting limitations, this was not possible up to now. In a meeting with the Rector of the University in February 2021, the Council of the Department was informed that the University authorities plan to assign one permanent technician position to the Department in the next hiring process, hopefully within the coming year. In addition, in a formal letter sent to the University authorities in February 2021, the Committee of Agricultural Farms of the Department has requested a permanent position for the development and maintenance of its Agricultural Farms.

### C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

Name	Position	Signature
<b>Dr. Despoina Miltiadou</b>	BSc Program Coordinator, Department Chair	
<b>Dr. Dimitris Tsaltas</b>	MSc Program Coordinator, Department Vice-Chair	
<b>Dr. Andreas Katsiotis</b>	PhD Program Coordinator Faculty Dean	
<b>Dr. Menelaos Stavrinides</b>	Chair, Dept. Quality Assurance Committee	
<b>Ms. Marina Panayiotou</b>	Student Member, Dept. Quality Assurance Committee	
FullName	Position	

Date: 18/03/2021



