ΦΟΡΕΑΣ ΔΙΑΣΦΑΛΙΣΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΠΙΣΤΟΠΟΙΗΣΗΣ ΤΗΣ ΠΟΙΟΤΗΤΑΣ ΤΗΣ ΑΝΩΤΕΡΗΣ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗΣ

CYPRUS AGENCY OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

STRATEGIC PLAN OF THE CYPRUS AGENCY

OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

(CYQAA)

2020-2025

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education, in close cooperation with other stakeholders in Cyprus and abroad, undergoes the second tenure of its appointment, as a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). The CYQAA is registered in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR), and is fully recognized by the Word Federation for Medical Education (WFME).

The Council of the CYQAA, committed primarily to serving institutions and students in higher education, and in promoting the Government's goal of Cyprus becoming a regional and global centre of excellence in higher education, has developed its strategic plan of the CYQAA, as well as its goals and priorities regarding the Agency's further development by the year 2025.

The CYQAA's main vision is to develop and sustain a culture of quality assurance among institutions of higher learning and the broader society, and to enable them to work towards improving their programs of study and themselves as institutions, in light of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The CYQAA has already worked in collaboration with the higher education institutions in Cyprus towards advancing higher education in the country to top quality higher education learning, based on knowledge, research, and innovation. In close collaboration with its social, economic and educational stakeholders, the CYQAA aims to enable institutions of higher learning to become centers of excellence on education, innovation and cutting-edge research, so that Cyprus becomes scientifically, technologically, financially, socially and culturally more advanced. Under this framework, the development of scientists with ethical and professional skills, innovative and creative thinking, and advanced research skills match the future needs of the society and the job market.

Based on CYQAA's vision and mission, the CYQAA Council has specified the Agency's strategic pillars, as well as its strategic goals and priorities for the Agency's second tenure during 2020-2025. Quantifiable performance indicators have also been specified for the purpose of systematic monitoring and assessing of how the Agency's goals and priorities are being met, and for purposes of planning for the Agency's further development.

Professor Mary Ioannidou Koutselini
President of the Council of CYQAA

1. THE CURRENT STATE OF CYQAA

An eleven-member Council, including its President and Vice-President, govern the Agency. The Council of Ministers, following a recommendation by the Cyprus Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, and in deliberation with the Council of Rectors and other governmental bodies, appoints the CYQAA Council for a five-year tenure.

According to the corresponding legislature, eight (8) members of the Council are academics at the rank of Professor or Professor Emeritus, with a professional record on higher education administration and quality assurance and accreditation. Two (2) members of the Council represent professional associations and one (1) member is an undergraduate student representative. Student representatives may serve in the Council for two (2) years only.
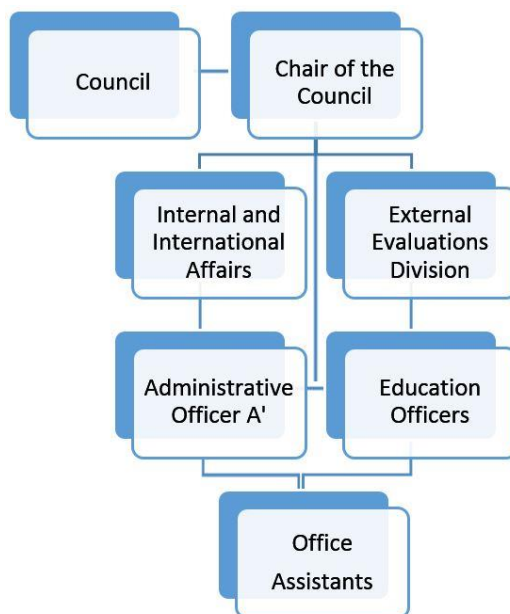
All members of the CYQAA Council operate independently and impartially, aiming to promote the quality assurance of higher education in Cyprus.

Council of the CYQAA

President	Professor Emerita Mary Ioannidou Koutselini	University of Cyprus
Vice President	Professor Diofantos Hadjimitsis	Cyprus University of Techonology
Member	Professor Emeritus Andreas Karamanos	Agricultural University of Athens
Member	Professor Evagelos Drimpetas	Democritus University of Thrace
Member	Professor Stavros Stavrou	Open University of Cyprus
Member	Professor Andreas Charalambous	University of Nicosia
Member	Professor Irene Polycarpou	University of Central Lancashire Cyprus
Member	Professor Christos A. Ioannou	Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne
Member	Mr. George Karas	Representative of the Cyprus Scientific and Technical Chamber (E.T.E.K.)
Member	Mrs. Irene Chrisitna Anthi Christofidi (Lawyer)	Representative of the Cyprus Bar Association
Member	Mr. Andreas Malliapis	Representative of the Pancyprian Federation of Student Unions (P.O.F.E.N.)

Organization Chart

The organizational structure of CYQAA is the following:

CYQAA's personnel consists of one (1) Administrative Officer A', who is charged with the Agency's administrative coordination, of two (2) Administrative Assistants, of a number of Education Officers and a number of non-permanent staff, depending on the Agency's needs.

Legal Framework & Responsibilities:

CYQAA was established on the basis of the "Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education and the Establishment and Operation of an Agency in Related Matters Law of 2015," under the name "The Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education" (CYQAA). Its first Council was appointed on November 5th, 2015 by the Council of Ministers. On January 13th, 2021 a new Council was appointed by the Council of Ministers.

CYQAA is the competent, autonomous and independent authority for the quality assurance of higher education in Cyprus. The Agency is responsible to conduct the external evaluation and accreditation of both public and private institutions of higher education in the country and to support, through the procedures provided by the relevant legislation, the continuous improvement and upgrading of higher education institutions and their programs of study. CYQAA's Law [N.136(I)/2015 – N. 132(I)/2021] adheres to and operates under the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).

Under the Law, the Agency has taken over all responsibilities, formerly undertaken by the Council of Educational Evaluation and Accreditation (SEKAP), the Advisory Committee on Tertiary/Higher Education (SETE), and of the Committee on the Evaluation of Private Universities (EAIP).

Additional responsibilities: The Agency, further to the responsibilities formerly undertaken by the bodies mentioned above, has assumed, under the relevant Law, extended responsibilities as follows:

- Institutional, Departmental and Programmatic Evaluation and Accreditation of higher education
- Promotion of the quality of higher education on the basis of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)
- Evaluation and accreditation of cross-border higher education programs offered by higher education institutions of the Republic of Cyprus to countries of the European Union and to third countries
- Review of the provisions underlying cross-border higher education programs offered by higher education institutions abroad to the Republic of Cyprus
- Review of inter-institutional synergies of higher education institutions
- Dissemination of information concerning the evaluation and accreditation of higher education

Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education

The Agency, in accordance with the provisions of the relevant Law and the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for quality assurance, has set criteria for quality assurance which are published in the Agency's website. These criteria correspond to both quantitative and qualitative indicators regarding the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning, of research and development, and of the resources offered by HEIs to their students and staff. The criteria are periodically reviewed and upgraded.

External evaluations conducted under the auspices of the Agency are systematic, independent and impartial, and are performed by external evaluation committees (EECs) consisting of expert academics in their respective fields of study. Based on the Agency's transparency principle, all EEC reports and other evaluation documents are available on the Agency's website.

In an attempt to identify emerging patterns regarding findings in external evaluations, the Agency studies and analyses external evaluation reports of programs of study and prepares "thematic analyses" reports, which are made available both to the public and to the HEIs, for productive discussion and upgrading of the HEIs' programs of study.

Promoting a Culture of Quality Assurance

The Agency plays a crucial role in establishing and sustaining a culture of quality assurance. Under this mindset, the Agency promotes and applies core values such as independence, integrity, transparency, synergy, trustworthiness and professionalism, all of which the Agency cares to pass on to higher education institutions in Cyprus.

The Agency aims, as one of its principal priorities from its inception on, to keep higher education institutions and other relevant stakeholders fully informed of and involved in the goals and processes of quality assurance and accreditation. The Agency makes all of its quality policy statements available through its website, upon which institutions of higher education are informed and expected to comply, on matters having to do with their mission, policies for quality assurance, teaching methodologies, various synergies, teaching and other staff, student assessment, learning resources and student support, internationalization and upgrading of their programs of study.

Furthermore, the Agency actively involves higher education institutions and other stakeholders (i.e. MOEC, KY.S.A.T.S., various professional bodies) in its external audits, aiming to familiarise them on the policies and processes followed, to increase transparency and to cultivate mutual trust between CYQAA and HEIs, for further upgrading of the quality of HEIs and their programs of study. In order to make this active involvement feasible and successful, and to ensure that communication channels are open both ways, the Agency takes a number of actions: (1) provision of updated information through the Internet (CYQAA's website and various social media), (2) organisation of seminars/webinars and conferences, (3) scheduled meetings with people leading higher education institutions and their associations, (4) distribution of feedback questionnaires, (5) scheduled meetings with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport (MOEC), and (6) informal meetings with other stakeholders (students, academic personnel, representatives of institutions and organisations).

Continuous Training of All Stakeholders involved

The Agency, operating within the provisions of its legal framework, promotes professional development opportunities to (a) members of external evaluation committees (academics, students, members of professional bodies), (b) administrative and academic members of higher education institutions, and (c) members of the Agency's personnel. Professional development topics vary from technical ones (correctly completing various paperwork), to more substantive ones (shared knowledge and understanding of the criteria for external evaluation, of the evaluator's role, of issues that may arise during the external evaluation, and of what constitutes quality upgrading of the higher education programs of study).

International Recognition and Internalization of Higher Education

The Agency considers its exchange with various international organizations to be of great importance, as they offer valuable knowledge and experience regarding the current status and future enhancement of higher education in Cyprus and in Europe. For the external evaluation of higher education institutions, the Agency

adheres to and follows the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The Agency, being mindful of its need for continuous upgrading, and in an effort to establish its accountability, it has been evaluated and accredited and is now an active partner in various professional associations of quality assurance and accreditation.

The Agency is:

- Recognized by the World Federation of Medical Education (WFME - Certificate of Recognition)
- Registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)
- A full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)
- A full member of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE)
- An affiliate member of the European University Association (EUA)
- A member of the European Distance and E-Learning Network (EDEN)

CYQAA, as a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), has already established itself as a quality organization, in close cooperation with institutions of higher education and other stakeholders in Cyprus. Furthermore, CYQAA is qualified to undertake external evaluations of higher education institutions in other European countries, whose legal framework allow external audits by Agencies registered at EQAR.

CYQAA places a lot of emphasis on quality assurance and accreditation of programs preparing medical doctors and other health-related professionals. To increase its accountability in this sector, the Agency sought out an external audit by the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME). WFME has visited the Agency on June 2019 to conduct an external audit. After deliberation based on observations and studying the Agency's internal processes, on February 18th, 2020 the WFME Recognition Committee granted the Agency recognition status regarding its reliability around policies and procedures having to do with quality assurance and accreditation of programs preparing medical doctors and other health-related professionals.

Continuous and systematic contact and communication with all local stakeholders

Operating under the Agency's policy of involving all social stakeholders in matters related to its mission, the CYQAA's President and the Members of the Council invite all institutions of higher learning, professional associations and other organizations in continuous and systematic dialogue.

The Agency's local stakeholders are:

- Public and Private Universities
- Higher Education Institutions
- The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth (MOEC)
- MOEC's Department of Higher Education
- The Cyprus Scientific and Technical Chamber
- Professional Associations and Boards of professions regulated by Law
- Registered associations of private schools
- The Ministries of the Republic of Cyprus
- The House of Representatives
- The Pancyprian Association of Students' Union (POFEN)
- The Youth Board of Cyprus

1. VISION AND MISSION

Our Vision

The CYQAA, in collaboration with local, European and International institutions and people involved, aims to become a catalyst in establishing higher education in Cyprus as a local and global hub of top quality higher learning, based on knowledge, research and innovation, so that Cyprus becomes scientifically, technologically, financially, socially and culturally more advanced. Under this framework, the development of scientists with ethical and professional skills, with innovative and creative thinking, with advanced research skills, a well-rounded education and cutting-edge knowledge is of utmost significance.

Our Mission

The CYQAA, as the competent and independent authority for quality assurance in Cyprus, is committed to following and safeguarding the European standards and guidelines for quality assurance (ESG), as well as to supporting, through the procedures provided by the relevant legislation and the principles underlying the establishment of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the continuous development and enhancement of higher education institutions and their programs of study, so that they are fully compliant with the European standards and guidelines for quality assurance (ESG). The CYQAA is also committed to further support the European policies on students and personnel mobility and of mutual recognition of higher education credentials. Moreover, the CYQAA is committed to contributing to the Government's goal of Cyprus becoming a regional and global educational center of excellence, by promoting and sustaining a quality culture among institutions of higher learning, as well as the broader public.

2. CORE VALUES

The Agency's core values are the following:

RESPONSIBILITY: the Agency assumes a high sense of professionalism and responsibility towards its duties, goals and tasks, and is committed to the on-going enhancement of its performance, to better serve the upgrading of quality assurance in higher education.

INTEGRITY: operating under existing legislature and the provisions of the Law, the Agency assumes a high sense of professionalism and responsibility in the conduct of its duties, as well as independence and impartiality and in its decision-making.

CONSISTENCY: the Agency is consistent in complying with the Law, and performing its duties according to internal and external rules and regulations, within required timelines.

TRANSPARENCY and ACCOUNTABILITY: to establish and sustain a culture of trustworthiness and reliability, the Agency operates under the principle of transparency in all its activities, policies and practices. All activity of and guidelines by the Agency are continuously uploaded on the Agency's website, including the Agency's annual reports.

SYNERGY: the Agency works with all involved stakeholders for the improvement and upgrading of the quality of higher education.

EQUAL PARTICIPATION: the Agency actively advocates and strives for diversity, inclusion and equity in both its policies and practices, and it adopts a policy on gender equality and gender-inclusive language.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT: the Agency, through the on-going assessment of its approach, activities and practices, aims to continuously improve its performance and outcomes, in order to be of utmost service to quality assurance and accreditation in higher education.

3. CYQAA'S SWOT ANALYSIS

SWOT ANALYSIS	
STRENGTHS	**WEAKNESSES**
-CYQAA Council composed by academics with a variety in disciplinary backgrounds and experiences from different countries and educational systems. -A student representative, as well as a member of the professional bodies, participate in the CYQAA council as equal members. -CYQAA staffed with capable, competent and well-trained personnel, equipped with well-rounded educational and managerial backgrounds. -Strong commitment, on behalf of the CYQAA, on continuous improvement and upgrading of quality assurance and accreditation. -Adherence to the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) as well as to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). -Continuous updating of the database consisting of distinguished and experienced external evaluation experts. -Earned international profile. -Recognized by the World Federation of Medical Education (WFME-Certificate of Recognition). -Registered in the European Quality Assurance Registry (EQAR). - Full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). -Full member of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE).	-Buildings not privately owned. -Personnel not on a permanent basis. -Delays in bringing about necessary changes on the legal framework.

-Affiliate member of the European University Association (EUA).
-Member of the European Distance and E-Learning Network (EDEN).
-Very good working relationship with various institutions of higher learning and other stakeholders.
-Continuous and systematic communication with various stakeholders.
-Active seeking of feedback from institutions of higher learning.

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
-Cyprus' strategic geopolitical location as a regional and global hub for higher education. -High ranking of Cyprus Universities in world university rankings. -Programs of study being offered in English. -Availability of inter-university programs of study. -Recruitment of international students. -Utilization of existing research expertise and establishment of innovative and technologically advanced laboratory infrastructure. -Establishing strategic synergies with other QA stakeholders locally and globally. -Further strengthening of local and global synergies with other QA Agencies. -Revision and update of the existing legal framework. -Established good working relationships with all local and global stakeholders.	-Financial reliance, to a great extent, on the State. -Staffing reliance on the State to a great extent. -Further and long-standing delays in bringing about necessary changes on the legal framework.

-Opportunities to receive feedback for improvement, due to the Agency's good working relationships with HEI. -Further opportunity to network and exchange good practices with international organizations (ENQA, EQAR, WFME), due to the already established international profile of the Agency. -Cyprus' manageable HE market (due to its size, the HE landscape is easier to monitor and warranty its QA). -Cyprus a small-size country with an affordable cost of living.	

5. STRATEGIC PILLARS 2020-25: GOALS AND PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

MISSION AND CORE VALUES

QUALITY

IN HIGHER EDUCATION

ESTABLISHING AND SUSTAINING THE CYQAA AS AN INSTITUTION

CONTRIBUTION

TO SOCIETY

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

STRATEGIC PILLARS	STRATEGIC GOALS	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	Key Performance Indicator (annually, every 3 and 5 years) (planned)	Key Performance Indicator (annually, every 3 and 5 years) (achieved)
QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION	Evaluation of programmes of study departments, and institutions	• Number of evaluated and accredited institutions	4	5
		• Number of evaluated and accredited departments	20	25
		• Number of evaluated and accredited programmes of study	120	150
		• Number of evaluated and accredited programmes of study of local HEI operating in other countries	1	1
		• Number of Thematic Analyses	3	4
	Full compliance with the Πλήρης συμμόρφωση με τα Ευρωπαϊκά Πρότυπα και Δείκτες Ποιότητας - ESG	• Number of European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance agencies fulfilled (Part 3 of the ESG (2015): Standards and Guidelines for quality Assurance Agencies) [https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf]	22/24	24/24

	Full compliance with the recommendations of ENQA, EQAR, WFME	• Number of recommendations fulfilled	8/10	10/10
ESTEBLISHING AND SUSTAINING THE CYQAA AS AN INSITUTION	Viable self-reliance (including the financial independence of the Agency)	• Number of legislations/regulations promoted • Number of legislations/regulations voted/approved	4 3	5 5
	Secured and well-developed infrastructure	• Number of buildings • Number and quality of supporting infrastructure • Number of IT infrastructure (software, licenses, platforms owned etc.)	-	1
	Internationalization	• Number of memberships in international associations • Number of active participation in European projects • Number of evaluated/accredited institutions/departments/programmes of study operating abroad	6 1 -	7 2 1

	Efficient administration, management and leadership	• Number of permanent staff hired	-	15
		• Number of secondments appointed	8	-
		• Number of staff who attended relevant training	11	15
		• Number and quality of incentives available to the staff to increase commitment and productivity	-	3
CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY	Quality of higher education offered	• Number of Institutions/ Departments/Programmes of study appearing in international higher education rankings	5	10
		• Citizens' degree of satisfaction from the higher education offered in Cyprus	-	-
		• Employers' degree of satisfaction from the higher education offered in Cyprus.	-	-