

ORIENTATION AND BRIEFING OF THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION COMMITTEE (EEC)

KEY POINTS

MEDICAL PROGRAMMES' ACCREDITATION

GENERAL

- The Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education (CYQAA) is the competent authority in Cyprus for ensuring the quality of higher education.
- The Agency was established in November 2015. It is a public organization, fully independent in processes and decisions which are all based on the CYQAA's law.
- In 2019, the CYQAA became a full member of The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and was registered with the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR). Henceforth, European standards are applied onto the CYQAA policies and European guidelines are followed (ESG).
- Amongst other competencies, the CYQAA conducts institutional, departmental and programmatic evaluations and, according to the experts' reports, the Agency decides in favour of accreditation, rejection or a second evaluation.
- In Cyprus' higher education sector, programmes of study are offered by 8 universities (3 public and 5 private) and 45 higher education schools (colleges, non-university). The operation of each programme of study is not permitted unless it has received programmatic evaluation/accreditation, which is repeated every five (5) years.
- Medical programmes are offered by 3 universities (1 public, the University of Cyprus and 2 private, the University of Nicosia, and the European University of Cyprus). The University of Nicosia Medical School is also offering in Cyprus the St George's, University of London Medical Programme (franchised programme).

- Cyprus has fully adopted the WFME procedures and standards of medical schools and programme accreditation and the evaluation is expected to assess whether the medical school under evaluation fulfils the basic or quality development standards for accreditation.
- According to the legislation, members of the EEC are academics from different countries in Europe, with one university student from a public university in Cyprus and a member of the professional association also being responsible for giving the licence to operate the specific occupation (for regulated occupations only). All members of the EEC are equal in terms of expressing their ideas and equitably contributing to the writing of the experts' report.

PROCESS

The evaluation process includes four phases:

- Application for evaluation accompanied by the medical programme's self-evaluation study.
- The external evaluation, which is carried out with the contribution of a panel of independent experts selected by the Agency from a pool of experts and/or after consultation with other agencies and quality assurance experts. This process includes, in particular, the study of the application and of the self-study, a site-visit and the writing of the experts' report.
- The institution's response. The experts' evaluation report is sent to the institution for its response, including the actions taken for full/substantial compliance and the action plan drawn up and implemented by the institution. Full or substantial compliance may need to be verified by the experts' panel.
- The Council's decision for accreditation/rejection or second evaluation.
- Based on the HEI's application for evaluation and the site visit conducted at the HEI, the EEC completes the external evaluation report after the site visit is conducted.

- According to the relevant legislation, the HEI is given a period of up to 3 months to respond to the EEC's comments on the external evaluation report, and to make the necessary amendments.
- The indicative site visit schedule is prepared by the CYQAA and it is sent to the EEC and the HEI before the evaluation. The EEC, within its competencies, may amend the schedule in ways it sees fit for the unobstructed conduct of the external evaluation.
- On the basis of the external evaluation report, the recommendations of the EEC and the HEI's response on the external evaluation report, the Council of CYQAA decides whether a programme of study/department/institution a) must be accredited, b) must be rejected or c) a second evaluation should be carried out. The experts' opinion/advice for compliance or not may be asked before the decision.
- Suggestions for improvement may be included in the Agency's final report and a follow-up process should be activated based on a timely flexible action plan submitted by the HEI. From that point of view, evaluation against standards is always considered a process of improvement.

REPORTS REGARDING THE EVALUATION PROCESS

<https://www.dipae.ac.cy/index.php/en/evaluation-en/medical-schools-en>

- The content of CYQAA's reports on basic medical education is in agreement with the WFME standards (Basic Medical Education – WFME Global Standards for Quality Improvement).
- All the forms used for the process of evaluation reflect the stakeholders' observations, the experts' feedback, possible restrictions provided by the legislation's framework, and the WFME's published guides. The forms' review process takes place regularly every two years.

- The HEI completes the ‘Application Form for External Evaluation’ (Doc. 200.1) and the ‘Guide to Self-study for Basic Medical Education’ (Doc. 200.1.2). The HEI’s application and other relevant material are sent to the members of the EEC approximately one month before the site visit. The material is also provided to the members of the EEC in print on the day of the site visit.
- In the Guide to Self-study for Basic Medical Education (Doc. 200.1.2), the medical school provides evidence of the fulfilment of **basic standards** and **quality development standards** for medical programmes.
- **Basic standards** are expressed by a ‘must’. This means that the standard in principle must be met by every medical school and fulfilment demonstrated during evaluation of the school.
- **Quality development standards** are expressed by a ‘should’. This means that the standard is in accordance with international consensus about best practice for medical schools and basic medical education. Fulfilment of – or initiatives to fulfil – some or all of such standards should be documented by medical schools. Fulfilment of these standards will vary with the stage of development of the medical schools, available resources and educational policy and other local conditions influencing relevance, priorities and possibilities. Even the most advanced schools might not comply with all standards.
- The EEC completes the ‘External Evaluation Report’ (Doc. 300.1.1/1). A printed copy of the report is delivered to the CYQAA the day after it is completed, after being signed by all members of the EEC. An electronic pdf copy is sent by the chair of the committee to the responsible CYQAA officer without signatures, in order to be uploaded on CYQAA’s web site with all other related documents.
- The HEI completes the ‘Higher Education Institution’s Response’ (Doc. 300.1.2/1).
- The EEC is asked for feedback on document ‘Feedback from EEC Experts’ (Doc.300.1.3/1).

CONTENT OF REPORTS (DOCS. 300)

<https://www.dipae.ac.cy/index.php/en/evaluation-en/medical-schools-en>

Doc. 300.1.1/1

- The external evaluation report for basic medical education follows the structure of assessment areas, with standards which are relevant to the WFME standards for medical programmes and some guiding questions that the EEC may find useful.
- Under each assessment area, the EEC must provide feedback regarding the degree of compliance with the requirements. In particular, the EEC is expected to write findings, strengths, areas of improvement and recommendations.
- The EEC should state the compliance for each sub-area (Non-compliant, Partially compliant, Compliant), which must be in agreement with everything stated in the report. It is pointed out that, in the case of basic and quality development standards that cannot be applied due to the status of the HEI and/or of the programme of study, N/A (= Not Applicable) should be noted.
- It is clarified that the evaluation of the medical school mainly focuses on basic standards' scores and comments, whereas quality development standards' scores indicate the need for the medical school's actions to extend beyond basic requirements.
- Appropriateness of the admission criteria, including the threshold of enrolment, must also be examined according to the level of the programme.
- The EEC should state the conclusions and final remarks regarding the programme of study as a whole.

- A process of appeals is provided by the legislation: The institution may, within one (1) month from the receipt of the final report of the Agency, submit an appeal/raise an objection requesting its review by the Agency, stating the grounds which, in its opinion, justify the withdrawal and the review of the evaluation report. The appeal's examination by the Agency shall be carried out based on the data contained in the evaluation file of the institution and the grounds set out in the objection in order to issue a relevant decision. An amendment of the legislation provides that the Council may assign an ad hoc advisory committee to examine the appeal before the final decision by the Agency.
- The decisions of the CYQAA are subject to appeals to the court.

Doc. 300.1.2/1

- The HEI responds within a time period of 3 months on the EEC's comments on each assessment area of the external evaluation report.

Doc. 300.1.3/1

- The EEC is asked via email for feedback on this document. The CYQAA Officer completes the part with the EEC recommendations and HEI's response before sending the document to the EEC for feedback.

FEEDBACK ON CYQAA's PROCESSES

- For purposes of CYQAA self-improvement the EEC completes a questionnaire on the quality of the CYQAA processes.

FINAL POINTS

- The HEI prepares the application form based on the template provided by the CYQAA.
- The application is sent to the EEC members prior to the evaluation in order to be reviewed and for the experts to be well-prepared before the evaluation. If the EEC believes that extra information regarding the programme of study is needed, then it is the members' responsibility to ask for it during the site visit. For example, the EEC may ask for teaching materials, sample papers, presentations of lectures, access to online platforms etc.
- Following the policy of the CYQAA, HEIs in Cyprus should offer ONLY quality programmes of study, which must be favorably compared to the programmes of higher education institutions overseas, and especially European institutions.
- HEIs have the opportunity through their responses to correct what emerges from the EEC report, so the EEC members should be objective and make fruitful recommendations on which the Council of the CYQAA can safely base its decisions.
- EEC members are expected to implement the WFME standards and evaluate objectively and in relation to the best programmes they have in mind, based on their expertise and international experience. At the same time, they are expected to acknowledge national differences in the educational programmes and medical schools, which in any case must not endanger the universal and national mission of the medical schools and doctors.