

Doc. 300.3.2

Date: 16 September 2021

Higher Education Institution's Response

(Departmental)

- **Higher Education Institution:**
UNIVERSITY OF CYPRUS
- **Town:** Nicosia
- **School/Faculty:** School of Engineering
- **Department:** Civil and Environmental Engineering
- **Programme(s) of study under evaluation**
Programme 1 (4yrs, 240 ECTS, 1st cycle)
In Greek:
Προπτυχιακό πρόγραμμα Πολιτικού Μηχανικού και Μηχανικού Περιβάλλοντος
In English:
BSc in Civil and Environmental Engineering
Programme 2 (3-8 semesters, MSc 110ECTS/MEng 90ECTS, 2nd cycle)
In Greek:
Μεταπτυχιακό (Μάστερ) Πρόγραμμα Σπουδών Πολιτικού Μηχανικού
In English:
MEng and MSc in Civil Engineering
Programme 3 (3-8yrs, 160 ECTS, 3rd cycle)
In Greek:
Διδακτορικό Πρόγραμμα Πολιτικού Μηχανικού
In English:
PhD in Civil Engineering
- **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:*
 - 1) *the findings, strengths, areas of improvement and recommendations of the EEC*
 - 2) *the deficiencies noted under the quality indicators (criteria)*
 - 3) *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

1.1 Mission and strategic planning

EEC's comment 1:

The Department mission is clear, and follows best international practice while still includes information relevant to Cyprus. Stakeholders are consulted about the course, but there is no formal advisory panel which should include recent graduates, employers and the Scientific and Technical Chamber of Cyprus.

HEI's response:

The CEE department agrees that it would benefit greatly from an advisory board. The Departmental Board during its 10th/2021 meeting (25/8/2021) decided in the formation of an Advisory Board (**Annex A**). The composition of the Advisory Board was discussed in detailed during the 11th/2021 meeting (15/9/2021). It was decided during the 11th/2021 meeting (15/9/2021) that the Advisory Board will consist of 9 members, serving a 3-year term, who will be prominent professionals from the sectors of civil engineering, environmental engineering, as well as contractors and local stakeholders. Following a short-listing procedure, the Department has nominated and will start contacting soon the following persons for membership in the advisory board:

- 1) Marinos Aristotelous (Civil Engineer, Aristotelous Construction Ltd., UCY graduate)
- 2) Theodoros Papagiannis (Civil Engineer, Aristotelous Construction Ltd., UCY graduate)
- 3) Platonas Stylianos (Civil Engineer, Platonas Stylianos & Associates LLC)
- 4) Andreas Theodotou (Civil Engineer, President of the Cyprus Association of Civil Engineers, Vice-President of the Scientific Technical Chamber of Cyprus)
- 5) Evangelitsa Tsoulofta (Civil Engineer, Department of Labor Inspection, Ministry of Labor)
- 6) Marios Avraamides (Environmental Engineer, Knowledge Centre for Bioeconomy of the European Commission)
- 7) Anthi Charalampous (Chemical Engineer, Cyprus Employers & Industrialists Federation)
- 8) Aggelos Dimakopoulos (Coastal Engineer, HR Wallingford Ltd)
- 9) Xenia Loizidou (Coastal Engineer, AKTI Research Center)

The list contains two graduates of our undergraduate program and three Scientific and Technical Chamber of Cyprus officers.

1.2 Connecting with society

EEC's comment 2:

This activity is generally done very well, but as the Department acknowledges, more could be done in providing information to the public, and particular in schools to attract more students into Civil Engineering.

HEI's response:

The CEE Department (10th/2021 Departmental Board meeting, **Annex A**) will commence an information campaign as early as November 2021 with faculty member visits to high schools and organize a meeting with high school career counselors of the Nicosia District.

EEC's comment 3:

The new buildings (when completed), and in particular the shaking table facility, will provide opportunities for outreach and may make the University of Cyprus more attractive as a study location - currently students effectively need a car to enable them to travel between sites. While the Department does communicate well with graduates the central University also does this but in a different way. The Department and central University could try to coordinate this more.

HEI's response:

The Department's undergraduate and postgraduate programs committees made efforts to arrange a 360° feedback meeting with this year's graduates, as well as current students, during the summer months following the submission of the EEC's evaluation report. However, this was proven to be difficult due to unavailability given that it was the summer break period. The CEE department has decided (10th/2021 Departmental Board meeting, **Annex A**) to hold a 360° feedback meeting with students and recent graduates at the end of each academic year (end of May).

1.3 Development processes

EEC's comment 4:

Currently there are very few students from abroad (other than from Greece), and this is most likely because of language issues. The Department plans for potentially teaching postgraduate courses in English is likely to result in more high-level students from abroad, but care should be taken to ensure it does not turn away students from Cyprus. If postgraduate teaching moves to English 1.3.3 will move to a 4.

HEI's response:

We agree that offering our postgraduate programs in English will definitely help attract foreign students. The University Senate (18th/2021 Senate meeting, 7/7/2021) has recently approved (**Annex B**) the Department's request to offer all of its postgraduate programs in English provided that they get accredited by the CYQAA. Final approval by the University Council is pending (it will be in the agenda of the Council meeting of 11/10/2021). Hence, once CYQAA grants accreditation for the evaluated postgraduate programs, namely MSc/MEng in Civil Engineering and PhD in Civil Engineering, and final approval is obtained from the University Council, these programs will be offered in English from September 2022 and onward.

EEC's comment 5:

The funding process for the department is an area of concern. Civil Engineering and other laboratory / practical based subjects are more expensive to teach than non-laboratory subjects. In addition to the provision of laboratories and equipment for teaching and research, there needs to be suitably qualified technical staff and a funded maintenance programme for the equipment. It is concerning that one site with laboratories has no technical staff based there, and that some equipment does not receive regular maintenance because of lack of funding. This is not only preventing some research from being conducted as equipment breaks down, but is a potential health and safety concern as some of this equipment can become dangerous to operate if not regularly maintained, particularly if there are no technical staff in the location. While it may be possible for the Department to gain some technical staff support from including this as a cost in research proposals (if the particular funding source allows this), these staff will normally only be allowed to work on the research programmes and not assist with teaching activities.

HEI's response:

The Department acknowledges the serious shortcoming in adequate staffing of the laboratories. Since its establishment, the goal of the Department was to operate with one lab manager and two technicians and has constantly demanded to raise the number of lab technicians from one to two. Following EEC evaluation, the CEE Department requested on 15/7/2021 the hiring of one more technician (**Annex C**). The minimum qualifications of the technician will be a technology degree (civil or mechanical). Until the move to the new Engineering School buildings, the Department requested the new technician to serve the needs of both laboratory locations, spending 3 days at the laboratories located in the old campus and 2 days in the Strovolos

laboratories. Until the hiring of the lab technician, the need will be covered temporarily by hiring of an administrative support special scientist under a 1-year contract. The Vice-Rector for International Affairs, Finance and Administration has affirmed that will support both our requests (for technician and, in the meantime for a special scientist) to the pertinent committees and approval bodies (**Annex D**). Provided final approval is granted, the administrative support special scientist is expected to begin work by January 2022.

EEC's comment 6:

Findings

The Department is well run and its teaching and research activities are well organised. It has a clear mission and has strategic plan in place for the short to long term, but some of those are being limited by factors outside their control (e.g. delays in completion of the new building, staff in key teaching areas not being replaced). There is difficulty caused by the Department operating on multiple sites, with teaching at a different location to laboratories, but this should be solved when the new building is completed (although this is delayed). Having multiple sites is likely to deter potential applicants who do not have a car.

HEI's response:

According the current schedule, the new Engineering School building will be completed by the end of 2022. Hence, in the near future all the activities of the Department will be consolidated in a single location and the students will not have to commute between lab facilities and lecture halls.

EEC's comment 7:

The teaching staff body generally has a collaborative and supportive approach, although there were some minor concerns that need to be addressed. The staff have the expertise required for the programmes of study and embed research into the curriculum as appropriate. The curriculum includes topics of global and local importance and advice from alumni and industry is sought before making changes. They do engage with society but this could be strengthened, especially with schools, as a means to attract more to the profession of civil engineering.

HEI's response:

The CEE Department (10th/2021 Departmental Board meeting, **Annex A**) will commence an information campaign as early as November 2021 with faculty member visits to high schools and organize a meeting with high school career counselors of the Nicosia District.

EEC's comment 8:

Strengths

- 1. The good organisation and collaborative ethos is a strength of the department*
- 2. The development processes for the staff and for the programmes allow teaching to remain relevant to the global and Cyprus society.*

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- 1. While there is little that can be done at this time, having the laboratories separated from teaching areas is an area that needs improvement, and all that can be done to speed the completion of the new building should be done.*

HEI's response:

Please see response to EEC's comment 7 above.

EEC's comment 9:

- 2. Providing staffing (both teaching and technical staff) that allows the Department to meet its mission is important and needs to be considered by the Central university.*

HEI's response:

Soon after the EEC's evaluation, the Department has applied for the allocation of two new staff positions:

- 1) One faculty member (at the rank of lecturer or assistant professor) with expertise in the field of Hydrology/Water Resources Management (**Annex E**).
- 2) One laboratory technician (**Annex C**)

Provided approval is obtained by the University, the positions are expected to be filled by the end of 2022.

EEC's comment 10:

- 3. Ensuring there is funding for maintenance and technical staff to operate key equipment is important not only for the benefits of teaching and research in the Department, but also for the safety of students and staff who use the laboratories.*

HEI's response:

The Department every year requests the allocation of all the necessary funds for the proper maintenance of the current equipment. Irrespectively of funding provided from the central University's budget, the Department from now on will allocate a larger portion of its own revenues for the maintaining of the laboratory equipment.

2. Quality Assurance

Sub-areas

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

. Quality Assurance

2.1 System and quality assurance strategy

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2.2 Quality assurance for the programmes of study

EEC's comment 11:

Regarding Section 2.2.6: While going through the information distributed regarding the course syllabus, the department should consider adopting the policy of incorporating the grading scheme and assessment methods explicitly in all courses. This is a standard practice in other academic institutions worldwide. Moreover, students feel more informed in this case.

HEI's response:

It is standard practice in UCY to state the grading scheme (with grade percentages explicitly shown) and all the assessment methods in the course syllabus. The undergraduate program and postgraduate program committees will collect this semester the syllabi from all instructors in order to check the degree of adherence to the rule.

EEC's comment 12:

Regarding student diversity (section 2.2.15): it is noted that the school programs are not offered in English language; therefore, this does not help diversity in the student community.

HEI's response:

We agree that offering our postgraduate programs in English will help enhancing the diversity of the student body through the admission of foreign students. The University Senate (18th/2021 Senate meeting, 7/7/2021) has recently approved (**Annex B**) the Department's request to offer all of its postgraduate programs in English provided that they get accredited by the CYQAA. Final approval by the University Council is pending (it will be in the agenda of the Council meeting of 11/10/2021). Hence, once CYQAA grants accreditation for the evaluated postgraduate programs, namely MSc/MEng in Civil Engineering and PhD in Civil Engineering, and final approval is obtained from the University Council, these programs will be offered in English from September 2022 and onward.

EEC's comment 13:

Findings

The applied procedures presented are fully satisfactory. We note the academic members' concern and interest in new and emerging trends in the fields of civil engineering and the efforts to follow these evolutions in order to adapt the department's curriculum.

Strengths

We note the strong and effective connection of the faculty members and the students with industry and professional bodies, resulting in the effective transfer of knowledge through various channels, which assures a high quality of learning. Interesting course offerings at the masters level cover a variety of contemporary topics in civil engineering.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

It is suggested that the members of the Department engage in a more frequent communication with the representatives of the Scientific and Technical Chamber of Cyprus (ETEK) for potentially new course offerings of interest to the profession. Such an explanation and discussion with ETEK would be beneficial for both parties.

Moreover, the course offerings should be offered in English considering that this will definitely increase the diversity in the student community.

Finally, it is suggested that the department should adopt the policy of explicitly incorporating the grading scheme and assessment methods in all courses, which is a standard practice in most academic institutions from abroad.

HEI's response:

We agree that our programs planning will benefit greatly from frequent communication with representative of ETEK. A meeting was held on 16/9/2021 between ETEK representatives and the faculty members of the environmental engineering group of the Department (Marina Neophytou, Despo Fatta-Kassinou, Argyro Tsipa and Dimitrios Stagonas), joined by the Departmental Head D. Loukidis, in order to discuss rights and licensing pertaining to the environmental engineering profession and how our programs could be updated to meet the required qualifications and the current and future needs of the industry in the specific field. Similar meetings can also be organized in the near future for the civil engineering sector. In addition, the planned composition of the advisory board (see response to EEC's comment 1) includes ETEK officers, thus providing even more opportunities for exchange of ideas and information between the two parties.

As for the courses being offered in English, please see response to EEC's comment 4. The MEng/MSc program and PhD program in Civil Engineering (i.e. the postgraduate programs included in the present evaluation) are planned to be offered fully in English from September 2022 onwards.

Regarding the grading scheme and assessment methods, please see response to EEC's comment 11.

3. Administration

EEC's comment 14:

The one area of concern is the low administrative staff numbers - both technical and secretarial staff. The issue around technical support staff is mentioned in section 1 of this report and elsewhere, but having a low number of secretarial staff can often result in academic staff having to perform many secretarial duties which is inefficient use of time. There is no longer dedicated IT support for the department.

HEI's response:

We fully acknowledge that the low number of technical staff (one lab managed and one technician) constitutes serious impediment to the development of the Department. Hence, we have requested the hiring of one more lab technician (see response to EEC's comment 5 and **Annexes C and D**).

We believe that the number of secretarial staff is sufficient (2 general secretaries) and does not constitute a particular problem. More secretarial staff will alleviate the administrative burden of the faculty member, but, as a matter of fact, the vast majority of the departments (even those established ten or more years before our Department) are served by two secretaries. We believe that with the proper training our current secretarial staff can adequately accommodate the administrative support needs of the Department and provide smooth operation of the department's administration. For example, we are currently exploring with the university's human resources service possibilities for training (in the form evening courses) that will enhance the English skills of our secretarial staff, in light of the postgraduate programs of the Department being offered in English in the near future.

The merging of the IT support at Engineering School level happened only a few years ago. This created some problems with respect to coordination and familiarization with the specific needs of each department. Nevertheless, these problems are gradually overcome and, possibly, there will be no need for an IT to be assigned exclusively to the CEE Department.

EEC's comment 15:

Findings

The Department follows the University administrative processes and structure which are clear and appropriate. The main university system integrates well with the departmental activities in supporting students in the non-technical side of their learning (for example information on plagiarism from the Library, and support from the Centre for Teaching and learning).

The Department can act with a certain degree of autonomy in setting its mission, but many funding decisions are dependent on the central University which does limit what can be done on a practical basis.

Strengths

- 1. The central University systems and legislation, into which the Department fits, are well thought out and clear.*
- 2. The links between the Departmental and central University systems works well in providing support for students and in dealing with disciplinary issues and complaints.*
- 3. There is an appropriate degree of autonomy for decisions which only affect the Department.*

Areas of improvement and recommendations

A list of problem areas followed by or linked to the recommendations of how to improve the situation.

- 1. More clarity in some of the central University decisions which affect the department would be beneficial. In particular, it would be beneficial if Departments know if they are likely to get funding in a certain area, and when they are likely to get it. If funding in certain areas is limited or if it is*



delayed, the Department should be given information on what it can do to improve its chance of funding (such as needing to recruit more students or needing to obtain more external research funding). These funding decisions can affect whether the Department can deliver its mission.

HEI's response:

Having more predictable and less fluctuating annual budget allocation per expense category will certainly assist the decision making and financial planning of the Department and its faculty members. Nonetheless, the irregularities in central University funding have started since the local financial crisis and thus stem from reasons that surpass the University itself.

4. Learning and Teaching

Sub-areas

4.1 Planning the programmes of study

4.2 Organisation of teaching

4.1 Planning the programmes of study

EEC's comment 16:

The Department has correctly identified that meetings with Stakeholders should be official.

HEI's response:

Please see response of EEC's comment 13.

EEC's comment 17:

The feedback mechanisms used by the Department towards students are appropriate, but can be further improved. E.g., through using online tools.

HEI's response:

At the end of each semesters, all UCY students evaluate each course the took by filling an online questioner.

EEC's comment 18:

Fingings

Perhaps, the Department can consider the addition of a practical course or an optional summer internship/summer placement for which students would be receiving ECTS credits.

HEI's response:

Following the EEC's recommendation, the Department decided (8th/2021 Departmental Board meeting, 27/7/2021, **Annex F**) to add to the undergraduate program two practical training courses (industry placement). These will be offered in the summer semester between the 2nd and 3rd year studies and between the 3rd and 4th year of studies. Each course will have 3 ECTS. These ECTS will not count for the 240 ECTS requirement of the BSc degree, as the practical training courses will be optional. A student may opt to take none, one or two of the courses. The students will be allowed to take each course only once.

EEC's comment 19:

There are meetings with stakeholders which are currently unofficial but the Department plans to set up an official meeting with an advisory board to review the programmes.

HEI's response:

Please see responses to EEC's comments 1 and 13.

EEC's comment 20:

Strengths

- A new, state-of-the-art library, which serves as a point of reference for students and faculty.
- A welfare service which is separated to a careers dedicated office and a psychological welfare office.
- Spacious classrooms and laboratories are helping the student-centered learning. Those are expected to further improve with the relocation to the new buildings.
- The members of faculty are following an open office policy with the students.

-The move to a new building where classrooms and laboratories are in the same building, which has been a major point of concern.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Points that can be improved are the following:

The meetings with the Academic advisor have been rendered optional recently. This is a University policy/decision. The members of the Department correctly indicated that their preference would be for such meetings to be mandatory for all students. This would be a constructive change.

HEI's response:

Following EEC's recommendation, the Department decided (8th/2021 Departmental Board meeting, 14/7/2021, **Annex G**) to render the meetings with the academic advisors mandatory for all students, starting this semester (Fall 2021). Each student must meet twice with the academic advisor at the beginning each academic semester (Fall and Spring). As done already for the current semester, each student must arrange a meeting with the advisor preferably two weeks before the first day of classes and no later than the end of the first week of classes.

EEC's comment 21:

Perhaps the Department can consider some mechanism to help students who have been identified to struggle. This could be offered as a tutorial system, provided by a teaching assistant. This is likely to help struggling students in the first year and address the dropout rate.

HEI's response:

Supporting tutoring services towards students diagnosed with learning difficulties are administrated centrally by the University (Social Support Office of the Academic Affairs and Student Welfare Service). There are currently efforts at central level to enhance this institution.

EEC's comment 22:

Another point that the committee felt that there could be some improvement was that of a practical course/summer placement. It is indeed true that the 4th year course offered resembles the experience in an office, but the option of a summer placement/internship could be helpful to the students. Perhaps the Department can have an organized mechanism to help students seeking for such an option and recognizing the corresponding credits.

HEI's response:

Please see response to EEC's comment 18.

5. Teaching Staff

EEC's comment 23:

*5.1 and 5.5: The Department lacks some permanent academic personnel for few key subjects.
5.3. There are no visiting professors at the Department this period.*

HEI's response:

Please see response to EEC's comments 24 and 26 below.

EEC's comment 24:

Areas of improvement and recommendations

A matter of concern for the EEC is the shortage of academic personnel for some key scientific areas which are of major importance for the discipline of civil engineer. The lack of some academic personnel is also evidenced when regarding the high number of laboratories (12) which hardly have more than two faculty members each. This issue has been fully recognized by the Department and actions have been undertaken.

EEC believes that areas needing new faculty members are: i) hydrology and water resources management, ii) energy technology and iii) transportation engineering.

HEI's response:

The Department's first priority is to hire a faculty member in the area of Hydrology/Water Resources Management. On 15/7/2021, the Department put a request for the opening of a faculty position at the rank of lecturer or assistant professor with expertise in the field of Hydrology/Water Resources Management (**Annex E**). The request was forwarded recently from the Rector's Council to the pertinent Personnel and Development Committee and is under examination. The Department has set as a second priority a faculty position in the field of energy efficiency of buildings.

EEC's comment 25:

EEC strongly encourages the Department to establish a committee of both senior and junior staff for the development of a strategic plan for the future recruitment.

HEI's response:

The Department has already put together and submitted (on 29/6/2021) to the University its strategic plan for the next five years. The Department formed (9th /2021 Departmental Board meeting, 27/7/2021, **Annex F**) a committee (M. Neophytou, D. Loukidis, L. Dimitriou) for monitoring and assessing the implementation of the strategic plan at the end of each year.

EEC's comment 26:

The Department must set up procedures to attract visiting professors who can efficiently aid the teaching effort.

HEI's response:

We plan to include in the next year's budget (2022) provision for hiring one visiting professor. This was our standard practice up until 2013, i.e. the onset of the financial crisis and the resulting budget cuts.



EEC's comment 27:

The EEC encourages faculty members to transfer findings of their research activities into the capstone design project.

HEI's response:

The faculty members will hold a meeting with special teaching staff Dr. I. Balafas, who is responsible for the capstone design project, in order to explore the possibilities of introducing research findings in the design performed by the senior students.

6. Research

EEC's comment 28:

6.3 Lack of resources for the regular maintenance of the existing lab equipment.

HEI's response:

Please see response to EEC's comment 10.

EEC's comment 29:

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The addition of new faculty members is expected to strengthen the research potential of the Department. EEC believes that a more concrete and well-structured strategy for the Department's research opportunities and promotion is needed. The EEC encourages the Department to consider mechanisms to support the faculty members in proposal writing. An advisable solution is to provide a specific budget internally for professional proposal writing.

HEI's response:

In the next year's (2022) financial budget, which will be prepared in the following months, we plan to include a provision that will cover the cost of proposal writing training for a number of faculty members of the Department, with priority to tenure-track faculty.

EEC's comment 30:

It is also recommended to consider expansion to some 'emerging' research areas (e.g. renewable energy and energy efficiency of buildings) that might trigger synergies with other European active research groups.

HEI's response:

Please see response to EEC's comment 23.

EEC's comment 31:

As the national funding is low, the EEC encourages the faculty members to orient their research funding questing towards international (e.g. European) funding instruments and to establish some synergies with other European and international institutions. This will possibly provide, among others, the Department with appropriate resources to support the regular maintenance of equipment.

HEI's response:

We agree with the EEC's recommendation. The Department will encourage faculty members to apply for European funding in the future.

7. Resources

EEC's comment 32:

With regard to 7.1 and 7.4: While a number of facilities are about to be delivered to the department, a coherent plan with regard to financial resources should be discussed with the university to ensure that these facilities should be operational including a proper maintenance plan. This should be of course complemented with external competitive funding (e.g., EU or other financial resources from the national level).

Regarding 7.3: based on the available information that was distributed, it appears that donations are not available to the department or at least they are not so common.

Findings

The department receives funding from the central University, and this includes the significant funding recently received for a new building and large shaking table. There has been an increase in staff numbers but there are, however, some positions which have not been immediately replaced when staff have left the University.

Strengths

A list of strengths, e.g. examples of good practices, achievements, innovative solutions etc.

The funding of a new building, including a new shaking table is a strength, provided there are also plans to invest in the maintenance of these new facilities.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

A list of problem areas followed by or linked to the recommendations of how to improve the situation.

Complementary funding could be provided through research contracts and industry contracts that could offer support salaries of privately hired personnel.

HEI's response:

Please see response to EEC's comment 31.

B. Conclusions and final remarks

EEC's comment 33:

On the other hand the EEC members felt that there should be a greater clarity from the University's side in terms of how internal sources are distributed amongst Departments. For example the funding available to maintain laboratories, administrative lab and technicians should be made known to the Departments and it should take into account the needs, especially in terms of teaching, of each Department.

HEI's response:

Please see response to EEC's comment 29 and 31.

EEC's comment 34:

It currently seems that the funding received by the Department for administrative staff, technicians and laboratory maintenance is below what it should be. Currently those members are ensuring the proper administration and operation of the labs by putting in extra hours of work. The result is that the related staff are unsatisfied with being overloaded and the machinery in the laboratories will gradually degrade. It is to the Department's praise that the labs are nonetheless working properly, with students feeling that they are very well organized and researchers being able to nonetheless use them for research. This last comment is one of the very few weaknesses and points of improvement that is repeated in different sections. The committee believes that the University should take into account that technical subjects require the corresponding funding for lab maintenance, especially when those labs are used for teaching.

HEI's response:

Please see response to EEC's comment 5.

EEC's comment 35:

Finally, the committee suggests that the Department members incorporate a greater ratio of proposals to European funding bodies than the national funding body, as that would allow some additional resources for maintaining the labs (especially for equipment mainly used for research). The above seems to be one of the few weaknesses of the Department. The Department otherwise scores very highly in the questions related to Administration. Nonetheless the previous suggestion will further improve the autonomy of the department.

HEI's response:

Please see response to EEC's comment 29 and 31.

EEC's comment 36:

The department also scores very highly in the questions related to quality assurance. The only minor suggestion of the committee is for the Department to consider more frequent formal meetings with the technical chamber, or in general to convert the informal meetings with stakeholders to formal.

HEI's response:

Please see response to EEC's comment 13.

EEC's comment 37:

The EEC notes that the students should have mandatory meetings with the Academic Supervisor, suggests that the Department considers offering some further form of help to struggling students (e.g., tutorials) and perhaps adding a practical course/internship module to the syllabus.

HEI's response:

Please see response to EEC's comment 20.

EEC's comment 38:

An additional comment further explained in the other form filled by the committee, has to do with the Department considering a minimum threshold for the number of students attending a direction of the MSc. When there are less admitted students than that threshold in a direction the Department should consider merging such directions in the following year.

The Department has correctly identified an existing gap in hydrology and is actively trying to recruit a related expert. Perhaps further expansion with addition of faculty in the fields of energy and transportation may help the expansion of the syllabus.

HEI's response:

In our opinion, there is no need to merge directions that have low numbers of students. This is because the courses offered in such directions are available also to the students of the other directions as secondary (or even primary) courses. As a result, the courses have adequate audience size despite that there may be only few students that take the course as a core (primary) course. Hence, there is no waste of resources. On the contrary, this way provides flexibility for each student to focus on the specialization that is truly of his/her interests.

EEC's comment 39:

A potential point that should be revised is the following: it should be ensured that none of the faculty members are overloaded with teaching. While from the syllabus it appears that the teaching responsibilities have been allocated reasonably, the committee cannot distinguish for example the size of the classroom corresponding to different courses, which can indeed impact the lecturer. Especially for tenure-track academics, the Department should ensure that they are not overloaded in their first years of the Department. The paths for a successful tenure should also be clear to all tenure-track faculty and all faculty in that position need to have a contact point that can inform them on the process and their progression.

HEI's response:

The normal course load is 4 courses per year per faculty member. Most faculty members teach two or more elective (undergraduate and postgraduate) courses and two or less core courses with inevitably large audience. This will be set to be the norm for all faculty without exceptions, in order to not have uneven distribution of course load.

EEC's comment 40:

The number of PhD students is currently low, and efforts should be made to increase those numbers in the future, especially as the number of faculty members is increasing. This is an area that can be improved, the EEC members recognize the effect of the decreased national resources over the last period and suggest that the Department mitigates this risk in the future by increasing the ratio of proposals submitted to European funding agencies. Strengthening the collaborations with other European research groups will further strengthen the research position of the Department, which is nonetheless good. The EEC members note that the new experimental facilities and the move to the new buildings will further help in attracting more resources including industrial contracts that could be leveraged to support administrative staff and technicians to support the facilities.

Finally in terms of resources it certainly appears that the Department has managed to operate well and has supported its main pillars of research and teaching excellence. But as noted in previous sections, there need to be more research funds made available to laboratories, technicians and administrative personnel.



HEI's response:

Please see response to EEC's comment 29 and 31.

C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Dimitrios Loukidis	Associate Professor, Head of Civil & Environmental Engineering Department	
FullName	Position	

Date: 16 September 2021

