

# Response to the

## External Evaluation Report (Departmental)

### 1. Department's academic profile and orientation

#### 1.1 Mission and strategic planning

The External Evaluation Committee has identified significant overlap between the two MSc programs under review. See for our detailed remarks in the reports of these two MSc programs. Compatibility with other Departments is clear from the exchange of teaching staff between Departments in the currently offered programs.

Response: The two programmes are designed in that way to attract the maximum number of students interested in shipping studies with minimum delivery cost for the department. The Shipping and Finance programme attracts students with good academic background in finance and shipping (or mathematics/statistics, logistics, or engineering), and the Shipping and Business is suitable for students with academic background in general business (ie., marketing, HR, and others) or other more theoretical disciplines like Law, Education, Media and Communication and others. In fact, in the past two years the Shipping and Business Master has received many more applications and receives more attention by potential applicants. Therefore, having these two distinct masters with the aforementioned overlap has the following advantages:

- a. our programmes are open to a broader set of disciplines thus expanding the pool of applicants.
- b. economies of scale as about half of the courses are common among the two degrees.
- c. the expansion of the shipping/business component of the programme is difficult to materialize with the currently available resources but will remain in the agenda as a priority once the faculty vacancies have been filled up.

#### 1.2 Connecting with society

None

#### 1.3 Development processes

The teaching programs currently attract mainly students from Cyprus, and a limited number of students from Greece. The committee has made comments on the teaching in English as part of our evaluation of the courses, which might be considered to

enlarge the pool of students for the various programs, and especially the MSc programs and the PhD program.

Response (a): The official language, set by government law, in our programmes is Greek. It is therefore impossible to change the teaching language to English. However, the department has already worked towards explore the possibility of delivering master programmes solely in English (i.e, as a self-financed programme) and is ready to do so once there is approval and available resources. This will help the department to increase its visibility with regards to foreign students and academic faculty candidates.

*Areas of improvement and recommendations*

- The current staff openings are a concern, because they are primarily in the shipping part of the department's teaching obligations. As a result, the focus of teaching and research shifted somewhat towards finance. Given that there are several positions to fill for shipping related positions, this problem is quite pressing. The Department should take measures to ensure that such a shortage does not persist.

Response (b): Currently the department comprises one resident faculty member and another special teaching scientist in Shipping. For this reason the additional teaching needs in the area of shipping have been largely covered by external teaching special scientists. The special scientists are carefully selected to have excellent background in maritime studies (most of them with a PhD in Maritime Studies) and extensive working experience in the shipping industry. We believe that this combination of high level academic qualifications and professional experience enhances the vocational aspect of our programmes, complements the academic rigour and and helps in the integration of the department with the shipping industry and the employability of the department's graduates.

Beyond these advantages of having special scientists in our programmes (a practice that the department will continue to adopt), the department is in the final stages of recruiting three (3) new staff members for shipping related positions. We expect that the three new members will contribute extensively to the shipping part of our programme, in the areas of teaching, research and administration.

- One recommendation that this committee would like to make in this respect is to consider offering at least one position to a PhD student who has defended or is about to defend their thesis. This is not in accordance with university policy, but in a small Department (and University) we feel that such exceptions might be made.

Response: The department strictly follows all good recruiting practices as stated by the government law and the rules and regulations of the University. Therefore, all our PhD graduates have equal opportunities with the all other candidates of departmental recruiting.

## 2. Quality Assurance

### 2.1 System and quality assurance strategy

None

### 2.2 Quality assurance for the programmes of study

None

#### *Areas of improvement and recommendations*

- Since its inception in 2008, the Department of Commerce Finance and Shipping has been housed in three different locations prior to relocating to its permanent base at the Continental Building in April 2012. It would be strategically important that the University starts thinking about the exclusive use of a building for the Department or/and School, in order to better accommodate all present activities, create the essence of an integrated community, avoid further potentially disruptive relocations and, not least, facilitate any plans for future expansion.

Response: This mainly depends on the University's plans and strategy. As department we will do all necessary steps to inform the University and relevant stakeholders regarding our needs for our own building and facilities.

- While access to both hardware and software is currently adequate, emphasis needs to be given to the continuous upgrade of hardware, and the maintenance of software subscriptions. The same stands true for subscriptions at the, rather costly, databases that are essential for performing business cases at undergraduate and postgraduate levels and research at doctoral level.

Response: The issue with the databases is a budgeting problem that mainly depends on the University since the cost of most financial databases is very big. As department we take every year all necessary steps to inform the University and relevant central services (as this relates to the annual budget of the Library) regarding our needs for databases.

Regarding hardware and software needs, these are partially funded centrally by the University. The department is willing to use departmental funds (generated from tuition fees) to cover part of these needs (if necessary).

## 3. Administration

None

*Areas of improvement and recommendations*

None

**4. Learning and Teaching**

**4.1 Planning the programmes of study**

None

**4.2 Organisation of teaching**

None

*Areas of improvement and recommendations*

- Delineate the research component on the MSc programs (see our programmatic report).

Response: The fact that dissertation is optional is counterbalanced by alternative assessment and teaching approaches in place to ensure that students obtain the necessary research exposure required for a postgraduate degree. The courses are synthesized with projects that enable them to engage in research activities. Often the projects are derived from the faculty members' research interests, although at a reasonable level of difficulty in order to be pursued by students. Additionally, our faculty members attempt to share the findings of their research during their lectures and try to link them with the courses' learning outcomes.

- Develop independent modules for the PhD program that will be more targeted to the needs and requirements of PhD students. (see our programmatic report).

Response: The educational component of the PhD programme has been designed with the objective to maximize the advanced level of knowledge required for research while faced with the constraint of a small cohort of new PhD intake per year (maximum 5 students) and a twofold direction (finance/shipping).

In response to the comments of the committee, we are committed to redesign the compulsory course requirements to a) enrich the level of knowledge offered and b) fit the academic profile of each student. First we intend to revise and limit the elective modules in order to have a more targeted and advanced list of courses. It will be left at the discretion of the supervisors whether the student should attend these modules or be offered exemptions. Students that have already concluded an MSc degree in a relevant field can proceed directly into research after successfully completing the three PhD dedicated modules.

Second, we aim to introduce two additional PhD level block modules to be offered in the Summer semester to support the research skills and level of knowledge of the candidates. This addition will expand the list of PhD dedicated modules from three to five.

Finally, to accommodate some degree of flexibility the supervisory team can set alternative tasks to the candidates in lieu of the listed modules to fit the profile of the candidate and the specific PhD research area. These tasks will count towards the taught ECTS.

## 5. Teaching Staff

### *Areas of improvement and recommendations*

- There are staff shortages in niche areas, such as Shipping, which is supported only by one FT faculty member only.

Response: see response 1.3(b).

- For the MSc electives that are offered to PhD students, teaching should be undertaken only by suitably qualified resident faculty.

Response: The department will take all necessary steps towards this suggestion in the future provided that the efforts to enlarge the pool of resident faculty members are materialized.

## 6. Research

### *Areas of improvement and recommendations*

- Integrate research s into the teaching of the MSc. The research Methods components is a step in the right direction and faculty members have to ensure that it provides a sufficient alternative to a dissertation, especially for students that follow the electives routes for their MSc.

Response: Upon implementing an optional dissertation route the assessment and teaching approaches have been revised to incorporate empirical research projects and case studies that enable students to understand how research achieves best practices. Often the projects are derived from the faculty members' research interests, although at a reasonable level of difficulty in order to be pursued by students. Additionally, our faculty members attempt to share the findings of their research during their lectures and try to link them with the courses' learning outcomes.

## 7. Resources

### *Areas of improvement and recommendations*

- Adding administrative personnel serving exclusively the Department would undoubtedly benefit the quality of the services offered to students attending the programs. Faculty members are supported by one full-time Secretary (administrative staff), who is responsible for organizing the Departmental meetings, the handling of minutes, the handling of all the processes related to promotion of Faculty members, and recruitment of new members of Faculty. The members of staff handling these issues are knowledgeable and devoted but serve a large number of students.

Response: This is a University issue. The department partly agrees with this comment. One secretary is not enough to handle the big number of UG and PG students. For this reason the department will request an additional full-time secretary. At the same time, the department recognizes the importance of having an IT personnel in the building/department. This will help to resolve timely both research and teaching IT problems facing every day. Therefore, the department will request from the University an exclusive IT staff for our department who will be based in the department's premises.

- While access to both hardware and software is currently adequate, emphasis needs to be given to the continuous upgrade of hardware, and the maintenance of software subscriptions. The same stands true for subscriptions at the, rather costly, databases that are essential for performing business cases at undergraduate and postgraduate levels and research at doctoral level.

Response: see response #2.2.

### D. Conclusions and final remarks

- The Department of Commerce and Shipping builds on the expertise of very reputable and experienced faculty to deliver specialist BSc, MSc and PhD programs in Shipping and Finance.
- A strength of the Department is the strong background of the academic and teaching staff. This ensures that the quality of the courses is high and provides the students with a good background and knowledge level for their working life.
- The department offers solid teaching programs at BSc and MSc level, that are highly regarded in the industry and attract the highest numbers of applicants in the university. As such, the department is doing well in portraying a service and industry-

oriented image. In addition, teaching is strong, and provides a good background of quantitative skills to students as well.

- At the same time, there are staff shortages in key areas such as Shipping and Commerce. Given that there are several positions to fill for shipping related positions, this problem is quite pressing. The Department should take measures to ensure that such a shortage does not persist.

Response: see response 1.3(b).

- Finally, we should also mention the institutional obstacles that the department is facing such as the requirement for all courses to be taught in Greek which significantly restricts the pool of applicants as well as academics that can potentially apply for positions.

Response: see response 1.3(a).