

Doc. 300.3.2

07.14.313.008

Higher Education Institution's Response (Departmental)

Date:

- **Higher Education Institution:**
Frederick University
- **Town:** Limassol
- **School:** Business and Law
- **Department:** Maritime transport and Commerce
- **Programme(s) of study under evaluation**
Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)

Programme 1

In Greek:

Ναυτιλιακές Σπουδές [4 ακαδημαϊκά έτη, 240 ECTS, Πτυχίο (BSc)]

In English:

Maritime Studies [4 academic years, 240 ECTS, Bachelor (BSc)]

Programme 2

In Greek:

Διεθνές Εμπόριο και Ναυτιλιακή Διοίκηση [3 ακαδημαϊκά εξάμηνα, 90 ECTS, Μάστερ (MSc)]

In English:

International Trade and Shipping Management [3 academic semesters, 90 ECTS, Master (MSc)]

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

All sub areas marked as Compliant

Quality indicators/criteria

1.1.1	<p>The Department has formally adopted a mission statement, which is available to the public and easily accessible.</p> <p><i>The Department has a formally defined mission and strategic statement, as it was presented to members of this Panel. However, there is no separate formulation of the research statement on the departmental website, that is accessible from the internet.</i></p>	3
1.3.3	<p>The Department applies an effective strategy of attracting high-level students from Cyprus and abroad</p> <p><i>Admission criteria for the BSc course appear to be dependent only on school-leaving certificate and competency of English language. This can be a justifiable choice, but it has consequences as the average duration of studies is well above four academic years. This EEC understands that this may also be due to many students switching to Part-Time studies as they progress through their studies. In any case, in the long-run, being more selective on the admissions will only benefit the department and enhance the quality of the academic program. Furthermore, while students pointed out that Part-Time studies were a preferred choice, the Department is recommended to review this practice as the percentage of students in need of one or two extra semester to finish the studies was quite high.</i></p>	3

Regarding Quality indicator **1.1.1**, the Department's mission statement is published on the University's website as shown [here](#). It is further noted that the University is in the process of deploying its new web site where the Departmental statements and other relevant information will be more prominently displayed.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- 1.a. A problem area identified by the committee is the entry level of the Bachelors program. Here students are offered entry into the program based on their school-leaving certificate and competency of English language. This is not a very selective process and the risk is that some weaker students will also be admitted. This EEC feels that

the program will benefit from being more selective in the process of admitting students.

Regarding Quality Criterion **1.3.3** and recommendation **1.a**, the issue of entrance criteria has been discussed both internally at the Department and with senior management. We believe that setting an entrance criterion of a 75% grade on the school leaving certificate as well as English language competency proves to be effective in ensuring that admitted students are well qualified to complete the degree. It is important to stress that there has been a misunderstanding in relation to the percentage of students that complete the programme within it's 4-year duration which we are clarifying below. A lot of our students undertake courses in summer semesters during their studies, especially all students taking work placement are doing so in summer semesters. To this end, in the automated data created it was shown that a significant percentage of students require more than 8 semesters to complete their studies as summer studies were accounted for as additional semesters. However, further analysis taking into account this fact indicates that about 75% of the students complete their studies within the 4-year duration which we consider to be appropriate, given that also several students prefer to enter into part-time work in the field in the last year of studies.

1.b. Some of the key external experts that provide for the outstanding recognition of the MSc program have reached an age in which succession planning may be advisable in order to ensure the high level of quality in the long run.

As discussed with the EEC, one of the key strengths of the Department is its strong network of external experts that complement the programme and offer students a unique blend of theoretical and applied knowledge. We are aware of the need for a renewal strategy and we completely agree with the Committee's comments. In fact, steps had already been taken towards succession planning before the accreditation with steps carefully considered and implemented by the Department to address retiring faculty in a timely manner. We have already identified external experts' replacements, as an example we are already in verbal agreement with Michel Christensen for this, and all necessary replacements will be effected from 2023 to 2025.

2. Quality Assurance

Sub-areas

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

All sub areas marked as Compliant

Quality indicators/criteria

2.1.4.2	<p>Research</p> <p><i>There is no clear target focus on research. Some suggestions for the department to consider is setting up a Journals list as well as targets for peer-review publications. It may also be advisable to consider developing a list of focus areas for research in order to bundle competences and to direct the development of deeper academic impact. Similarly, it appears that there is no formal quality assurance system for research.</i></p>	3
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Areas of improvement and recommendations

2.a. The committee had some concerns as to the research output and quality of the department. The committee has not identified a clearly articulated policy to promote research quality, such as a preferred journals list, clear time allocations for research and education time for staff members, a research strategy based on student's MSc thesis, or individual or collective publication targets.

The committee recommends the development of a research strategy that is in line with the requirements and expectations of the business community of ship management and operations, and that explicitly includes the work of BSc and MSc students, as well as long-term (financial) involvement of companies.

Department's Response:

2.a. In response to the Quality Criterion **2.1.4.2** and recommendation **2.a**, we would like to note the following: First, we acknowledge that earlier efforts of the Department towards

research activity have not been effective. To address this area of deficiency the Department has set out, as of March 2019 a strategic plan to reinforce research. The main goals and actions completed according to the Research Strategy plan are summarized below. The entire text of the strategic plan is attached in **Annex 01**.

Goal 1: Increase capacity and capability of Dept Research Team

Principle Actions Completed:

- A Head of Research for the department was appointed in September 2019. A second staff was also hired to assist in the effort.
- A Research committee has been formed on the Dept Advisory Board, to review strategy, contribute ideas and support external relationships.
- A set of research performance KPIs have been set and clearly communicated to faculty (available in the **Annex 02**). The KPIs include target publications to selected ranked referred journals, articles in high impact factor journals, attained funding and number of PhD students supervised. The performance of each faculty member in relation to the set KPIs, as well as the performance of the department as a whole is reviewed on an annual basis. It is worth noting that since the EEC's visit eleven (11) journal articles, three (3) books and two (2) conference papers have already been published (see **Annex 03**).
- A clear focus towards applied, industry funded research has been set out, in line with the niche and reputation of the institution in Marine & Maritime research.

Goal 2: Involvement of Students in Research & Department Activities

Principle Actions Completed:

- Student topics for BSc and MSc dissertations have been reviewed and updated. In turn the topics were discussed with the Advisory Board to ensure relevance to and support from industry.
- Coordinate and collaborate with the Department of Business that operates the PhD in Management programme of study so as to accept suitable candidates in the maritime field and allow for co-supervision by faculty of our Department. It is noted that already one student has been admitted to the program and a second application is under

consideration for admission. We would like to point out that the existence of doctoral students is essential for the materialization of the department's research targets. We believe that in the medium term the Department should develop its own PhD program to support this goal

Goal 3: Participating in calls & tenders

Principle Actions Completed:

- Established an alert and monitoring system for national, regional and EU calls.
- Department research profile has been setup on NCP Care, LIFE, Conexus, Med Blue Economy Stakeholder Platforms, offering our partnership expertise.

Goal 4: Transfer of Know How/Interaction with Industry & Society

Principle Actions Completed:

- Established a Department Advisory Board consisting of industry Leaders and former government ministers.
- Entered Memo of Cooperation with Limassol Municipality, to engage with industry and citizens on Blue Growth and Environmental Sustainability and delivered public webinar with industry experts from regional network. Substantial press coverage and stakeholder response.
- Entered MoU with Italian Chamber of Commerce to explore partnerships on Green City/Blue Port concepts and projects
- Established MoUs with various international University research centres
- MoU with Fameline Holding Group to collaborate on student research and innovation

Goal 5: Networking on National & International level

Principle Actions Completed:

- A Contact Relationship Management (CRM) application has been established, where profiles of companies and individuals in the department research network is maintained.



- Faculty is encouraged to participate and represent the department at physical conferences and online webinars, promoting the ongoing effort and capability of the department.

We highlight the above points in order to emphasize that, irrespective of the current evaluation (since 2019), the Department not only acknowledged the need to improve on research but more importantly, has taken solid steps towards improvement. In summary, we would like to point out that we have ourselves identified the need for improvement in the specific area and we believe that the action plan decided in 2019 is along the correct track. Clearly, such plans require time to bear fruits but we believe that it is clear from the accomplishments described above that the Department is on the right path to meet its goals.

3. Administration

All sub areas marked as Compliant

Areas of improvement and recommendations

3.a. The committee has not immediate areas for improvement in this assessment area.

4. Learning and Teaching

All sub areas marked as Compliant

Quality indicators/criteria

4.1.3	<p>Intended learning outcomes, the content of the programmes of study, the assignments and the final exams correspond to the appropriate level as indicated by the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).</p> <p><i>Programs are tailored and attuned to industry needs. However, some of the learning outcomes in module specifications are convoluted and, for the MSc course in particular, do not appear to be consistent with a Masters' level program. In addition, the Literature also appears to be out of date and overly comprehensive.</i></p>	3
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Areas of improvement and recommendations

4.a. The course catalogue requires an overhaul in terms of the formulation of intended learning outcomes (ILOs). We recommend a small set of main ILOs at the program level, and then distributing these outcomes to individual courses, adhering strictly to Bloom's (or another coherent) taxonomy, and an organized ILO hierarchy. This will result in a more limited set of ILOs per course, which will tie in more logically with assessment types and course delivery. It should be recognized that each ILO specified requires an assessment strategy. The more ILO's specified, the more comprehensive an assessment will be, which could easily lead to an over-assessment in the program.

4.b. The reading for many of the courses was an overly comprehensive list of books that all cover more or less the same material. In addition, a very limited set of sources was used as required reading (notably the Stopford book on Maritime Economics). The committee recommends to revisit this reading list, select relevant literature (and discard the rest), and then complement with seminal papers and journal articles that represent more recent outcomes from Research and Development. If collection books are used, perhaps a more useful approach would be to develop independent syllabi that contain the relevant chapters only.

4.c. Regarding Quality Criterion **4.1.3** and recommendation **4.a and 4.b**, all comments in relation to the ILO have been adopted and new Course Descriptions for the Programs have been prepared, submitted in the **Annex 03**, which strive to improve on all counts of the recommendations. Further to enrichment with well-established textbooks the courses will be updated with articles from high impact academic journals in the field so that students can interact with state-of-the-art research in the specific fields

It is noted that this revision process forms a part of continuous efforts towards improvement and the course descriptions will be revisited every time a course is offered and the Department will track the amendments and improvements made.

5. Teaching Staff

All sub areas marked as Compliant

Areas of improvement and recommendations

5.a. The practitioners in the teaching staff are about to reaching retirement age. The department would be advised to consider succession planning for those practitioners, preferably from their own alumni network in Cyprus.

Please refer to answer 1.b. Specifically, the Department has discussed the matter with the collaborating practitioners that are approaching retirement age and for the majority a succession plan has been set between 2023 and 2025. Importantly, as the EEC recommended, we have already proceeded with engaging young and promising alumni that are involved in the sector with research contracts. This allows for the appropriate training and induction of young practitioners to the operations of the Department and the collaboration with existing staff on various domains, this allowing for a smooth transition within the planned succession period.

5.b. In addition, the strong focus on education and industry connections, partly dependent on the interests and status of the practitioners, may be an obstacle for a more effective research-based orientation of the department faculty. For the longer term, the department will have to develop a research-based leadership role for the ship management and operations community, while still being close to the local businesses. The right choice of new practitioners, as well as a hybrid approach where practitioners can also build an academic research record - partly in industry, and partly in academia - could be part of this development.

We agree with the EEC's comment and in fact, we believe, a significant reason of the success and respect the program commands in the industry is due to the balance between practitioners and theoretical engagement. We understand that there were some shortcomings in relation to the research-based orientation but we believe that (a) with the corresponding research plan developed in 2019 and (b) with the results already achieved, we are on the right track of addressing this. We strongly agree that a significant aspect for the future success is maintaining the hybrid approach in relation to the practitioners' engagement, whose



contribution is invaluable for keeping the program as a leader in the sector's preference. This can be achieved with ensuring that the selection process for future replacements takes this dimension into account, i.e. indicating that the dual role of industry and academia can be undertaken, but more importantly, with the promotion of the doctoral program within which promising practitioners can engage in academic research that would significantly complement both their teaching support and the achievement of the department's research goals

6. Research

Quality indicator / criterion

6.1	The Department has a research policy formulated in line with its mission	3
6.2	The Department consistently applies internal regulations and procedures of research activity, which promote the set out research policy and ensure compliance with the regulations of research projects financing programmes.	3
6.5	The results of the teaching staff research activity are published to a satisfactory extent in international journals which work with critics, international conferences, conference proceedings, publications, etc. The Department also uses an open access policy for publications, which is consistent with the corresponding national and European policy.	3
6.6	<p>The Department ensures that research results are integrated into teaching and, to the extent applicable, promotes and implements a policy of transferring know-how to society and the production sector.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>There is no clearly defined research policy.</i> • <i>Limited number of publications in peer-review Journals</i> • <i>There are no clearly defined research targets for individual faculty</i> • <i>There is no consistency in research grants and research focus areas</i> 	3

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- 6.a. The volume and quality of the research output can still be significantly improved. A number of department faculty do not seem to be involved in research at all. Our recommendations are that the department develops a research strategy that is in line with its strong industry-oriented teaching programs. For the longer-term development of the industry relationships, research will become important.
- 6.b. It is also important to recruit research staff from the population of graduates and alumni, and develop arrangements in which the faculty of the department can work closely with representatives of the industry and students in research projects, that at the same time result in publications in quality peer-review journals.

- 6.c. It is pivotal to develop a research strategy that is industry focused, since this will strengthen the relationship with the industry, and complement the teaching in both shipping programs. It is also important not to create a group of people in the department who focus only on research. The research policy of the department should take this into account.
- 6.d. Finally, we see a big role for the students' thesis projects. The department should be more supportive to students who want to take up challenging and new topics, that may not be directly relevant for their employer, or work environment. The department should also screen all thesis projects annually, to determine which ones are publishable, which ones might be presented at the annual industry seminar, and for which thesis projects, cooperation with other departments might be sought. In the next accreditation, the material should contain reporting on: thesis topics, follow up at companies, journal publications related to theses, and so on.

Department's Response:

With respect to Departmental efforts to improve on research activity, particularly with respect to adhering to a specific research policy, please refer to answer 2.a.

Some additional pointers, as per the recommendations made, are listed below:

- We have deployed a targeted action plan for increased research output both in quality and quantity, as presented in Annex 01. As mentioned, this has already started yielding results. We strongly focus our success on maintaining industrial links and to this end we have engaged in an applied research with the key stakeholders in maritime in Cyprus
- The link or student projects, especially at graduate level, with publishable work is understood. The Department has updated the goals of master thesis and also provides incentives for presenting the work in local conferences in order to promote the research culture in the community.
- As per the recommendation, research staff are employed from the pool of alumni that will assist industry-centered research activities

- Finally, we take note and agree with the point that research activity should not be restricted to a specific subset of the faculty. Although invariably certain members of staff will be more research active than others, the departmental research strategy is clear in setting research engagement goals for all elected members of staff. Details of the plan are provided in Annex 01 and key goals are provided in part 2a of this response. Furthermore, the university has clear criteria for promotion which have as a key and inseparable element for promotion the proof of academic research output.

7. Resources

All sub areas marked as Compliant

Areas of improvement and recommendations

7.a. The department should consider drawing up a wish list of resources, conditional on the formulation of a departmental research strategy with medium to long term time horizons

The Department has been in communication with senior management to ensure support for its research strategy both in the short term and medium term. A series of actions have been approved to this end by the Department as listed below for the short term:

- Employment of alumni in research support positions and for extending the network of practitioners' support. The Department currently employs two such alumni that assist in the research activities undertaken for the Blue Marine study in collaboration with the Municipality of Limassol
- Establishment of an internal research funding scheme within the university so as to assist small-scale research proposals and kickstart research activities of faculty that have remained inactive
- Implementation of a teaching load reduction scheme to support faculty, especially new colleagues, for engaging and enhancing their research activity
- Registering in relevant data banks in order to enable research both by undergraduate and postgraduate students but also assist faculty in their research fields. The Department is already registered with "Clarksons Shipping Intelligence Network", one of the most prominent databanks in shipping and will have access to Tradesviews, a database of more than 20 years of dry and wet cargo data from this semester

It is noted that all the short term actions suggested have been approved and are in development. Furthermore, medium term actions have also been formed and approved by the Department:

- Development of a dedicated doctoral program in the Department so as to enhance research engagement and culture
- Approval of budget for a senior visiting professor scheme that will allow experienced professors from established universities to take residency for a period (usually during the sabbatical) at the Department in order to seed research activities
- Support for networking activities with established maritime academies globally in order to expand the collaborating network of the Department

B. Conclusions and final remarks

1. The School of Business and Law of Frederik University builds on the expertise of experienced resident faculty and seasoned market practitioners to deliver specialist BSc, MSc and online courses in Shipping.

A strength of the Department is the practical experience of the teaching staff. This ensures that the quality of the courses is high and provides the students with solid practical knowledge for their working life. Students have expressed great satisfaction with the knowledge, support and dedication of the teaching staff.

2. The department plays a key role in delivering job opportunities to the students, and this is appreciated both by students as well as the business community. The industry links with the domestic shipping cluster is clearly one of the advantages of this course.
3. At the same time, the absence of clear research culture and vision in research is obvious and may affect the long-term prospects and competitiveness of the degrees. This committee had some concerns as to the research output and quality of the department. The committee has not identified a clearly articulated policy to promote research quality, such as a preferred journals list, clear time allocations for research and education time for staff members, a research strategy based on student's MSc thesis, or individual or collective publication targets. This is something that the Leadership of the University should address.
4. In addition, the course catalogue requires an overhaul in terms of the formulation of intended learning outcomes (ILOs). We recommend a small set of main ILOs at the

program level, and then distributing these outcomes to individual courses, adhering strictly to Bloom's (or another coherent) taxonomy, and an organized ILO hierarchy. A similar overhaul is also in order for the reading lists for many of the courses.

5. Finally, succession planning is something that the Department will need to take seriously over the coming years. Many of the practitioners in the teaching staff are about to reaching retirement age. The department would be advised to consider succession planning for those practitioners, preferably from their own alumni network in Cyprus.

Firstly, we would like to thank they EEC for their hard work invaluable comments and suggestions both during the visit and in the provided report. We believe we have addressed all the comments and adopted all recommendations made by the EEC. In particular, in relation to the concluding remarks:

- We work very hard to maintain an appropriate balance of theoretical knowledge hybridized with applied knowledge obtained from esteemed practitioners. It is a top priority of the Department to maintain collaborations with practitioners that are able to provide this additional dimension to the program and, as noted by the EEC, ensure that the programs offered are highly appreciated both by the students themselves as well as the employers.
- The limitations in research output and environment have been noted and accepted. In fact, we have identified this shortcoming ourselves and we have devised an action plan to address this. We have elaborated in our response the various dimensions of actions taken and it is already evident that these are yielding results in the correct direction.
- We accept that the learning outcomes at the graduate programs of the department were insufficiently targeted and required further structure and focus as well as encompassing within an appropriate taxonomy framework. This has been rectified as per the provided revised relevant documents in **Annex 03**.
- Succession planning has already been considered and we expect to have replacements from 2023 in relation to the practitioners employed. It is noted that we accept and adopt the EEC's suggestion of engaging Department's alumni for this role; we are already employed two of our graduates for research roles in the Department in order to prepare this process, as suggested.



C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Signature</i>
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Prof. George Demosthenous Rector

