

Doc. 300.3.2

Date: 21/09/2023

Higher Education Institution's Response

(Departmental)

- **Higher Education Institution:**
University of Nicosia
- **Town:** Nicosia
- **School/Faculty:** School of Sciences and Engineering
- **Department:** Department of Engineering
- **Programme(s) of study under evaluation**
Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)

Programme 1

In Greek:

Programme Name

In English:

Oil and Gas Engineering (4 years, 240 ECTS, Bachelor of Science)

Programme 2

In Greek:

Programme Name

In English:

Oil, Gas and Energy Engineering (1.5 years, 90 ECTS, Master of Science)

Programme 3

In Greek:

Programme Name

In English:

Oil, Gas and Energy Engineering (3 years, 180 ECTS, Doctor of Philosophy (PhD))

- **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 2021 [L.136(I)/2015 – L.132(I)/2021].

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

1.1 Mission and Strategic Planning

Comments from the EEC:

Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

The department has a clear mission statement which is communicated openly. The same holds for the overall strategy. The faculty appear to contribute to it and for their feedback to be accounted for but such contributions can be made in a more formal, explicit, way.

Additionally, provide information on the following:

1. Coherence and compatibility among programmes of study offered by the Department.
2. Coherence and compatibility among Departments within the School/Faculty (to which the Department under evaluation belongs).

The programmes of study provide a coherent set from undergraduate through to PhD in the Department. Modules are gradually becoming more technical and closer to the knowledge frontier, a consistent group of faculty members teaches the module and overall there appears to be compatibility among programmes. Remaining departments of the school of Engineering, where the focal department belongs, also appear compatible.

Provide suggestions for changes in case of incompatibility.

Responses by the HEI:

We would like to thank the EEC for their feedback and positive comments and would like to assure them as well as the CYQAA that we will continue monitoring the quality of our programmes and ensure that our teaching and academic support to our students and faculty are of the highest quality, follow international standards and adopt emerging developments. We want to assure the EEC that we will continue to work focused on our mission statement, monitoring the coherency of our programs and investing on our faculty development and training.

1.2 Connecting with society

Comments from the EEC:

Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

The department engages in a number of activities that build bridges with the broader society including articles in the popular press, strong collaboration with industry and participation in events. The programs that the department provides address recent job demands and the very high record of employability among its graduates speaks to that effect. The department is advised to document its impact on society in a consistent and measurable way.

Responses by the HEI:

We welcome the EEC's positive comments. In response to the comments of the committee, the Department has instructed the Department's existing Programmes Promotion and Industrial Liaison Committees to keep a record with all their activities including a list of participants, and the expected and achieved benefits from each action taken.

1.3 Development processes

Comments from the EEC:

Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

Faculty members are well qualified and the fact that there is a relatively low turnaround among faculty is an indication that the department offers an environment that the faculty members appreciate. The EEC notes that the current teaching load is rather on the heavy side and this may discourage promising candidates to apply. The teaching remission scheme is a positive step to address the issue and the EEC encourages further effort towards that end. Also, the EEC commends the university, and the department more specifically for the provision of different forms of funding opportunities for faculty including seed funding and publication-based bonuses. That said, funding for larger investments is a point of attention as the space for laboratories is limited and this stands in the way of further development for faculty and students alike.

Regarding student attraction, the department appears to rely on university wide-efforts to promote the university and local and international networks. The EEC notes that there is space for improvement especially on the former as the funds meant to promote the programmes of the department of Engineering can be increased.

Additionally, write:

- Expected number of Cypriot and international students
- Countries of origin of international students and number from each country

Using data on enrollment over the last 5 years the department admits per year, on average, 22 undergraduate students, 8 graduate students and 1 or 2 doctoral students. The department aspires to grow these numbers by 30 percent which would translate to 29 undergraduate, 10 graduate and more than 2 doctoral students. The student population is rather diverse in terms of country of origin where nearly half of the students are from Cyprus and the remaining from abroad with Russian, Lebanese, Greeks and Camerons heading that category. Other countries in Africa are also represented among the student population.

Responses by the HEI:

The Department has asked the university management to include in the 5-year development budget room for more laboratories. We expect this to materialize in the coming years since there is a project about to begin for a multi-storey new building to house the Medical School and other health-related programmes. Three of these programmes (Pharmacy, Physiotherapy and Veterinary Medicine) are currently housed in the same building as the Department of Engineering Labs and some of the released space from their labs will be available for expanding the Department's lab capacity.

Please note that the numbers of students provided by the EEC are only for the programmes under evaluation (3 out of 9 of the programmes offered by the Department). The average intake per year for the Department is around 80 students, 15 of which are MSc and PhD students.

Comments from the EEC:

Findings

A short description of the situation in the Department based on evidence from the Department's application and the site - visit.

The Department functions well with teaching and research activities being well organized and communicated to faculty. The mission and the strategy of the department are aligned with those of the University and in broad strokes the EEC assess the department positively.

Space limitations for laboratories are a point that needs attention for multiple reasons including safety, potential to grow and enrich research and practice and others.

Faculty appear collegial and teaching duties appear balanced across faculty with teaching duties matching faculty research and expertise. The programmes are generally well planned and indeed build on each other from undergraduate level up to the PhD. Teaching loads can become somewhere lighter and the teaching reduction plan is a promising step to address that issue. The EEC appreciates the provision of different forms of funding available to support research. Engagement with society such as participation in local events and the engineering summer school is strong but there is some space for improvement. Involvement with industry works well within the boundaries of the relatively limited local market.

Strengths

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

- 1. Efforts to promote research via publication bonuses and other means.*
- 2. Matching of teaching with faculty expertise and qualifications.*
- 3. Realistic ambition level fit to the resources of the university and its boundaries as a private university relying on tuition fees and not on government funding.*

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

- 1. Space limitations for laboratories. This is particularly important for a number of reasons prime among them being that doctoral students do not have dedicated space for their research. Also, having a safe and designated space for chemical storage is highly recommended.*
- 2. Teaching load can become lighter for faculty. A potential way to do that is via the introduction of Teaching Assistants or recruitment of new full time/part time academics.*

Responses by the HEI:

We welcome the comments of the EEC. Indeed, the introduction of the publication award scheme three years ago has helped increase significantly the number of publications as well as improve the quality of the publications. This directly affects the quality of teaching since active participation in state-of-the-art research activities strengthens the faculty expertise.

1. As mentioned earlier, the Department has asked the university management to include in the 5-year development budget room for more laboratories. We expect this to materialize in the coming years since there is a project about to begin for a multi-storey new building to house the Medical School and other health-related programmes. Three of these programmes (Pharmacy, Physiotherapy and Veterinary Medicine) are currently housed in the same building as the Department of Engineering Labs and some of the released space from their labs will be available for expanding the Department's lab capacity.
2. The Department will attempt to further reduce the teaching load of the faculty members (with the limit of the minimum teaching hours required by their contracts and the collective agreement in force) by recruiting more part-time personnel as well as taking advantage of the recently established policy regarding Teaching Assistantship by PhD candidates.

2. Quality Assurance

Sub-areas

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

Comments from the EEC:

2.1 System and quality assurance strategy

Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

The department has put in place a number of committees meant to provide quality assurance. These committees appear to work efficiently with rules and regulations being clearly communicated to students and faculty. The quality assurance approach follows the US system which relies on internal faculty members for quality assurance. A potentially promising approach to strengthen the quality assurance process is to introduce external examiners. External examiners are faculty from other universities, which could be from Cyprus or abroad, who are tasked with quality assurance checks including scrutineering exams, checking consistency between modules, reviewing alignment between learning goals and taught material and the like.

2.2 Quality assurance for the programmes of study

Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

The main area of concern is the rather limited laboratory space available to the department. Also, laboratory housekeeping and safety signs were rather poor and need further attention. This is a boundary for the growth of research, for the development of doctoral students and for the efficiency of teaching. Along the same lines, safety protocols must be developed and followed closely. The fact that the labs are in a different location from the faculty offices presents an additional, lesser, concern as this adds logistical and transportation complications. The library appears to run well but given its space there is the potential to become crowded when semesters are in full swing.

Findings

A short description of the situation in the Department based on evidence from the Department's application and the site - visit.

Clearly stated and communicated quality assurance processes are in place but there is space for improvement especially when it comes to establishing and following safety protocols.

Introducing external examiners in the quality assurance process would be a very strong addition as the moment that process relies only on internal faculty members. External members can examine the processes with a fresh eye, bring in new ideas and likely be less prone to potential biases that can come along when quality process lack an outsider's perspective.

Strengths

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

Specific protocols and dedicated committees are in place in charge of quality assurance.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

The EEC strongly recommends the introduction of external examiners as part of the quality assurance process.

Responses by the HEI:

We thank the EEC for the feedback and provide below the actions taken/to be taken for addressing their concerns.

The university regulations are aligned to the North American system and do not incorporate any provision for external examiners. Hence, there are no adopted procedures for the utilization of external examiners. Nevertheless, the Department is more than willing to utilize external examiners if the university's regulations adopt such a policy. To this direction, the Dean of the School will take the issue to the University Senate and Council. In any case, we believe that the Departmental Quality Assurance Committee ensures to a great extent the quality of the assessment methodology as well as the consistency across the various courses offered in the Department. Finally, as an additional level of quality assurance of our programs, the Department follows a university-wide procedure for the periodic evaluation of its programmes (Internal Program Evaluation Process - IPEP) where external evaluators are appointed to review the academic paths, as well as the processes established for quality assurance. Their feedback is documented, and each programme coordinator proposes possible mitigation actions to address possible findings by the IPEP.

As mentioned in the previous section, we expect that the Department will be given space to expand its laboratory capacity after the relocation of three other programmes (Pharmacy, Physiotherapy and Veterinary Medicine) to another building.

Regarding the lab safety and housekeeping issues mentioned, the department has taken the following measures:

- a. Updated the thorough lab safety manual to be provided to all students in their first laboratory course taken at the university (attached as Annex 1).
- b. In collaboration with the university's Health and Safety Officer, added the necessary signs in all its laboratory spaces.
- c. Removed incompatible electric appliances from the laboratories (e.g. microwave oven).

Furthermore, we note that the comment regarding the location of the faculty offices is obviously due to a misunderstanding. All the faculty teaching in the programmes (except from the Dean of the School), including those responsible for the laboratories, have their offices in the building where the laboratories are located.

3. Administration

Comments from the EEC:

Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

The EEC notes strong administrative support offered to faculty and students and the department is fully compliant regarding administration.

Findings

A short description of the situation in the Department based on evidence from the Department's application and the site - visit.

The Department complies with the administrative process set by the university which are clear, and follow standard practices. Administrators are committed to offering strong support and may go well and beyond formal duties when there is a need. The fact that members of the admin support team are employed at the department for a number of years is a strong indication of a robust programme. Plagiarism and similar practices are becoming more of a concern in the era of significant advances in Artificial intelligence and this is an issue to be dealt with carefully from all universities globally including the department of Engineering at the University of Nicosia. The Department has a certain degree of autonomy in setting its mission, but many funding decisions lie at the university level and this is a limitation in terms of what the department can do in practice. For example, lab space limitations, which are arguably the main point of attention, can be dealt with only centrally.

Strengths

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

- 1. Committed and experienced administrative support.*
- 2. Clear protocols put in place.*
- 3. Administrative team has worked together at the department for a number of years.*

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

The EEC finds the administrative component of the department to operate at the highest possible level.

Responses by the HEI:

We would like to thank the committee for their feedback and positive comments. The administrative support provided by experienced personnel in the centralized system followed by the university greatly advances the quality of service received by the students and faculty.

4. Learning and Teaching

Sub-areas

4.1 Planning the programmes of study

4.2 Organisation of teaching

Comments from the EEC:

4.1 Planning the programmes of study

Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

The department reviews its programmes regularly, consults with stakeholders and the EEC found the programmes of study to be at least on par with comparable programmes abroad.

4.2 Organisation of teaching

Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

The small cohorts of most programmes, the clear protocols in place for quality control, and the positive attitude of instructors when it comes to mentoring even beyond class hours contribute positively to a proper organization of teaching and student-centered learning.

Findings

A short description of the situation in the Department based on evidence from the Department's application and the site - visit.

The EEC found the department to operate at a high level when it comes to learning and teaching.

There are protocols in place and dedicated personnel for student welfare, career support and pastoral care. Each student is also allocated a personal tutor and this is another layer of student support.

Faculty teach on modules they have expertise on and the programmes are structured in a way that minimizes overlap between modules. Indeed, latter modules build on early modules and students are progressively exposed to more challenging material.

Learning and teaching are student centered and this manifests in many ways including the following. The instructors have an open-door policy and the small cohorts allow them to monitor student progress regularly. Classrooms are of adequate size but there is significant space for improvement when it comes to laboratory facilities. Student representatives participate in quality assurance committees and marking criteria are clear and communicated early in the term. The programmes offered by the department also offer practical training such as the internship of the Bachelor's programme.

The doctoral programme is rather small with 1 or 2 intakes per year and this is a point of concern as such a small cohort is bound to generate small, if any, knowledge spillovers within its members.

Strengths

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

- 1. Faculty teach on modules linked to their areas of expertise.*
- 2. Open door policy for students.*
- 3. Student representatives in quality assurance committees.*

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

- 1. Laboratory space.*
- 2. While the programmes are organized in a coherent manner, it would help to also receive more feedback from the outside likely in the form of external examiners. This is a strong recommendation from the EEC as it noted that the delivery of some modules may not be following best practices*

including overly long collection of crowded slides. Having an external examiner would likely minimize the frequency of such cases.

- 3. The doctoral programme needs to grow so that students have the opportunity to learn from each other.*

Responses by the HEI:

We thank the EEC for the constructive comments. Indeed, the Department gives priority to assigning courses to faculty members with a high level of expertise in the subject. In cases where this is not possible, we recruit experts from industry to teach courses thus ensuring that our students receive the highest quality of education possible. The open-door policy has been a part of the university culture from the time of its establishment. Having student representatives participating in quality assurance and other committees provides us with valuable feedback to understand their needs in the teaching process that aims to help them succeed in their career.

Regarding the issues raised above:

1. Please refer to Section 1 response for lab spaces.
2. Please refer to Section 2 response for external examiners.
3. Please note that the number of new PhD students per year is ~5. The numbers mentioned are only for the PhD in Oil, Gas and Energy Engineering. The Department has asked the marketing department to boost the advertising of PhD programmes. Additionally, the Department attempts to establish collaborations with research centers in Cyprus and abroad which do not offer PhD programmes in order to co-supervise researchers who want to pursue a PhD degree in research topics of common interest and utilize available funding in this direction.

5. Teaching Staff

Comments from the EEC:

Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

The EEC finds that the teaching staff is highly qualified and the small cohorts allow for very favorable teacher student ratios. Permanent and visiting staff are on a good balance too.

Also, write the following:

- Number of teaching staff working full-time and having exclusive work
- Number of special teaching staff working full-time and having exclusive work
- Number of visiting Professors :
- Number of special scientists on lease services

The department hosts 16 research teaching staff members, 1 special teaching staff member, 16 research teaching staff members from other departments of the University (Mathematics, Computer Science, Architecture), 23 Adjunct Faculty (industry, research centres, partner institutions) and 5 Research teaching staff members teaching free electives such as languages, business and economics.

Findings

A short description of the situation in the Department based on evidence from the Department's application and the site - visit.

The teaching staff are highly qualified and are selected carefully. Teaching is provided by 16 research teaching staff members, 1 special teaching staff member, 16 research teaching staff members from other departments of the University (Mathematics, Computer Science, Architecture), 23 Adjunct Faculty (industry, research centres, partner institutions) and 5 Research teaching staff members teaching free electives such as languages, business and economics.

The EEC find the teaching – support faculty numbers to be adequate to fully support the department's programmes and to offer a good teacher – student ratio. Teaching staff employ interactive teaching methods and the fact that they also engage in research is a plus as they bring, to the degree possible, their research into teaching.

Gender and nationality diversity among faculty can be improved significantly to match the international and gender diverse student population of the department and the university more broadly.

Strengths

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

1. Faculty bring their research into teaching
2. Faculty teach on areas of their expertise
3. Highly qualified faculty members

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

1. *The EEC strongly recommends to the department to engage in targeted practices meant to improve diversity, gender and nationality, among its permanent and part-time faculty. These may include facilities for child care as a means to attract qualified female candidates, international recruiting campaigns, provisions for couple hiring and the like. Such efforts are unlikely to yield drastic results in the short run but are very likely to pay off in the medium and long run.*
2. *The EEC also recommends to offer more and more frequent training programs for teaching to ensure that faculty are up to date with the latest developments and methods in teaching delivery.*

Responses by the HEI:

We would like to thank the committee for their kind words about the personnel teaching in the programmes of the Department. The established university procedures for hiring as well as for promotion and the awarding of tenure ensure both the selection of high-caliber academics as well as robust support for their continuous development.

Regarding the issues raised above:

1. The department will follow specific practices in all future faculty recruitment calls in order to improve the diversity, gender, and nationality among the permanent faculty member:
 - a. Add a footnote saying: “The University adopts an equal opportunity policy at recruitment and encourages both genders to apply for all levels of Academic and Administrative Staff. The University does not discriminate in any way based on gender, religion or belief, ethnicity, national or social origin, age, physical ability, marital status, or sexual orientation.”
 - b. Explicitly announce them in international venues such as academic vacancies portals, conferences, research communities, as well as female-oriented communities such as IEEE Women in Engineering and Society of Women Engineers (SWE).
 - c. Include in all full-time hiring committees a female member from a related field from another department of the university (if such faculty member exists).
2. The university regularly offers faculty training, organized centrally by the university’s Pedagogical Support Unit. An example of this training can be found in <https://www.unic.ac.cy/psu/training-and-development-for-faculty/>. Also there is an internal knowledge base with prerecorded tutorial videos for all the teaching tools that are provided from the university. All faculty members, including newly hired and part-timers have access to this material to receive the appropriate training.

6. Research

Comments from the EEC:

Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

The EEC notes that the department faculty engage in research activities, has developed mechanisms to promote and sustain research and overall offers an environment that is conducive to research. The main point of attention is the relatively limited laboratory space. This is a significant bottleneck regarding research not only for faculty but also for students at all levels, particularly PhDs.

Findings

A short description of the situation in the Department based on evidence from the Department's application and the site - visit.

The department faculty engage in research in line with the University mission and regulations and the associated evaluation criteria for faculty comprising research, teaching and service.

The increase in the rate of publications over time is a strong indication of the research efforts among faculty. Importantly, the majority of those publications appear in leading outlets as proxied by Q1 publications in the SCOPUS database (e.g., 85 percent of SCOPUS-indexed publications in the Engineering department in 2022 are in the Q1 quartile). Indeed, by and large, faculty members have good research records. Faculty members also serve as journal editors and evaluation experts outside the university, participate in and organize scientific conferences and have attracted research funding at noteworthy levels. The EEC has also noted that faculty members have international collaborations both with industry and academia.

The department offers teaching reduction for faculty attracting research funds and importantly has devised a number of schemes to provide research funding including the yearly research budget, publication bonuses and seed funding distributed on a competitive basis. All these initiatives are much appreciated by the EEC.

Research is an integral part of promotion criteria which are communicated clearly to faculty members. As noted above, limited lab availability is the largest challenge for the department and that scarcity can impact research performance and growth negatively.

Strengths

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

- 1. Different internal funding schemes available to faculty.*
- 2. Faculty's research is of international standing with a focus on publishing on leading outlets. The publications records of the faculty are at least comparable to other departments in Cyprus and abroad.*
- 3. Teaching remission available for faculty attracting external research funds.*

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

- 1. The EEC encourages the Department to consider mechanisms to support the faculty members in proposal writing. For example, faculty with recent experience in attracting funds may be invited to offer seminars or the department may set aside a budget specifically for professional proposal writing.*
- 2. The internal funding opportunities are very welcome by the EEC and seem to be working well. But, they are not sufficient to launch larger and more ambitious projects.*
- 3. Limited lab space and housekeeping is the main point of attention when it comes to growth of research.*

Responses by the HEI:

We welcome the outlining by the EEC of the Department's strengths. We will continue to encourage all faculty members to take advantage of the various funding schemes/opportunities as well as the teaching remission scheme (research time release), to further enhance the research profile of the Department.

Since the Department recognizes the importance of research in both increasing the reputation of the institution and injecting the teaching process with state-of-the art knowledge. The members of the Department utilize every available resource to improve their research output. In this respect:

1. They participate in proposal writing workshops organized both internally at the university (Research and Innovation Office) and at a national level by the central funding agency (<https://www.research.org.cy>). The majority of these workshops are for European calls and beside the overview of the requirements of the proposals include sharing best practices among the local community from researchers who have coordinated European projects. The same agency provides for free proposal proof reading services to all Cyprus-based researchers. In the past, faculty members of the Department have used this service.
2. For the funding of ambitious projects, the Department relies on external resources such as the local funding agency as well as Horizon Europe projects. The faculty members submit proposals in collaboration with other local and European research institutions and industrial partners in relevant calls on a regular basis. In the past, extra incentives have been given to faculty members who coordinated projects such as reduced teaching load and relief from all their administrative responsibilities.
3. Following the comments on the two points above, and in conjunction to our response regarding lab space in Section 1, the faculty members also submit proposals in calls that fund the development of research equipment and facilities (infrastructure). As a recent example, a faculty member from the Oil and Gas Engineering program has submitted a proposal for research infrastructure development under the local call STRATEGIC INFRASTRUCTURES/1222, ΘΑΛΕΙΑ Program, with total budget €5,000,000 and requesting budget €700,000. The announcement of the results is expected at the end of 2024.

7. Resources

Comments from the EEC:

Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

The available resources seem to be enough to allow the department to continue operating at a good level but more needs to be done for growth. Donations do not appear to constitute a significant income source and there might be an opportunity there as an income source next to tuition fees.

Findings

A short description of the situation in the Department based on evidence from the Department's application and the site - visit.

The department receives funding from the university and the EEC did not note any major deficiencies when the benchmark is to continue operating at the current (good) level. Deficiencies exist if the ambition is to grow as internal funding is typically not enough for larger projects and limited lab space is the outcome of resource scarcity. The faculty and administration recognize the issue and this is an important first step but significant investments are needed to address it fully.

Strengths

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

- 1. There seems to be good communication between the department and the central university.*
- 2. The department owns a number of valuable and resource – demanding state of the art pieces of equipment and there appears to be a steady flow of acquisition of such equipment.*
- 3. The department acknowledges limitations when it comes to funding.*

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

- 1. The EEC recommends looking into donations carefully as an alternative source of income. The department operates for a number of years and this helps in starting to develop the critical mass required for donation efforts to yield meaningful results.*
- 2. Internal resources can grow to become more fit even for larger research projects.*
- 3. More resources must be devoted towards the promotion of programs offered by the department.*
- 4. To the degree possible, efforts must be made to improve lab availability.*
- 5. Fraction of the funding related to the oil and gas related research projects can be improved.*

Responses by the HEI:

Once more we would like to thank the EEC for the positive comments. Indeed, being a young university played a critical role in developing highly efficient processes, which, in turn, allow for good communication between the academic departments and the university management. The equipment requested by the Department follows a 5-year plan that has been developed taking into account possible limitations resulting from the strategic plan of the university. Hence, the Department manages to acquire all the requested equipment.

Naturally, as a private institution, the University of Nicosia relies on student tuition/fees. The vast majority of external funding comes from research grants from local or European sources. Nevertheless, there is room for improvement to increase the potential for future growth of the Department.

- 1. Receiving donations from industry, foundations or individuals is a constructive method that has not been extensively explored. In the past, we have received donations in the form of equipment and technical software by companies, yet to a limited degree. In addition, we have investigated donations in the form of student scholarships or PhD student subsidization with very poor results.*

Our impression from these actions is that, unfortunately, there is increased reluctance in donating in a private, for-profit university.

2. There is an on-going discussion at the higher administration level for increasing the research expenditure and introducing additional motivation schemes for research purposes. Although the Department cannot do much besides supporting these efforts, the Department Council favors the relief of faculty coordinating large projects from administrative responsibilities.
3. The Department has asked the Marketing Department to increase the advertising for all the programmes hosted. We are also actively involved in the development of promotional material as well as the planning of promotional actions coordinated by the Departmental Programmes Promotion Committee. Additionally, the Department attempts to establish collaborations with various entities, in Cyprus and abroad, in order to achieve better exposure of our programs both in Cyprus and in the region in general.
4. Please refer to our previous comment in Sections 1 (for teaching) and 6 (for research).
5. We will try to increase the fraction of funding going to the Oil & Gas Engineering programmes to the extent possible.

B. Conclusions and final remarks

Comments from the EEC:

Please provide constructive conclusions and final remarks, which may form the basis upon which improvements of the quality of the Department under review may be achieved.

The EEC found the department of Engineering at the University of Nicosia to be compliant in most the evaluation criteria and partially compliant in a handful of criteria. This positive evaluation is a clear indication of the EEC's favorable assessment of the department in terms of overall academic profile, quality assurance policies and administration, student-centered learning, faculty, research and resources.

As we have detailed in the sections above, the department hosts a strong cohort of faculty members, has a clear mission, engages strongly in research and offers a good teaching and learning environment from the undergraduate up to the doctoral level. Quality assurance protocols are in place and implemented clearly and administrative support is at high levels. The administration promotes research and is aware of its strengths and limitations.

The main areas where the EEC suggests improvements to further strengthen the department are the following:

- 1. Lab space is limited and housekeeping was rather poor. This has significant implications for, among others, lab safety, research endeavors and doctoral training.*
- 2. The student population of the department and the general university is diverse in terms of gender and nationality. This is a positive fact. The EEC notes that such diversity is not present among the faculty at the department of engineering and strongly recommends for the department and the university to craft strategies to remedy this imbalance between the diversity of the faculty and the student population.*
- 3. Quality assurance as well as learning and teaching can be improved if the department sets in place external examiners who will be involved in quality assurance primarily with regards to teaching. Indeed, the EEC strongly recommends working with carefully selected external examiners.*
- 4. The doctoral programme is rather small and the EEC recommends to grow it considerably to reach a critical mass so that there is learning between doctoral candidates. Growing the programme would require more lab space and as such this is to be taken into account.*

In summary of the assessment, EEC finds the department to operate at a very good level. There are also areas that can be developed further, discussed above, and in EEC's estimation such improvements are within reach either in the short run or in the medium and long run.

The EEC would like to thank all involved in the Department of Engineering at the University of Nicosia for the high engagement throughout the evaluation process - and for providing a rich set of supporting documents and videos before and during the site visit.

Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to Mr. Avramis Despotis for organising and facilitating the evaluation process.

Responses by the HEI:

The faculty of the Department of Engineering and the Rectorate of the University of Nicosia wish to express their gratitude to the EEC committee for their positive comments, constructive feedback and suggestions for the future development of our Department. We have taken all of them into consideration and we hope



we have provided adequate responses to the concerns expressed. Closing, we would like to briefly repeat our response to the main points raised in Sections 1 to 7:

1. We intend to increase our lab space following the freeing of existing room occupied by other programs as well as following our development plan. We have updated the lab manual (attached) and placed appropriate signing in the labs in order to improve the lab safety and student training procedures (Sections 1 and 2).
2. We will take diversity-related measures to maximize the chance of hiring faculty to reduce imbalance (gender, ethnic, etc) between the personnel (Section 5).
3. Even though we are already utilizing external experts for the revision of our programmes, we will welcome external examiners provided that relevant policy and procedures are established by the University (Section 2).
4. We will work towards collaborations that will increase the number of students as well as the relevant funding for our PhD programs (Section 4).

Finally, we want to express our sincere appreciation to Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance in Higher Education and its staff for the established procedures that help towards the growth of our university and the tertiary education in the country in general.



C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Dr George Gregoriou	Dean, School of Sciences and Engineering	
Dr Stelios Neophytou	Head, Department of Engineering	

Date: 21/09/2023

