Doc. 300.3.1

Date: Date

External Evaluation Report
(Departmental)

- **Higher Education Institution:**
  University of Cyprus
- **Town: Nicosia**
- **School/Faculty: Pure and applied Sciences**
- **Department: Biological Sciences**
- **Department's Status: Currently Operating**

- **Programme(s) of study under evaluation:**
  Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)

Programme 1
In Greek:
Programme Name
In English:
Bachelor Degree in Biological Sciences

Programme 2
In Greek:
Programme Name
In English:
Master in Biodiversity and Ecology

Programme 3
In Greek:
Programme Name
In English:
PhD in Biodiversity and Ecology

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].

Department's programmes (to be filled by the CYQAA officer and verified by the EEC):

DEPARTMENT	PROGRAMMES OF STUDY

A. Introduction

This part includes basic information regarding the onsite visit.

The onsite visit was conducted according to the suggested program. All evaluators were present on site, as were the department representatives. The evaluators would like to point out the excellent preparation of all parties involved, the excellent support by the agency representative and by all department members and students which contributed to an open and constructive exchange of views and ideas. The format of the evaluation program was highly valued by the evaluators.

B. External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

Name	*Position*	*University*
Prof Markus Morrison	Director, Inst. Of Cell Biology and Immunology	University of Stuttgart, Germany
Prof Luc Leyns	Chair of the Dept of Biology	Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium
Prof Eric Allan	Vice Director of the Inst. Of Plant Sciences	Univ. of Bern, Switzerland
Georgia Hadjiandoni	Student member of the Evaluation Committee	Open University of Cyprus
Name	Position	University
Name	Position	University

C. Guidelines on content and structure of the report

- *The external evaluation report refers to the Department as a whole (programmes offered, teaching staff, administrative staff, infrastructure, resources, etc.).*

- *The external evaluation report follows the structure of assessment areas and sub-areas.*

- *Under each assessment area there are quality indicators (criteria) to be scored by the EEC on a scale from one (1) to five (5), based on the degree of compliance for the above mentioned quality indicators (criteria). The scale used is explained below:*

1 or 2:	*Non-compliant*
3:	*Partially compliant*
4 or 5:	*Compliant*

- *The EEC must justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.*

- *It is pointed out that, in the case of indicators (criteria) that cannot be applied due to the status of the Department, N/A (= Not Applicable) should be noted and a detailed explanation should be provided on the Department's corresponding policy regarding the specific quality indicator.*

- *In addition, for each assessment area, it is important to provide information regarding the compliance with the requirements. In particular, the following must be included:*

  Findings

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

  Strengths

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

  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 should state the compliance for each sub-area (Non-compliant, Partially compliant, Compliant),* ***which must be in agreement with everything stated in the report.***

- ***The report may also address other issues which the EEC finds relevant.***

1. Department's academic profile and orientation

(ESG 1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9)

Sub-areas

1.1 Mission and strategic planning (including SWOT analysis)
1.2 Connecting with society
1.3 Development processes

Mark from 1 to 5 the degree of compliance for each quality indicator/criterion

1 or 2: Non-compliant
3: Partially compliant
4 or 5: Compliant

Quality indicators/criteria		
1. Department's academic profile and orientation		
1.1 Mission and strategic planning (including SWOT analysis)		**1 - 5**
1.1.1	The Department has formally adopted a mission statement, which is available to the public and easily accessible.	5
1.1.2	The Department has developed its strategic planning aiming at fulfilling its mission.	5
1.1.3	The Department's strategic planning includes short, medium-term and long-term goals and objectives, which are periodically revised and adapted.	5
1.1.4	The programmes of study offered by the Department reflect its academic profile and are aligned with the European and international practice.	4
1.1.5	The academic community is involved in shaping and monitoring the implementation of the Department's development strategies.	4
1.1.6	Stakeholders such as academics, students, graduates and other professional and scientific associations participate in the Department's development strategy.	4
1.1.7	The mechanism for collecting and analysing data and indicators needed to effectively design the Department's academic development is adequate and effective.	4
Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.		

No significant deficiencies at overall department level identified

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).

Among programmes: Coherence and compatibility is very evident through direct lines of qualification that lead from BSc to MSc programmes, taking advantage of the strengths of the department. MSc program is undergoing revision and will need to ensure that coherence with other offers will be maintained. Among departments: The school of pure and applied sciences integrates the fundamental disciplines from the area of natural sciences within one faculty. Coherence and compatibility is considered high. This is evidenced also in training, where physics and chemistry are transfer components contributing to BSc level training.

Provide suggestions for changes in case of incompatibility.

n.a.

1. Department's academic profile and orientation		
1.2 Connecting with society		**1 - 5**
1.2.1	The Department has effective mechanisms to assess the needs and demands of society and takes them into account in its various activities.	5
1.2.2	The Department provides sufficient information to the public about its activities and offered programmes of study.	5
1.2.3	The Department ensures that its operation and activities have a positive impact on society.	5
1.2.4	The Department has an effective communication mechanism with its graduates.	4

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

The department is heavily involved in initiatives and interest groups that reach beyond the academic duties and activities and that have direct links to interaction with the society. This includes societies and initiatives whose portfolio includes the open promotion of science and research in the disciplines relevant to the department. Open days and laboratory visits as well as engagement with the general public including high school students is very well developed.

1. Department's academic profile and orientation		
1.3 Development processes		**1 - 5**

1.3.1	Effective procedures and measures are in place to attract and select teaching staff to ensure that they possess the formal and substantive skills to teach, carry out research and effectively carry out their work.	5
1.3.2	Planning teaching staff recruitment and their professional development is in line with the Department's academic development plan.	5
1.3.3	The Department applies an effective strategy of attracting high-level students from Cyprus and abroad.	3
1.3.4	The funding processes for the operation of the Department and the continuous improvement of the quality of its programmes of study are adequate and transparent.	4

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

Currently limited success in attracting sufficiently high numbers of MSc students for MSc programme in Biodiversity and Ecology. More specific information on this in the curricular evaluation form.

Additionally, write:
- Expected number of Cypriot and international students
- Countries of origin of international students and number from each country

30-40 per year, with 80% expected Cypriots. Foreign students are primarily expected from Greece, but also Albania and Armenia.

Findings

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

The Department of Biological Sciences at the University of Cyprus has established a broad profile and orientation, particularly strong in fundamental biosciences, which is highly valued at the BSc level. Its capacity to address diverse fields of international relevance is a notable strength, reflecting the department's commitment to maintaining a competitive edge in the global biosciences landscape.
The department shows a clear awareness of the need to expand into emerging disciplines. Strategic recruitment of new staff in key areas is a priority, which is expected to enhance its ability to meet the demands of both national and international contexts. One such area is the Biomedical Engineering Research Center, where the department has demonstrated a vision to contribute to new structures and profile areas, despite the challenges posed by limited resources.
The department has a keen understanding of the importance of aligning its profile with timely and attractive topics at both the national and regional/international levels. It has clearly identified gaps in its current offerings and the steps necessary for further development. For example, efforts to strengthen the public and private sector interface, particularly in health and environmental themes, show the department's forward-thinking approach to positioning itself as a key player in these areas.

The department's involvement in the YUFE (Young Universities for the Future of Europe) network is a testament to its adaptability and readiness for change, ensuring it remains connected with European partners. However, there is room for improvement in terms of showcasing its strengths more visibly to attract international students. While the department's current mission statement is effective in appealing to local BSc students, a more targeted and timely reflection of its unique strengths could assist in drawing a larger international audience across all programmes and retaining local students throughout their studies.
The department is also encouraged to continue to develop synergies with other universities, particularly public institutions, research centers, and NGOs. Collaborations across research and teaching would provide additional opportunities for growth and innovation.
Despite its successes, there are still some challenges to address. Ecology and biodiversity are being recognized as fields with growing job prospects, and the department has made strong efforts to demonstrate the potential career paths for students in these areas. However, the department currently has a disproportionate number of professors in molecular biology compared to ecology and evolution, and with plant biology being generally underrepresented. Although this issue has been acknowledged and will be partially addressed through an upcoming faculty hire, in plant ecology and global change, it remains a significant area for development. The department is encouraged to recruit more professors in complementary domains to strengthen its research in ecology and evolution and to ensure collaboration and prevent isolated research efforts. Such new hires should also align with the new master's programme to maintain a cohesive academic structure.

Strengths

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

The broad profile and orientation in fundamental biosciences is valued highly at the BSc student level
The department has the capacity to address major and diverse fields of international relevance
There is an awareness of the need to cover emerging disciplines and profile areas through appropriate recruitments of staff and a clear identification of gaps to further develop the department
The opening of a plant biology and global change professorship is a welcome event. The department is encouraged to recruit more professors in complementary domains to ensure that there is a clear interface/collaboration possible with existing academics (to avoid single/isolated research). These should be in line with the new master orientation.
There is a vision for how to contribute to new structures and profile areas, such as the biomedical engineering research center, despite lack of provision of additional resources
The department clearly reflects on its profile and orientation in the context of timeliness and attractiveness, both at the national and regional/international level
The department has a vision for both how to interact with public and private sectors in the context of health and environmental issues
There are strong current efforts and requirements to demonstrate ecology/biodiversity is an area with job prospects nationally and internationally
There is a readiness for changes/ show adaptability in the growing context of UCY .
The department is networked with other European universities through YUFE

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

The department might need to better or more visibly display and communicate its strengths to the outside.
The overall “mission statement” is fairly generic, considering the explicit strengths displayed in profile and orientation. While this will apparently not affect the intake of local BSc students, it is felt that a more timely description, reflecting the particular strength of the department, might potentially assist in attracting additional MSc and Phd students from abroad, in all programs offered, and in retaining local students to progress from BSc to MSc.
The department is encouraged to develop synergies with other universities, particularly public ones, and all possible relevant research centers and NGOs, in the both research and teaching.
There are still only a few professors in the fields of ecology and evolution, compared to molecular biology. This issue is recognised and will be partially addressed with upcoming positions but more needs to be done to recruit excellent ecologists and evolutionary biologists.
Plant biology is poorly represented with only a single professor working on plants. New hires working on plants would substantially strengthen the department.

Please select what is appropriate for each of the following sub-areas:

Sub-area	***Non-compliant / Partially Compliant / Compliant***
1.1 Mission and strategic planning	Compliant
1.2 Connecting with society	Compliant
1.3 Development processes	Compliant

2. Quality Assurance

(ESG 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8)

Sub-areas

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

Mark from 1 to 5 the degree of compliance for each quality indicator/criterion

1 or 2: Non-compliant
3: Partially compliant
4 or 5: Compliant

Quality indicators/criteria			
2. Quality Assurance			
2.1 System and quality assurance strategy			**1 - 5**
2.1.1	The Department has a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of the Institution's strategic management.		4
2.1.2	Internal stakeholders develop and implement a policy for quality assurance through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders.		5
2.1.3	The Department's policy for quality assurance supports guarding against intolerance of any kind or discrimination against students or staff.		5
2.1.4	The quality assurance system adequately covers all the functions and sectors of the Department's activities:		
	2.1.4.1	Teaching and learning	5
	2.1.4.2	Research	5
	2.1.4.3	The connection with society	5
	2.1.4.4	Management and support services	5
2.1.5	The quality assurance system promotes a culture of quality.		5
2.1.6	Students' evaluation and feedback		3

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

Stronger attention and more formal procedures to accommodate student feedback can be developed at all levels (BSc, MSc and PhD level programmes).

2. Quality Assurance		
2.2 Quality assurance for the programmes of study		**1 - 5**
2.2.1	The responsibility for decision-making and monitoring the implementation of the programmes of study offered by the Department lies with the teaching staff.	5
2.2.2	The system and criteria for assessing students' performance in the subjects of the programmes of studies offered by the Department are clear, sufficient and known to the students.	5
2.2.3	The quality control system refers to specific indicators and is effective, which have been presented and discussed.	5
2.2.4	The results from student assessments are used to improve the programmes of study.	4
2.2.5	The policy dealing with plagiarism committed by students as well as mechanisms for identifying and preventing it are effective.	5
2.2.6	The established procedures for examining students' objections/ disagreements on issues of student evaluation or academic ethics are effective.	5
2.2.7	The Department publishes information related to the programmes of study, credit units, learning outcomes, methodology, student admission criteria, completion of studies, facilities, number of teaching staff and the expertise of teaching staff.	5
2.2.8	Names and position of the teaching staff of each programme are published and easily accessible.	5
2.2.9	The Department has a clear and consistent policy on the admission criteria for students in the various programmes of studies offered.	5
2.2.10	The Department flexibly uses a variety of teaching methods.	5
2.2.11	The Department systematically collects data in relation to the academic performance of students, implements procedures for evaluating such data and has a relevant policy in place.	5
2.2.12	The Department analyses and publishes graduate employment information.	4

2.2.13	The Department ensures adequate and appropriate learning resources in line with European and international standards and/or international practices, particularly:		
	2.2.12.1	Building facilities	5
	2.2.12.2	Library	5
	2.2.12.3	Rooms for theoretical, practical and laboratory lessons	5
	2.2.12.4	Technological infrastructure	5
	2.2.12.5	Academic support	5
2.2.14	There is a student welfare service that supports students in regard to academic, personal problems and difficulties.		5
2.2.15	The Department's mechanisms, processes and infrastructure consider the needs of a diverse student population such as mature, part-time, employed and international students as well as students with disabilities.		5
2.2.16	Mentoring of each student is provided and the number of students per each permanent teaching member is adequate.		5
2.2.17	The provision of quality doctoral studies is ensured through doctoral studies regulations, which are publicly available.		5
2.2.18	The number of doctoral students, under the supervision of a member of the teaching staff, enables continuous and effective feedback to the students and it complies with the European and international standards.		5
2.2.19	The Department has mechanisms and funds to support writing and attending conferences of doctoral candidates.		3
2.2.20	There is a clear policy on authorship and intellectual property.		5

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

2.2.19: These funds seem to be allocated to PIs rather than provided at departmental level.

Findings

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

The Department of Biological Sciences at the University of Cyprus demonstrates a strong commitment to quality assurance, with clear evidence of efforts by departmental staff to ensure high standards across all levels of teaching, training, and research. The evaluation and training programmes are well-structured, with efficient measures in place to regularly assess and improve

the quality of teaching. These processes allow for continuous reflection on the quality of training modules through dialogue between lecturing staff and the chair of the department, providing clear avenues for feedback and necessary adjustments.
The department's strategic focus on maintaining quality extends to future recruitment plans, particularly in areas such as Biotechnology and Plant Ecology. These planned hires will further enhance the breadth and depth of the department's training programmes, ensuring that its academic offerings remain comprehensive and up-to-date with current scientific developments.
Involving students in quality assurance processes is another strength of the department, with structures in place that allow for active student participation in maintaining high academic standards. External stakeholders consistently report that graduates from the department are not only of very high quality but also demonstrate strong critical thinking skills. This positive external feedback reinforces the perception that the department upholds a high academic standard, further enhancing the prestige and reputation of its programmes. This strong reputation allows the department to attract top-tier students at the BSc level, which is a significant asset.
At the BSc training level, the department is also exploring the possibility of integrating more biology themed exercises into courses imported from other disciplines, such as mathematics, physics, or chemistry. This would ensure that interdisciplinary modules align more closely with the department's biological focus, thereby enhancing the relevance of these courses for biosciences students.
One area for potential improvement relates to the two-year turnover in the chair's role. This relatively short tenure can impair the longer-term feedback and guidance needed to enhance training modules and courses that might occasionally receive lower student evaluation results. A peer mentoring system could be explored as a possible solution, where feedback is passed to the incoming chair to ensure continuity in the improvement process. This would help maintain the focus on long-term quality development, ensuring that any issues identified are addressed in a sustainable manner.

Strengths

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

There is very clear evidence that departmental staff strive to ensure quality at all levels
The evaluation of training programmes is well structured and efficient measure to assess quality in teaching and training
There are processes in place to reflect on the quality of training modules between lecturing staff and dean, with avenues for providing feedback
The quality in breadth and depth of the training programmes is considered in planned future recruitments in the direction of Biotechnology and Plant Ecology
There are structures in place that allow student participation in maintaining high quality standards
There was clear evidence from an external stakeholder that students graduating are of very high quality and are critical thinkers. The academic standard of the department is also considered to be very high.
The programmes offered by the department have very high prestige and excellent reputation, which is a great asset that allows to select for the best student and talents at BSc entry level

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

Student evaluations flagged that imported training courses and modules for the BSc should be more relevant for biology. Courses in mathematics, physics and chemistry could be improved through the inclusion of more exercises relevant to biological problems.
The two year turnaround in the chair makes it challenging to track over time evaluations of training modules and courses that might occasionally not achieve very high evaluation results. It might be a possibility to assess, through the chair, if a peer mentoring scheme could be introduced in such cases, or if reports can be passed to the next incoming chair

Please √ what is appropriate for each of the following sub-areas:

Sub-area	***Non-compliant / Partially Compliant / Compliant***
2.1 System and quality assurance strategy	Compliant
2.2 Quality assurance for the programmes of study	Compliant

3. Administration

(ESG 1.1, 1.3, 1.6)

Mark from 1 to 5 the degree of compliance for each quality indicator/criterion

1 or 2: Non-compliant
3: Partially compliant
4 or 5: Compliant

Quality indicators/criteria		
3. Administration		**1 - 5**
3.1	The administrative structure is in line with the legislation and the Department's mission.	5
3.2	The members of the teaching and administrative staff and the students participate, at a satisfactory degree and on the basis of specified procedures, in the management of the Department.	4
3.3	The administrative staff adequately supports the operation of the Department.	5
3.4	Adequate allocation of competences and responsibilities is ensured so that in academic matters, decisions are made by academics and the Department's council competently exercises legal control over such decisions.	5
3.5	The Department applies effective procedures to ensure transparency in the decision-making process.	4
3.6	Statutory sessions of the Department are held and minutes are kept.	5
3.7	The Department's council operates systematically and autonomously and exercise the full powers provided for by the law and / or the constitution of the Department without the intervention or involvement of a body or person outside the law provisions.	5
3.8	The manner in which the Department's council operates and the procedures for disseminating and implementing their decisions are clearly formulated and implemented precisely and effectively.	4
3.9	The Department applies procedures for the prevention and disciplinary control of academic misconduct of students, teaching and administrative staff, including plagiarism.	5
3.10	The Department has appropriate procedures for dealing with students' complaints.	4

3.11	Internationalization of the Department and external collaborations.	4

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

Click to enter text.

Findings

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

The administrative and technical support staff in the Department of Biological Sciences at the University of Cyprus appear highly motivated, demonstrating a strong identification with the department. There is a notably high level of satisfaction among staff in terms of collegiality and the overall working atmosphere, which contributes positively to the department's operations.
However, several concerns regarding staff remuneration and career progression were identified during the evaluation. It appears that administrative and accounting staff are carrying workloads and solving tasks that exceed what is typically expected at their pay scale. Moreover, staff performing similar tasks in central administration reportedly earn substantially more, which creates an imbalance and risks undermining morale. The lack of promotion opportunities due to a capping of the pay scale for these positions presents a serious challenge. This situation poses a significant risk of losing highly qualified and enthusiastic staff, which could have a detrimental impact on the department's functioning.
It is strongly recommended that the university leadership reviews this situation to explore options for addressing the pay disparities and career stagnation. One possible solution would be to swap these positions with potentially vacant ones that allow for career progression. Such adjustments would help retain key staff members who are essential to the department's success.
There is also potential to support laboratory technical staff in further developing their skill sets. Encouraging staff to attend trainee programmes or participate in international training opportunities, such as through ERASMUS Plus, would enhance their capabilities and allow them to acquire new skills and techniques. This could be a valuable investment in maintaining the department's competitiveness in teaching and research.
Nevertheless, there is a general impression that the number of laboratory technical staff is significantly below international standards. This limitation hinders the department's ability to fully realize its potential for international competitiveness in both teaching and research excellence.

Strengths

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

Administrative and technical support staff appear highly motivated
There is a strong identification with the department
There is a high level of satisfaction in terms of collegiality and working atmosphere

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

It appears accounting staff, technical staff and administrative staff carry workloads and solve tasks that might be above what is expected at their pay scale (it appears staff with similar tasks e.g. in central administration earn substantially more). However, there exists no possibility for promotion due to a capping of the pay scale for these positions. The current situation creates a very high and acute risk of losing highly qualified and enthusiastic staff. It is strongly suggested that the university leadership reviews this situation and seeks options to swap these positions with potentially currently vacant positions to allow career progression.
There is potential to support laboratory technical staff in expanding their skill sets through encouraging trainee programme attendance or embedding into other international teams for training in new skills and techniques, e.g. through ERASMUS plus or similar measures.
General impression that laboratory technical staff positions in numbers overall substantially below international standard, limiting international competitiveness in teaching and research excellence.

Please select what is appropriate for the following assessment area:

Assessment area	***Non-compliant / Partially Compliant / Compliant***
3. Administration	Compliant

4. Learning and Teaching
(ESG 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.9)

Sub-areas

4.1 Planning the programmes of study
4.2 Organisation of teaching

Mark from 1 to 5 the degree of compliance for each quality indicator/criterion

1 or 2: Non-compliant
3: Partially compliant
4 or 5: Compliant

Quality indicators/criteria		
4. Learning and Teaching		
4.1 Planning the programmes of study		**1 - 5**
4.1.1	The Department provides an effective system for designing, approving, monitoring and periodically reviewing the programmes of study.	5
4.1.2	Students and other stakeholders, including employers, are actively involved on the programmes' review and development.	4
4.1.3	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).	5
4.1.4	The programmes of study are in compliance with the existing legislation and meet the professional qualifications requirements in the professional courses, where applicable.	5
4.1.5	The Department ensures that its programmes of study integrate effectively theory and practice.	4
Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies. Click or tap here to enter text.		
4. Learning and Teaching		
4.2 Organisation of teaching		**1 - 5**

4.2.1	The Department establishes student admission criteria for each programme, which are adhered to consistently.	5
4.2.2	Recognition of prior studies and credit transfer is regulated by procedures and regulations that are in line with European standards and/or international practices.	5
4.2.3	The number of students in the teaching rooms is suitable for theoretical, practical and laboratory lessons.	5
4.2.4	The teaching staff of the Department has regular and effective communication with their students, promoting mutual respect within the learner-teacher relationship.	5
4.2.5	Student-centred learning and teaching plays an important role in stimulating students' motivation, self-reflection and engagement in the learning process.	5
4.2.6	The teaching staff of the Department provides timely and effective feedback to their students.	5
4.2.7	The criteria and the method of assessment as well as the criteria for marking are published in advance.	5
4.2.8	The assessment allows students to demonstrate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved.	5
Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies. Click to enter text.		

Findings

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

The Department of Biological Sciences at the University of Cyprus promotes a learning environment that fosters the development of critical thinking among its students. The number of students in the classes is appropriate, allowing for active participation and better comprehension of the lessons, which enhances student-centered learning. This smaller class size facilitates more meaningful interactions between students and lecturers, contributing to a more effective and engaging educational experience.

The teaching staff are dedicated to periodically reviewing the programme of study, making adjustments based on BSc student needs and feedback. Students are actively involved in this process, with representatives participating in the departmental council, ensuring that their perspectives are considered in programme development and review.

The department sets high student admission criteria, consistently attracting high-caliber students, which helps maintain a rigorous academic environment at BSc level. Additionally, there is strong evidence that students can easily communicate with the teaching staff, promoting an open and supportive atmosphere.

However, while the department integrates theory and practice to some extent, there are limitations due to a low number of laboratory exercises. This partial integration of hands-on experience with theoretical learning presents an area for potential improvement, particularly in enhancing the practical skills of students.

Strengths

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

They promote the development of critical thinking
The number of students in the teaching rooms is ideal to promote the active participation of them and better understanding of the lesson and so promotes better student- centered learning
Teaching staff seem to periodically review the program of study and adapt it to their students' needs
Students are actively involved (via their colleagues that are members of the departmental council) in the review and development of the program.
Student admission criteria are very high and this attracts the highest level students to apply
Students can easily communicate with the teaching staff

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

The Department only partially integrates theory and practice due to lack of laboratory/fieldwork exercises

Please select what is appropriate for each of the following sub-areas:

Sub-area	***Non-compliant / Partially Compliant / Compliant***
4.1 Planning the programmes of study	Compliant
4.2 Organisation of teaching	Compliant

5. Teaching Staff *(ESG 1.5)*

Mark from 1 to 5 the degree of compliance for each quality indicator/criterion

1 or 2: Non-compliant
3: Partially compliant
4 or 5: Compliant

Quality indicators/criteria		
5. Teaching Staff		**1 - 5**
5.1	The number of teaching staff - full-time and exclusive work - and the subject area of the staff sufficiently support the programmes of study.	5
5.2	The teaching staff of the Department has the relevant formal and substantive qualifications for teaching the individual subjects as described in the relevant legislation.	5
5.3	The visiting Professors' subject areas adequately support the Department's programmes of study.	5
5.4	The special teaching staff and special scientists have the required qualifications, sufficient professional experience and expertise to teach a limited number of programmes of study.	5
5.5	The ratio of special teaching staff to the total number of teaching staff is satisfactory.	5
5.6	The ratio of the number of subjects of the programme of study taught by teaching staff working fulltime and exclusively to the number of subjects taught by part-time teaching staff ensures the quality of the programme of study.	5
5.7	The ratio of the number of students to the total number of teaching staff is sufficient to support and ensure the quality of the programme of study.	5
5.8	Feedback processes for teaching staff in regard to the evaluation of their teaching work, by the students, are satisfactory.	4

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

Click to enter text.

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

Number of teaching staff working full-time and having exclusive work: 13 (all)

Number of special teaching staff working full-time and having exclusive work: 2 (all)
Number of visiting Professors: 0
Number of special scientists on lease services: 2 ('Special Teaching Scientists' on teaching hours based contract, who teach Botany and Immunology during this semester).

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 at the Department of Biological Sciences at the University of Cyprus are highly motivated to deliver internationally competitive training programmes. There is clear evidence that the faculty regularly reflects on the current curriculum and seeks to improve course content, demonstrating a commitment to academic excellence. This self-awareness extends to recognizing potential shortcomings in comparison to international competitors, and there is a clear trajectory toward expanding the teaching portfolio through new hires to address any gaps.
Teaching duties are well-balanced among the academic staff, with substantial discussions taking place among lecturers to ensure that course content is aligned and coherent across the department. However, one notable challenge is the limited availability of support staff for teaching, particularly in areas that require hands-on training and laboratory/fieldwork-based courses. The lack of adequate support staff significantly hampers the department's ability to offer more practical, laboratory/fieldwork-oriented experiences for students. It is recommended that the university assess how additional resources can be allocated to support these areas, which are essential for comprehensive scientific training.
To further enhance the practical component of the teaching programmes, the department may consider introducing more computer-based practical work beyond the already computation-heavy disciplines. This could include courses on digital image analysis or training using legacy data for digital data analysis, which would provide students with valuable skills relevant to modern biosciences.
Another important area for improvement is the use and allocation of teaching assistants (TAs). Currently, there is no clear vision or system for determining who receives a TA and when. Establishing a structured approach to the allocation of TAs would help provide stability and ensure the quality of teaching. It is crucial that the university guarantees a certain number of TA positions over multiple years, allowing for better long-term planning and ensuring consistency in the support provided for teaching.

Strengths

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

Staff are generally highly motivated to deliver internationally competitive training programs
There is clear evidence they reflect on current offers and improve coursework
There is a general awareness of potential shortcomings in comparison to international competitors
There is a good trajectory of further expanding the teaching portfolio and filling gaps through new hires
Teaching duties are very well balanced between academic staff; contents seem to be discussed a lot between lecturers

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

Support staff for teaching appears very limited to non-existent, depending on the area of training. This creates limits, specifically for hands-on training and laboratory-based courses. University should assess how additional resources can be provided

Teaching staff might assess possibilities to introduce computer-based practical work beyond the already computation-heavy disciplines, e.g. through introducing digital image analysis and training courses making use of legacy data for digital data analysis training

A clear vision on who gets a TA and when would be important. The positions should be attributed in advance to help provide stability and ensure quality of the teaching. Of course, the university must "guarantee" the number of positions for a certain number of years to allow for a multi-year planning.

Please √ what is appropriate for the following assessment area:

Assessment area	***Non-compliant / Partially Compliant / Compliant***
Teaching staff number, adequacy and suitability	Compliant
Teaching staff recruitment and development	Compliant
Synergies of teaching and research	Compliant

6. Research

(ESG 1.1, 1.3, 1.5, 1.6)

Mark from 1 to 5 the degree of compliance for each quality indicator/criterion

1 or 2: Non-compliant
3: Partially compliant
4 or 5: Compliant

Quality indicators/criteria		
6. Research		**1 - 5**
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.	5
6.3	The Department provides adequate facilities and equipment to cover the staff and students' research activities.	5
6.4	The Department has the appropriate mechanisms for the development of students' research skills.	5
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.	4
6.6	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.	5
6.7	The Department provides mechanisms which ensure compliance with international rules of research ethics, both in relation to research activity and the rights of researchers.	5
6.8	The external, non-governmental, funding of research activities of teaching staff is similar to other Departments in Cyprus and abroad.	5
6.9	The policy, indirect or direct of internal funding of the research activities of the teaching staff is satisfactory, based on European and international practices.	5
Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.		

The mission statement of the department is quite generic; developing a more focused mission statement would help to emphasize the particular strengths of the department and can assist in focusing the research activities and policies.

Findings

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

The Department of Biological Sciences at the University of Cyprus demonstrates strong research activity, with staff making effective use of available resources to support their research endeavors. Many of the department's professors are internationally recognized within their respective disciplines, contributing to the department's strong research reputation on a global scale. Research conducted within the department is well aligned with the training needs of junior researchers and PhD candidates, ensuring that students are actively involved in gaining valuable research experience. The department has also been successful in disseminating its research internationally, with several notable outreach activities linked to research that are well developed and contribute to the visibility of the department's work.
Despite these strengths, the department faces significant external challenges, particularly related to the limitations of national funding schemes. The two-year funding duration common to national grants compromises the ability to plan and sustain long-term research projects. Additionally, the intense competition for European Union (EU) funding further complicates the situation. It is recommended that the university leadership flag these issues at the governmental level to advocate for more sustainable funding opportunities.
In terms of research output, the department's publication activity appears appropriate given the pool of principal investigators. However, there is some variability in grant funding across the department. To address this, internal review mechanisms between peers could be introduced to enhance the success rate of research proposals and improve the overall consistency of research output.

Strengths

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

Staff make good use of their resources for research activities
Many professors are internationally recognized in their specific disciplines
Research carried out is well aligned with training needs of junior researcher and PhD candidates
There are good examples of research being well disseminated internationally
Outreach activities linked to research very well developed

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

National funding schemes are limited to two year funding durations, which significantly compromises continuity in research activities and solid longer term planning. At the same time there is excessive competition for EU funding programmes, making it hard to receive sufficient research funds from EU projects alone. We encourage the university leadership to flag this at the governmental level

Overall publication activity appears appropriate for the pool of principal investigators, but publication output is somewhat heterogeneous. Consider internal review mechanisms between peers to increase success of submitted proposals.

Please √ what is appropriate for the following assessment area:

Assessment area	***Non-compliant / Partially Compliant / Compliant***
Research mechanisms and regulations	Compliant
External and internal funding	Compliant
Motives for research	Compliant
Publications	Compliant

7. Resources *(ESG 1.6)*

Mark from 1 to 5 the degree of compliance for each quality indicator/criterion

1 or 2: Non-compliant
3: Partially compliant
4 or 5: Compliant

Quality indicators/criteria		
7. Resources		**1 - 5**
7.1	The Department has sufficient financial resources to support its functions, managed by the Institutional and Departmental bodies.	5
7.2	The Department follows sound and efficient management of the available financial resources in order to develop academically and research wise.	5
7.3	The Department's profits and donations are used for its development and for the benefit of the university community.	5
7.4	The Department's budget is appropriate for its mission and adequate for the implementation of strategic planning.	3
7.5	The Department carries out an assessment of the risks and sustainability of the programmes of study and adequately provides feedback on their operation.	5
7.6	The Department's external audit and the transparent management of its finances are ensured.	5
7.7	The fitness-for-purpose of support facilities and services is periodically reviewed.	5
Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies. **Department would benefit substantially from more resources for teaching assistants and research assistants.**		

Findings

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

The Department of Biological Sciences at the University of Cyprus appears to have adequate resources in terms of laboratory infrastructure, including instrumentation, as well as consumable materials needed for ongoing research and teaching activities. Additionally, a new building and expanded laboratory space are expected to become available soon, which is urgently needed to accommodate the department's growing needs.

However, a major shortcoming is the critical lack of technical support staff and teaching assistants. This shortage significantly limits the department's ability to offer laboratory-based modules and hands-on training, which are essential components of scientific education. It poses a substantial risk to the department's international competitiveness in both research and teaching across all disciplines. A very strong recommendation is made for university leadership to address this issue by expanding the resources dedicated to technical support and teaching assistants, as this is crucial for maintaining the department's high standards.
Additionally, the department currently lacks essential facilities for experimental plant biology, such as greenhouses and growth chambers. These resources are vital for research and training in plant biology and must be addressed to fully support the department's diverse research areas.

Strengths

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

resources for laboratory infrastructure such as instrumentation appear sufficient
consumable resources are also adequate
new building and additional laboratory space will soon be available and is urgently needed

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

The major shortcoming is a lack of technical support staff and teaching assistants, currently massively limiting the scope of laboratory based modules and hands-on work. We make a very strong recommendation to the university leadership to expand the resources. Otherwise there is a very high risk of losing international competitiveness in research and training activities across all disciplines combined in the department.
Facilities for experimental plant biology are lacking, i.e., no greenhouses or growth chambers, and the department should consider how to provide these in the future, as it will not be possible to expand plant biology research without appropriate facilities

Please √ what is appropriate for the following assessment area:

Assessment area	***Non-compliant / Partially Compliant / Compliant***
7. Resources	Compliant

D. Conclusions and final remarks

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.

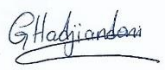
The department demonstrates a commendable commitment to academic excellence in both research and teaching. The department's teaching staff are highly motivated, and their efforts to regularly review and improve the curriculum reflect a strong focus on student-centered learning. Student involvement in programme development further enhances the educational experience, and the department continues to attract high-caliber students due to its stringent admission criteria. However, the integration of theory and practice remains limited, particularly due to few laboratory exercises, which highlights a key area for improvement.

Research activities in the department are well aligned with student training and are internationally recognized. However, challenges with national and EU funding limit long-term research planning and continuity, posing a threat to sustained success. It is crucial for the university leadership to advocate for more sustainable funding mechanisms at the governmental level. Furthermore, while research output is appropriate, internal peer review processes could enhance publication consistency and success in grant applications.

A significant issue lies in the department's human resources, specifically the critical shortage of technical support staff and teaching assistants. This gap severely limits laboratory-based training and poses a risk to the department's international competitiveness in both teaching and research. Expanding these resources is essential to maintaining high standards. Additionally, facilities for experimental plant biology, such as greenhouses and growth chambers, are lacking and need to be developed to support the department's diverse research portfolio.

Overall, while the department shows significant strengths, addressing the highlighted resource limitations, improving practical training integration, and securing more stable funding will be crucial steps in ensuring the department's continued growth and excellence in research and education.

E. Signatures of the EEC

Name	*Signature*
Prof Markus Morrison	
Prof Eric Allan	
Prof Luc Leyns	
Georgia Hadjiandoni	
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