



Doc. 300.2.2

Date: 05/08/2025

Institution

Response

(Institutional Evaluation)

- **Higher Education Institution:**
**NATIONAL AND KAPODISTRIAN UNIVERSITY OF
ATHENS (NKUA) – CYPRUS BRANCH**
- **Town:** Nicosia, Cyprus
- **Institution Status:** New Institution

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.300.2.1) must justify whether actions have been taken in improving the quality of the Institution in each assessment area.*
- *In particular, in the section building facilities, student welfare services, infrastructure, the HEI must respond on the comments and scoring of the EEC.*
- *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. 300.2.1).*
- *In case of annexes, those should be attached and sent on a separate document.*

BUILDING FACILITIES - STUDENT WELFARE SERVICES - INFRASTRUCTURE

1. Building facilities

1.1 Plans and licenses

1.1.1

1.1.1.2

On the Description:

Given the integration of the NKUA Cyprus Branch into the urban grid of the city of Nicosia, a comprehensive site plan consolidating all relevant information could only be an additional version of the topological plan (similar to those already provided under section 1.1.1.1). This enhanced topological plan (titled: MASTERPLAN-BUILDINGS&FACILITIES-PARKINGS-ATHLETICS.pdf) has been prepared and uploaded to the communication platform provided by the CYQAA authority. This Masterplan simultaneously indicates:

- (a) the building facilities,
- (b) the locations of designated parking areas (for students, academic and teaching staff, visitors, and individuals with disabilities), and
- (c) the sports facilities designated exclusively for the NKUA Cyprus Branch.

It should be noted that most of this information has already been presented through other forms of documentation – such as agreements, mature proposals, or offers regarding facilities and building infrastructure. These documents have been submitted, either from the side of the property owners, or from the side of the applicant (NKUA), and have been included as supplementary material during the QAA process. Although these documents do not constitute final agreements (since their finalization is contingent upon the outcome of the current QAA procedure) they are in most aspects complete and ready for ratification.

The aforementioned upload constitutes documentation that may fulfil the requirements of documentation of point 1.1.1.2.

On the Notes:

All buildings of the NKUA Cyprus Branch evaluated during the QAA process include: (i) institutional buildings (primarily for administrative use, i.e., offices), (ii) student halls and classrooms for theoretical instruction, (iii) computer labs and study rooms, (iv) a library, and (v) student residences. The existing usage permits for these buildings closely align with the proposed functions of the NKUA Cyprus Branch.

Additionally, it should be emphasized that all buildings and facilities are designed for public use and are of high quality, consisting either of entirely new constructions or extensively renovated and modernized structures within the past 2 to 5 years (in most cases). They all, fully comply with the latest regulations of both Cyprus and the European Union.

It is important to note that no Medical School laboratory facilities were included in the inspection during the QAA process, as these needs are addressed through the relevant agreement with the Medical School of the University of Cyprus. The agreement is mature but its finalization is contingent upon the outcome of the current QAA procedure. Still we should emphasize that the laboratory facilities of the Medical School of the University of Cyprus are state-of-the-art and already possess all necessary permits for their intended use.

1.1.2

In evaluating this particular point, it is important to note the limited significance that the undersigned evaluator attributes to the absence of this specific certification. This limited significance is clearly explained in the “Notes” of this section, where the certification procedure and the time it typically requires are well described.

Furthermore, as previously stated in section 1.1.1.2, all buildings and facilities are intended for public use and are of high quality—either newly constructed or extensively renovated and modernized within the past 2 to 5 years in most cases. They all fully comply with the most recent regulations of both Cyprus and the European Union.

1.1.3

1.1.3.1 & 1.1.3.2

In evaluating this particular point, it is important to note the limited significance that the undersigned evaluator attributes to the absence of these specific inspection forms. This limited significance is clearly explained in the “Notes” of this section.

Furthermore, since the date of this External Evaluation (24th-25th July 2025), Certificates of Visual Inspection were issued (Π.Ο.Ε.) that are documents that cover in certain extend the absence of E.O.E. 102 and E.O.E.Σ.Ε.Κ. 103. These Certificates were forwarded by the owners of the properties to the applicant (NKUA). Consequently, NKUA uploaded the certain documents to the communication platform provided by the CYQUAA authority.

The aforementioned upload constitutes documentation that in substance meets in an acceptable degree the requirements of documentation of points 1.1.3.1 and 1.1.3.2 . In parallel, all additional steps were taken immediately to complete any gaps of the documentation needed regarding E.O.E. 102 and E.O.E.Σ.Ε.Κ. 103.

1.1.3.4

Further expanding on the reasoning presented by the undersigned evaluator, as outlined in the "Notes" of this certain section and based on findings from the External Evaluation, it is important to emphasize that, although the described usage of the buildings may be broadly categorized as commercial, this commercial use already incorporates office spaces and areas designated for educational activities and practices. Moreover, it was in this context that the certain buildings were appropriately selected to serve the purposes of the NKUA Cyprus Branch.

This was clearly observed and understood during the inspection process, which led the undersigned evaluator to confidently conclude that the Fire Safety Requirements and Certificate should remain consistent requiring no changes between the initial and subsequent uses of the buildings.

1.1.3.5

At this particular point, it is important to note that the undersigned evaluator accepts as satisfactory the Certificates for the Mechanical Services issued by the engineers of the buildings. This acceptance is intended to adequately cover the entire period for the preparation and relocation of NKUA from the temporary buildings and facilities to the permanent ones. The Certificates were forwarded by the property owners to the applicant (NKUA), and consequently, NKUA uploaded the documents to the communication platform provided by the CYQUAA authority.

The aforementioned upload constitutes documentation that meets in an acceptable manner the requirements of documentation of point 1.1.3.5.

1.2 Other facilities

1.2.3 (mistakenly referred as 1.2.2)

No Medical School laboratory facilities were included in the inspection during the QAA process, as these needs are addressed through the relevant agreement (already mentioned) between the NKUA and the University of Cyprus. These laboratory facilities of the Medical School of the University of Cyprus are state-of-the-art and already possess all necessary permits for their intended use.

It should be reiterated that the agreement between the two Universities is mature; however, its finalization remains contingent upon the outcome of the current QAA process. The commitment of both parties to conclude and implement this agreement (aspects of which include legal details that are not yet subject to publication) is clearly stated to relevant documents that have already been uploaded to the communication platform provided by the CYQAA authority.

The above-mentioned documents as well as the provided information should most probably form a satisfactory level of compliance with the requirements of point 1.2.3 (mistakenly referred as 1.2.2).

1.2.6 – 1.2.7 – 1.2.8

The NKUA and the Municipality of Nicosia are actively collaborating toward an agreement regarding the allocation of designated parking spaces for NKUA Cyprus Branch, under specific conditions. A preliminary agreement is currently in preparation; however, several of its key details – such as the exact numbers of parking spaces for all categories – remain contingent upon the outcome of the ongoing QAA procedure and, therefore, cannot yet be finalized. The agreement includes provisions for the allocation of parking spaces for each category (students, teaching staff, and individuals with disabilities), situated in close proximity to the buildings and facilities of the NKUA Cyprus Branch.

On the part of the Municipality of Nicosia, a clear commitment to providing a viable solution, regarding designated parking areas that adequately meet the needs of the NKUA Cyprus Branch, has been formally expressed in the uploaded Letter of Certification. This Letter is accompanied by a detailed map indicating all municipal parking locations within the urban area of Nicosia's historic center.

The aforementioned document, along with the supporting information, is expected to constitute a satisfactory level of compliance with the requirements of points 1.2.6, 1.2.7, and 1.2.8.

2. Student welfare services

We are grateful that the committee did not identify any areas of improvement in this field and granted compliance.

3. Infrastructure

We are grateful that the committee did not identify any areas of improvement in this field and granted compliance.

1. Institution's Academic Profile and Orientation

Sub-Areas

- 1.1 Mission and strategic planning**
- 1.2 Connecting with society**
- 1.3 Development processes**

1.1 We are grateful that the committee did not identify any areas of improvement in this field and granted compliance.

1.2 We thank the committee for their insightful comments. We appreciate the hesitance in providing a 5/5 assessment given that the program is new, and there is not current activity to evaluate.

1.3 We welcome the suggestion of the committee to stay in close contact with local community, and we thank them for granting compliance in the sub-area



2. Quality Assurance

Sub-Areas

2.1 System and quality assurance strategy

2.2 Ensuring quality for the programmes of study

We thank the committee for their positive words and for sharing our enthusiasm on the novelties this Branch will lead. We also appreciate being granted compliance in this sub-area.



3. Administration

We welcome the committee's suggestion which will materialize through our cooperation with UCy as reflected in part in our MoU. We also appreciate being granted compliance in this sub-area.

4. Learning and Teaching

Sub-Areas

4.1 Planning the programmes of study

4.2 Organisation of teaching

4.1 We appreciate the Committee's input on this sub-area. We would like to highlight that the statement "As in Athens, the decision has been made to have no patient contact up until the end of the 3rd year." is inaccurate. What was presented during the two-day discussion, is that actual clinical rotation starts half-way through the 3rd year. Students have contact with patients as soon as the 1st year. Through curricular and extracurricular activities, including elective subjects, students have the opportunity to contact patients. Moreover, during the first two years, students have extensive training on simulation (actor-based, scenario-based and VR-based) so that they build confidence as well as skills, and more importantly in order to ascertain that patients' experience will not be negatively affected by the interaction with students. The latter is the undisputable top priority of any Medical School, therefore we are confident our approach is appreciated by clinical evaluators.

Additionally, as per indicator 4.1.4 we argue that contact with patients is not the only effective way of integrating theory and practice. Simulation, as mentioned above, as well as case-based discussion are very effective tools, and considered appropriate for the early years of studies.

4.2 We appreciate the Committee's reluctance regarding indicator 4.2.3. as the program is not yet running. With regards to indicators 4.2.4 and 4.2.5, given that for the first year of the programme, and until permanent staff is recruited, teaching will be delivered from existing NKUA staff, throughout the two-day presentation ample evidence was provided with regards to existing staff's effective communication and feedback provision. Therefore, it is not clear to us why these two indicators were given a "partially compliant" marking.

We welcome the overall suggestion of introducing medical psychology at an earlier stage - we will accommodate this in the upcoming revision of the curriculum, which will affect both Athens and Cyprus Branch programs.

5. Teaching Staff

It is our understanding that the scoring reflects the fact that “Very few of this can be assessed since the program is not yet in operation”, as indicated in the comments of the EEC for this section. However, we wish to emphasize that as it was repeatedly highlighted throughout the two-day discussion, the NKUA School of Medicine is staffed with over 600 tenured educators, a number that will rise to 700 by the end of the year. NKUA is renowned for the quality of its staff, and position openings attract great numbers of highly qualified candidates from all over the world. We think that this guarantees the quality of the teaching staff that will cover the branch until its full operation, following its accreditation. There is no reasonable doubt that “loaned” staff will deliver equally high-quality teaching in Cyprus. Regarding the staff that will be recruited specifically for the Branch, the same rigorous criteria, as those applied in the NKUA recruitment procedures, will be applied for the Cyprus Branch, so as to recruit highly qualified educators.

With regards to research, research opportunities for the academic staff to be placed in Cyprus were explicitly presented through the process, and NKUA Faculty provided specific examples on how research will be available from day 0. As also pointed out by the EEC, the use of UCY facilities will be beneficial to both UCY and the Branch regarding support of research opportunities. Finally, the committee itself actually presents all the necessary arguments in favour of at least 4/5 marking of this sub-area in their own “Strengths” section.



6. Research

We are grateful that the committee did not identify any areas of improvement in this field and granted compliance.



7. Resources

We are grateful that the committee did not identify any areas of improvement in this field and granted compliance.

B. Conclusions and Final Remarks

With regards to the challenges described by the committee:

1. The NKUA School of Medicine has an ongoing collaboration with UCy, thanks to their similar mission, shared values and common ethos. This is the reason why they have chosen each other as a strategic partner. This is reflected in the signed MoU, based on which accredited laboratories and preclinical teaching facilities of the UCy will be used by the proposed branch. We fail to see how the proposed branch could dissolve the educational landscape. Apart from the UCy labs, the Branch does not aim to use any other resource or infrastructure that existing institutions use. It has built its own infrastructure, and will continue to do so, it will bring its own faculty, and will immediately recruit dedicated staff, and it will use its own research resources. In fact, the Branch aims to raise the standards in Medical Education and research, and encourage everyone in the field to evolve accordingly.
2. The University Hospital, as conceived by local authorities, will be run by the local government independently. The latter will certainly be fully responsible for deciding how beds and facilities will be utilized in terms of academic education. The branch will not, and in fact should not, have any authority on these decisions. Other Schools can follow the example of the NKUA School of Medicine, and discuss with the Cypriot Government, presenting their cases, and exploring potential participation. NKUA will support the project, but in no case will it patronize its operation. Therefore, it is entirely unclear why the regulation of the future University Hospital is included in this assessment.
3. We appreciate the concern of the committee. The timing of the evaluation was not in our hands and therefore it would be unfair to be used as a shortcoming. On the contrary, the School acted rapidly, prepared swiftly and thoroughly for this presentation in an extremely limited time, and expects to be assessed fairly for the actual content of the application. We reiterate that policies, staff and pool of applicants are in place, therefore we stand our ground that despite time pressure, the Branch is ready to function in full.

With regards to committee's findings:

1. The NKUA School of Medicine is renowned for its extroversion and its international collaborations. As it was highlighted during the relevant presentations, the School has MoU with Schools and Hospitals all over the world and encourages student exchange in the context of European and International programs. Additionally, as an Institution that strongly supports biomedical research, it participates in international collaborations, as documented in the thousands of published multi-centered studies. The branch will be open to any suggestions for research collaboration with existing institutions. In fact, one of the main roles that it aims to fulfil is to introduce top-level research as argued by stakeholders. The expertise, the funding, and the network of the NKUA School of Medicine will certainly offer formidable incentive for other Schools building their own research portfolio. We fail to understand how meaningful co-operation could represent a suggestion for improvement, not to mention a concern for the overall project. Additionally, it is very challenging for us to understand how potential impingement on clinical training capacity and existing research success could be applied through our project. Firstly, current clinical training and research activity of existing schools is minimal in terms of both quantity as well as variety, mainly due to the small number of patients treated. Secondly, throughout the proposal of our branch there was not a single hint that NKUA branch will utilize any of their resources (apart from UCy labs as per MOU, on which stakeholders and panelists of the committee no less confirmed the capacity). Thirdly, as confirmed by students and stakeholders, over the past years, students from the existing institutions in Cyprus select Clinical Departments of the NKUA School for their electives. We never considered that as an impingement on the part of the existing schools, primarily because this is our ethos and secondly because of the premium clinical capacity of the School in Athens. Moreover, we feel unsure as to what indicators could be used as evidence of co-operation, and it would be very useful to us if we could study what the three existing Schools have presented in this area.

In more detail:

- a. Through careful evaluation of infrastructure, facilities, portfolios, mission and values, and academic orientation, the NKUA School of Medicine and the School of Medicine of the University of Cyprus (UCy), have chosen each other as a strategic partner. This is reflected in the MoU, based on which accredited laboratories and preclinical teaching facilities of the UCy will be used by the proposed branch.
- b. We are confident that the NKUA Branch will contribute to the continuing raise of academic standards in Cyprus and improve the educational “ecosystem” in favor of students as well as the local and international medical community. Though, functioning in the same environment, and assuring ethical academic conduct, any competition is overseen, regulated and protected by local and European legislature. The magnitude of the NKUA School of Medicine should be regarded as motivation for further improvement in medical education and research. After all, offering prospective students the opportunity for high quality medical / clinical education, to the top standards that NKUA School of Medicine operates on for almost 200 years, should not be regarded as a threat for other Medical Schools or weakness/risk for the program itself, but should instead be welcomed and encouraged.
- c. NKUA has already more than 800 cooperation agreements with Universities across 58 countries and is ready to collaborate in research and educational programs with other Institutions in Cyprus.

2. We would appreciate an explanation of what represents a risk, given that administrative procedures, staff, and pool of applicants are in place. Written confirmation by the NKUA regarding its commitment to providing clinical training in its facilities in Athens has been granted and is already available (please see Annex 6 of the **Medical School's Response** (Basic Medical Education) form).
3. NKUA School of Medicine presented the rationale, arguments and strategic planning for suggesting a starting capacity of a minimum of 60 students.
- i) The market gap, presented through numbers and charts, is in the range of several hundreds of students from Cyprus, Greece, and other countries where Greek speaking students aim for studies in Medicine. The expressed interest through emails and phone calls already surpasses the aimed number of admissions. Therefore, no concern about the ability to achieve the said number of admissions is justified.
 - ii) As was highlighted earlier in this response, the Faculty of the School has decades of experience in Medical Education, and has been running preclinical subjects for more than 300 students per semester. Therefore, their capacity to accommodate a minimum of 60 students is indisputable. In fact, original assessments defined that the Branch could easily accommodate a starting number of 100 students, but this was reduced to a minimum of 60 only to compensate for time restrictions, posed by the late evaluation.
 - iii) It is unclear as to which calculation could be implemented to differentiate between the needed infrastructure for teaching a minimum of 60 students versus 30 students. The lack of any relevant published data, studies or guidelines, render such a demarcation very subjective. Using the number of UCy students as a threshold seems extremely arbitrary. Should the committee present the algorithm based on which this suggestion was made, the School could certainly offer counter arguments, proving its adequacy for the proposed number of admissions.
 - iv) The suggestion for 30-40 admissions is an extreme one, given that no European School of Medicine currently admits less than 40 undergraduate students per year. Over previous decades, newly established English MD programs started with less than 40 admissions, but since mid-2010s, they have all gone above 60. Therefore, there is currently no business case in Europe with less than 40 admissions in a tuition fee-based program.

4. Capacity for clinical practice and education

- i) Throughout the evaluation procedure, the NKUA School of Medicine presented in every detail the infrastructure for clinical practice and education. Plans are in place for cooperation with a fully functional private clinic (El Greco), that covers all primary and secondary medical specialties, with a currently available capacity of 60 beds, and planned expansion up to 100 beds within the following 2 years. The above have been confirmed by respective stakeholders during the relevant session. Additionally, an agreement has been made for collaboration with a new Hospital, building of which has already been approved, blueprints and relevant agreements were presented to the evaluation committee, and completion is anticipated prior to the first cohort of students reaching their clinical rota. Moreover, the leadership team of the NKUA are working closely with the Cypriot administration to materialize the project of a new, purpose-built University Hospital. This has been a chronic unmet social demand and, as explained by participating stakeholders, NKUA has the scientific and political leverage to mitigate challenges that have prevented previous attempts from finishing this project. The NKUA School of Medicine extends to 16 Hospitals in Athens, with 4 exclusively University Hospitals, which is a testament to its ability to establish and run a University Hospital, more than any other body that has been involved with the project in the past. As the stakeholders explained during the relevant session, collaboration with NKUA is Cyprus' best chance to materialize this project. Once completed, the University Hospital will comprise the main clinical campus of the proposed branch. Finally, the NKUA School of Medicine, with its 67 University Clinical Departments in Athens and over 3.300 beds, offers opportunities for clinical training that are considered unique, not only in the region, but also in the wider European area. These Departments have trained thousands of doctors over the past decades, who are praised worldwide for their clinical experience and expertise. The School includes 18 Centers of Clinical Excellence for rare diseases, that will be included as elective rotations in the proposed program, offering students exposure to diagnosis and treatment of rare conditions, to which they would otherwise have no access during their undergraduate studies. On a separate note, clinical exposure of students during their first and second year of studies, will be carried out using the facilities of the existing Hospital (El Greco), the capacity of which is considered adequate for the extent of clinical exposure 1st- and 2nd-year students need according to the curriculum, since most of their clinical practice is designed to be carried out through simulation, predominantly high-fidelity and virtual-reality simulation.

- ii) The committee stressed that they have not inspected the aforementioned facilities. NKUA School of Medicine proposed to the committee visiting both the El Greco Hospital, as well as the Clinical Departments in Athens. It was argued that time constraints would not allow for this. The School reiterates its proposal and invites the committee to inspect the sites at their convenience, within the context of the current assessment. The Leadership of the School appreciates that a visit on 17 Hospitals and almost 70 Departments overall could be a time-consuming exercise, but this is considered an actual argument in favor of the adequacy of the clinical capacity, lifting any concern that the committee might have. Moreover, the facilities of the School in Athens as well as implemented clinical curriculum have been approved repeatedly by the Hellenic Authority for Higher Education (HAHE), therefore no reasonable doubt pertains.
- iii) In an extensive session with the Faculty of the School, it was made clear that there is a remarkably large pool of teaching personnel that can staff the proposed branch from day 0, and until permanent branch staff is recruited. Professors with decades of experience in medical education and research, as well as administration of University Departments are exactly what is missing from the current environment, and guarantee a seamless function of the proposed branch.
- iv) The curriculum itself was explicitly presented both in written and through the delivered presentations. It is once again highlighted that this curriculum is accredited by HAHE, and has been running with appropriate updates and modifications for many decades, educating almost 400 students per year, during their clinical years.
- v) It has to be underlined that the Cypriot Administration has passed a legislative act according to which admission of Cypriot students to Greek Universities, as well as clinical training in the NKUA School of Medicine are officially recognized. It must be underlined that thousands of Cypriot students have been trained in the NKUA School of Medicine for more than one century, following competitive national (Pan-Cypriot) exams. The NKUA School of Medicine is today their top choice, and only those with highest grades achieve admission. Hence, studying in the NKUA School of Medicine is officially recognized by the Republic of Cyprus. In this context, and for the benefit of its students, by approval of the NKUA Senate, the Branch's program will also have access to the Athens training infrastructure.
- vi) There is now confirmation in written by the Cypriot Ministry of Health that there is an option for students of the Branch to receive clinical training in public hospitals of Cyprus.

vii) For the above reasons it is extremely hard to see how the proposed branch falls short in comparison to existing Schools, where clinical education is performed in a small number of beds. These are actually the reasons why students from all over the southeastern Europe, including Cyprus, compete for attending their electives in the Clinical Departments of the NKUA School of Medicine. This is an undisputable “in-the-field” argument underpinning School’s supremacy in clinical education.

5. Given that the main concern expressed is the inability to assess current clinical infrastructure, we once again highlight the vast capacity of the Athens Hospitals, the readily available contingency in written with the parent institute, the HAHE accreditation of the program in Athens, as well as the option for prompt visit and evaluation of all clinical sites. The capacity in Athens is not a backup for a potential disadvantage; it is in fact a certain advantage for initial cohorts of students.

6. We are confident that such a statement to the students, though very easy to provide, is entirely superfluous, given that there is no reasonable chance of inability to offer the curriculum in full, as described above.

7. The NKUA branch School of Medicine is ready to offer the curriculum as presented above. Opportunities in Greece exist and will be used to enhance clinical exposure and depth of knowledge. NKUA has a long-standing immaculate track record of successful projects, thus we feel there is no substance in preparing for a potential failure. With regards to the University Hospital, this is primarily a project by the local Government. NKUA will support the project with its paramount experience and socioeconomic leverage.

8. Finally, we sincerely welcome the positive comments made by the Regulated Professions Representative member of the EEC, according to whom *“The programme for NKUA Medical School Cyprus Branch meets the requirements for professional licensure in Cyprus. Consequently, the graduates of the said programme will be eligible for professional registration and licensure in Cyprus. I fully approve an initial cohort of 60 students for the NKUA Medical School Cyprus Branch.”*

Please find documents related to clinical training capacity in Annex 6 of the **Medical School’s Response** (Basic Medical Education) form.

We cordially thank the EEC for their support through the process, their insightful comments and their ongoing input.



D. Higher Education Institution Academic Representatives

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Professor Pagona Lagiou, MD, PhD	Dean, School of Health Sciences	

Date: 05/08/2025

