Doc. 300.1.2

Higher Education Institution's Response

- **Higher Education Institution:**
  University of Cyprus

- **Town: Nicosia**

- **Programme of study**
  Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)

  In Greek:

  Μάστερ Πολιτικής Επιστήμης

  In English:

  MA in Political Science

- **Language(s) of instruction: Greek**

- **Programme's status:** Currently Operating

- **Concentrations (if any):**

  In Greek: Διεθνείς Σχέσεις ή Συγκριτική Πολιτική
  In English: International Relations or Comparative Politics

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.300.1.1 or 300.1.1/1 or 300.1.1/2 or 300.1.1/3 or 300.1.1/4) must justify whether actions have been taken in improving the quality of the programme of study in each assessment area. The answers' documentation should be brief and accurate and supported by the relevant documentation. Referral to annexes should be made only when necessary.*

- *In particular, under each assessment area and by using the 2nd column of each table, the HEI must respond on the following:*

    - *the areas of improvement and recommendations of the EEC*
    - *the conclusions and final remarks noted by the EEC*

- *The institution should respond to the EEC comments, in the designated area next each comment. The comments of the EEC should be copied from the EEC report **without any interference** in the content.*

- *In case of annexes, those should be attached and sent on separate document(s). Each document should be in *.pdf format and named as annex1, annex2, etc.*

1. Study programme and study programme's design and development
(ESG 1.1, 1.2, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9)

Areas of improvement and recommendations **by EEC**	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
We have identified similar issues as with the BA programme regarding the formalization of assessment procedures. Continuing along the same lines with regards to flexibility in teaching/assessing in the English language is likely to attract more international students. Similarly with the above BA programme the inclusion or further systematization of methods courses would help students prepare for the labour market.	1(a) With regard to formalizing assessment procedures, and further to our discussion during the on-site visit, kindly note that the UCY general rules do not allow much leeway regarding marking disputes between students and course convenors, whose autonomy in teaching and grading is enshrined in the rules. The second examiner system that is an established good practice in the UK is not practised at UCY (with the exception of assessing MA dissertations), nor is external examining practised (with the exception of Doctoral dissertations). However, please note that students are encouraged to raise any concerns with the MA Programme Coordinator and/or the Department's Chairperson, to ensure that the course convenors do offer adequate explanation and feedback on grades and/or revise the grade if there has been an error. Frankly, there have not been any serious or notable disputes over grading for the MA in Political Science since its launching 12 years ago. Finally, note that student evaluations with regards to the specific question of assessment methods is very positive (the average score indicating satisfaction in the last two semesters is 4.5/5). 1(b) We agree that the introduction of courses taught/assessed in English is quite promising and that will also allow for the courses of the MA in Political Science to be taken by international students in the future (e.g. from the MA in Peace, Conflict and Democracy as well as postgraduate Erasmus students). We are reluctant, however, to introduce too many new courses in English at this stage as the language of instruction for this MA is Greek and we wouldn't like to risk alienating potential students who feel more comfortable studying in Greek. But, in any case, we will revisit this issue in due course and in consultation with our students and make a final decision whether to include or not new courses in English before the next QAA. 1(c) Whilst we appreciate the value of an additional methods course that is optional at the MA level beyond SPS 500, at this stage we are unable to offer such a course due to staff limitations. However, as we discussed with the EEC in our final session, which included all programme coordinators in the Department, we will definitely explore systematizing our methods courses across the different MA programmes in the Department and/or at the School level. In short, we may end up including an optional methods course down the road but only if an intra-	Choose level of compliance:

	Departmental or intra-School one is agreed upon that will share the financial burden across programmes. See also our response in 4(a) below.	

2. Student – centred learning, teaching and assessment
(ESG 1.3)

Areas of improvement and recommendations **by EEC**	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
Compared to the BA programme, the number of options available is smaller. The move towards a programme in Comparative Politics as well as the one in Conflict, Peace and Democracy partly addresses this. Similarly to the BA programme while the fact that much discretion is left to individual members of staff entails flexibility, on the other hand the absence of greater coordination and/or more systematic assessment procedures can be improved. Specifically, the department could focus more on practices to make assessment more consistent. Practical training is done through the placement in partnership with high quality stakeholders. However practical training could be enhanced by more systematic focus on employability skills and methods.	2(a) With regard to MA options available, we agree that they are limited but this is due to lack of permanent teaching staff and the need to keep the MA financially viable. As explained during our on-site discussions with the EEC, in our revised programme we commit to offering 4-6 pathway courses per year, depending on the number of registered students as well as staff availability. We appreciate that students would like to have the full range of courses to choose from, and more if possible. However, if we were to commit to always offer the maximum of 6 pathway courses per year, we shall seriously risk the financial viability of the MA programme and /or pathway, for we will need to offer 15 courses in total every year for the MA, i.e. 6 more than the 9 courses we currently offer every year.

2(b) Further to our response in 1(a) above, note that the Department frequently discusses and exchanges ideas on assessment procedures within its institutional framework. Nonetheless, we reiterate our commitment to further improve and systematize our assessment practices wherever feasible, whilst retaining the autonomous character of teaching at UCY.

2(c) A primary aim of the Internship Programme is the development of employability skills and methods. That is why those who opt for an Internship placement are credited with 10 ECTS and this is meant to signal the emphasis on professional development. Our stakeholders frequently report that our student interns are of much higher quality than other students or even recent hires in their organization. Practical skills are also enhanced through participation in international Model UN competitions that we strongly encourage and which we are committed to continue to support financially. At the same time, we should note that our emphasis in this MA programme is also in providing solid theoretical underpinning and cultivating a reflective and critical disposition in political science students, something that is much appreciated by our stakeholders. With regards to practical training that is done in partnership with 'high quality | Choose level of compliance: |

	stakeholders', please note that we are in collaboration with the Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to develop professional training programmes for new diplomats. We also plan an annual day workshop on negotiation for all MA students to start from this academic year. These more practical courses will no doubt cross-fertilize our MA curriculum re: employability skills and methods, whilst recognizing that our MA is not a vocational programme. See also our response in 4(a) below.	
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3. Teaching staff
(ESG 1.5)

Areas of improvement and recommendations **by EEC**	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
The comments in this area overlap, given the teaching staff is the same across the three programs. [There does not appear to be a systematic procedure in place for staff development. Addressing this issue by establishing more structured procedures for promotion, as well as for staff development and training, would be beneficial. As previously mentioned, to tackle the current understaffing challenges, it would be advantageous to develop a long-term hiring strategy that aligns with the department's research, teaching, and EDI needs. Additionally, it is important to note that there are currently no female professors among the staff.]	3(a) With respect to staff development, it is regulated and monitored by university institutions rather than intra-Departmental or intra-programmatic processes. We should note that this is not a compulsory procedure. But we do appreciate the recommendation, and we will encourage members of the teaching staff to participate in centrally organized staff development courses.

3(b) With regard to establishing more structured procedures for promotion, note that the promotion procedure at UCY is regulated by the law and it is quite structured as explained in our submitted dossier. The Department does not have much leeway in this regard. The Department does, however, frequently discuss its future development and hiring strategy, and we very much welcome the EEC's recommendation to seriously consider our research and teaching needs as well as our equity, diversity and inclusion needs.

3(b) The gender imbalance, especially as regards the Political Science staff, has been rightly noted, it is indeed a concern and has been discussed intra-departmentally. We try to ensure that, at least, the internal and external members of our promotion/hiring committees include female professors – although we recognize this is not in itself the solution. In our next hiring procedures, we will strongly encourage female applicants so as to increase the pool of female candidates. | Choose level of compliance: |
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4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification
(ESG 1.4)

Areas of improvement and recommendations **by EEC**	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
To enhance the recognition of the qualifications students receive upon graduation, the department can systematize method teaching and integrate employability skills into the curriculum. This approach will better prepare students for both potential PhD studies and the labor market. Another strategy would be to offer an MSc program, signaling to employers that graduates have received rigorous methodological training in political science.	4(a) Further to our response in 1(c) with regards to including/systematizing methods courses and our response in 2(c) regarding practical skills, we are unable at this stage to proceed to offer an MSc programme. We must weigh seriously and carefully the pros and cons of such a change. Whilst we certainly recognize the appeal that an MSc has in certain political science approaches as well as specific employers, we also note that this is not common for programmes in Political Science/International Relations/Comparative Politics. We are also concerned that an MSc rather than an MA might be off-putting for students with more humanities and international relations/studies background. We will, however, consider this before the next QAA, depending on the interest and the availability of staff to proceed with such a strategy.	Choose level of compliance:

5. Learning resources and student support
(ESG 1.6)

Areas of improvement and recommendations **by EEC**	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
As noted in the previous section, we identified a shortage of permanent staff, which limits the department's capabilities to offer a wider range of modules, particularly at the MA program, which has a fairly limited number of optional courses.	5(a) With regard to the identified shortage of staff, we fully agree. The Department has recently made a strong case for more positions to cover the needs of all our teaching programmes, including the MA in Political Science.	Choose level of compliance:

6. Additional for doctoral programmes
(ALL ESG)

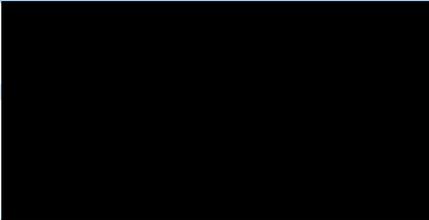| Areas of improvement and recommendations **by EEC**	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
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7. Eligibility (Joint programme)
(ALL ESG)

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B. Conclusions and final remarks

Conclusions and final remarks **by EEC**	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
1. The department offers an ambitious BA program with a wide array of modules, and a fundamentally restructured MA program aimed at addressing previous evaluation concerns and enhancing financial viability. More resources could improve program quality and diversity, reduce reliance on non-permanent staff, and formalize assessment procedures. Additionally, encouraging more students to pursue dissertations and method courses would better prepare them for the job market and research endeavors. The department has a successful PhD program despite the small intake. However, lack of funding for scholarships limits PhD program accessibility, and the absence of a broader PhD community hampers collaborative opportunities. 2. Teaching, learning, and student development are well-supported, with a broad program covering various political science sub-fields. The program attracts high-quality students, and teaching benefits from excellent facilities and flexible methods. However, greater coordination and systematic assessment procedures are needed to ensure consistency. Practical training could be enhanced by focusing on employability skills and methods. 3. The faculty has a distinguished publication record and international experience, fostering a rich learning environment. However, there's a lack of systematic staff development procedures and female representation among professors. Long-term hiring strategies aligned with research, teaching, and equity needs are recommended. 4. The department demonstrates a commitment to clear and consistent student support, with transparent admission regulations and application processes. Systematizing method teaching can enhance student experience and employability. Offering an MSc program and integrating employability skills into the curriculum would further enhance student preparation for the job market and PhD studies. 5. The department provides ample information and state-of-the-art facilities to support student learning. However, a shortage of permanent staff limits module diversity, particularly in the MA program. Efforts to encourage PhD students to utilize international networks like ECPR for workshops and journal access are needed. Additionally, promoting student work presentation and inviting external speakers online could enhance academic networking at no extra cost.	Please see our responses in Sections 1 to 5 above.	Choose level of compliance:

Final Remarks: We take up this opportunity to thank the EEC for their recommendations and their appreciation of the good work that we are doing. We are delighted that the overall organization, dossier, additional material and responses that we have provided were helpful for the work of the EEC. We are especially grateful for their recognition of the understaffing of the Department and the effects that understaffing has on the MA in Political Science specifically and all the Department's study programs more generally. Also, we cannot fail to mention the good spirit in, and collaborative attitude with, which the discussion between the EEC and the Political Science faculty on research, teaching, student guidance, and assessment practices took place.

C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

Name	Position	Signature
Professor Philemon Bantimaroudis	Department Chairperson	
Professor Costas M. Constantinou	MA in Political Science Coordinator	
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