

Doc. 300.1.2

Date: 5 July 2022

Higher Education Institution's Response

- **Higher Education Institution:**
UNIVERSITY OF CYPRUS

- **Town:** Nicosia

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

In Greek:

Μάστερ στην Επιστήμη Ηλεκτρολόγου
Μηχανικού/Μάστερ Μηχανικής Ηλεκτρολόγου
Μηχανικού (1.5 χρόνια/90 ECTS)

In English:

Master of Science in Electrical Engineering/Master of
Engineering in Electrical Engineering (1.5 academic
years/90 ECTS)

- **Language(s) of instruction:** Greek and English
- **Programme's status:** Currently Operating
- **Concentrations (if any):** None



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 300.1.1/2 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.*
- *In particular, under each assessment area, the HEI must respond on, without changing the format of the report:*
 - *the findings, strengths, areas of improvement and recommendations of the EEC*
 - *the 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.300.1.1 or 300.1.1/2 or 300.1.1/3 or 300.1.1/4).*
- *In case of annexes, those should be attached and sent on a separate document.*

1. Study programme and study programme's design and development

(ESG 1.1, 1.2, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9)

EEC's Comment 1:

Although the University has a well-organised communication with graduates and the Department helps graduates with their employment in organisations and big companies, it is suggested to have a mechanism of analysis and publish graduate employment information as well as industry needs.

HEI's response:

The Department's view on this very important issue is that the mechanism to keep track and analyze graduate employment information should be implemented at the University-level through the office responsible for the alumni.

Nevertheless, recognizing the importance of this issue, and in the absence of a mechanism at the university-level, the Department has made an effort in the past to create an archive with the contact and employment information of all its graduates. That document includes this information for all the graduates from 2007 (the Department's first graduates) to 2012. Based on the EEC's recommendation, we will now resume this documentation effort and we will gradually contact all the remaining graduates (from 2013 onward) to complete our archive. This archive will be updated periodically (every few years), in order to ensure that it remains as up-to-date as possible. It should be noted that the key impediment in maintaining contact with our graduates is the fact that they lose access to their university email address upon graduation. The Faculty of Engineering has recently initiate an effort to raise this issue at the University-level, in order to find a way to provide graduates with some form of "alumnus" email address.

Regarding the probing of industry needs, our academic staff has strong connections with local industry (e.g., the Electricity Authority of Cyprus, various telecommunication companies, start-ups, etc.), mainly through numerous collaborative research efforts and internship programmes. We always ask our industrial partners for feedback regarding both our research and teaching activities, but this is done mostly in an ad-hoc manner. Based on the EEC's recommendation, we will formalize this process; we will start inviting all pertinent stakeholders to annual meetings held at the Department's premises, where we will ask for feedback regarding the needs of the industry and how those can be served by the activities of our Department.

EEC's Comment 2:

The completion of the new building to house the Department and the activities of the programme will strongly enhance and improve the quality of the lectures, labs and research. Also new perspectives are offered to increase the programmes, number of students and academic staff.

HEI's response:

Indeed, the new School of Engineering building that will house the Department will strongly enhance the quality of our Department and allow us to increase the number of our offered programmes. As highlighted in the recently crafted Strategic Plan 2021-2025 of the Department (submitted to the University in June 2021), the creation of new English-language Master programmes is one of our priorities. A new Master programme in Key Enabling Technologies was approved by the Department in April 2022 and the official application documents will soon be submitted to the Graduate School of the University. Another new Master programme in Smart Grid Technologies was submitted in February 2022 for funding within the context of Erasmus Mundus

Joint Master Degrees (EMJMD). The additional new programmes will increase both the number of students and, correspondingly, the number of academic staff. They will also expand the courses available to the PhD students, further enhancing their theoretical/experimental background. Moreover, new laboratory facilities and new equipment will enhance teaching through the development of new teaching laboratories as well as research activities through the development of additional research laboratories and testbeds.

EEC's Comment 3:

Low numbers of students as most of them are part-time.

HEI's response:

We agree with the EEC that the number of students enrolled in our Master programme is low, and we recognize this is a problem that we must tackle. We believe that the primary reasons for the low numbers are (1) the part-time nature of most Master students, (2) the fact that the current Master programme is “general”, i.e., it does not focus on a specific domain, and (3) the language of instruction is Greek (which limits the pool of applicants). We definitely intend to address the last two reasons. As mentioned in our response to EEC's Comment 1 above, we are already in the process of starting at least two new specialized Master programmes to be offered in English. Moreover, all our existing graduate programmes (Master and Ph.D.) will switch to the English language starting in Fall 2023.

EEC's Comment 4:

There are no official formal procedures for the career and promotion of the academic staff.

HEI's response:

There must have been a misunderstanding regarding this issue, because the procedures for promotion of the academic staff are formally and explicitly stated in the official rules/law of the University. There are very detailed rules and procedures regarding the promotion of the academic staff at all the ranks (from Lecturer to Assistant Professor, from Assistant Professor to Associate Professor [tenure], and from Associate Professor to Professor).

EEC's Comment 5:

The above suggestion for having more bi-directional communications between the students and the department is also applicable to this MSc/MEng programme.

HEI's response:

We believe that staff-student meetings would enable bi-directional communications and be very beneficial to the students. It is probably not necessary to have multiple (regular) such meetings per semester, but perhaps one such meeting per year. We feel that an annual meeting suffices to inform the students of any changes made by the department, since the changes are typically not so drastic from year to year. We will start holding these annual staff-student meetings starting with the next Academic Year.

EEC's Comment 6:

Consider offering more courses in the evening for those students working in the daytime.

HEI's response:

We already offer the vast majority of our graduate-level courses in late afternoon and the evening. Most courses start at 18:00, while some start at 16:30. A very small number of classes start at 15:00. Obviously, we cannot offer all classes at 18:00, because there would be more scheduling conflicts for the students. However, we will try – if possible – to have all graduate courses start no earlier than 16:30.

EEC's Comment 7:

Consider to switch to a fully English taught MSc/MEng programme.

HEI's response:

All the post-graduate programmes (Master and PhD) have received approval by the University Senate to be offered in English, and we will start offering them only in English from the 2023-24 Academic Year. The new specialized Master programmes that are under preparation (see response to EEC's Comment 3) will only be offered in English.

EEC's Comment 8:

Consider attracting international MSc/MEng students.

HEI's response:

This is precisely the reason why we will be switching all our graduate programmes (Master and PhD) to English starting in Fall 2023. The Faculty of Engineering is starting an effort to promote the English-language graduate programmes of all of its constituent Departments. Independently, the Department also intends to embark on systematic advertising through all relevant online and physical channels that reach an international audience. Finally, we also intend to progressively increase our presence on social media channels, which tend to be very effective advertising outlets.

EEC's Comment 9:

Consider joint degrees with non-European universities.

HEI's response:

At the moment, our efforts are focused more on collaborations with EU universities, because of the various funding opportunities, such as the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees (EMJMD) initiative. Specifically, a new Master programme in Smart Grid Technologies was submitted in February 2022 for funding as an EMJMD. Moreover, mobility within the EU is seamless and does not involve complications regarding immigration/visa/permit/etc. Of course, we thank the EEC for this suggestion and we will certainly consider this option, too.

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

EEC's Comment 10:

Consider getting student feedback during the term/semester to benefit the students and courses in the ongoing term/semester.

HEI's response:

The official policy of the University is to obtain the student evaluations/feedback at the END of each semester. The instructor of each course then uses the student feedback and makes appropriate (where needed) adjustments to the course syllabus/teaching the next time the course will be taught again. Students can provide feedback for any course during the semester though the course's designated office hours either in-person or anonymously through their student representatives. Further, to receive feedback DURING the semester, the Department has advised all faculty and teaching staff to periodically ask for unofficial student feedback during the semester and take appropriate action on-demand, if needed. To make this process (i.e., mid-semester feedback) official, the decision would have to be made at the University-level.

EEC's Comment 11:

Consider a proactive strategy for increasing the number of MSc/MEng students.

HEI's response:

The Department is very active in outreach and promotional activities, but we intend to further increase our efforts in this domain. With the switch to English-taught post-graduate programmes in Fall 2023, we also intend to embark on systematic advertising through all relevant online and physical channels that reach an international audience. Moreover, we also intend to progressively increase our presence on social media channels, which tend to be very effective advertising outlets. Finally, the Faculty of Engineering is starting an effort to promote the English-language post-graduate programmes of all of its constituent Departments.

EEC's Comment 12:

Consider how the process can be made easier when the students have to choose elective courses for a given semester.

HEI's response:

Before the start of each semester, all students are actively encouraged to arrange one-on-one meetings with their Academic Advisor to discuss the various courses that they must take. It should be noted that elective courses for the Masters programme in EE are only six, out of which the students must take only three. The decision on which elective courses to register for is taken by the student in consultation with his/her academic advisor based primarily on the student's interests and their intended area of specialization. Based on the EEC's recommendation, we will also start to host a departmental annual meeting for all students to discuss specifically the various options for course electives.

3. Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

EEC's Comment 13:

While the number of faculty members is appropriate to the evaluated study programme, the committee feels that the workload of each teaching staff might be slightly higher than the expected. The committee was informed that a few new MSc programmes are to be created in order to increase the number of master students, which means that the workload of the teaching staff could be further increased. The department needs to find a tradeoff between the number of delivered courses and the staff's workload.

HEI's response:

The law of the University dictates the teaching load of all academics, so the Department has no control over the amount of teaching each colleague has to do; the teaching load is, in fact, exactly the same for all academics, irrespective of their rank. However, we fully understand the concern regarding the creation of new Master programmes, which will, inevitably, increase the number of offered courses. We plan to address this issue by requesting additional academic and teaching staff, and not by increasing the teaching load of existing academics. This is also the current mode of operation of the Rectorship that has tied new faculty lines to new programmes offered by the Departments. The teaching load of all academics will never exceed the amount dictated by the law of the University.

4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification (ESG 1.4)

EEC's Comment 14:

The number of students is small. Department should continue the planning of the English MSc programme with various specialisations. Herein new cross-departmental/cross-disciplinary study options may form an excellent attraction for new students. It is recommended that the department invest in student marketing and prepare for an increasing amount of support work once students with diverse backgrounds arrive. We also recommend that the department try to avoid creating a large number of very small programmes. The communication of rules and regulations (to students) should be improved.

HEI's response:

The new specialized Master programmes are specifically targeting cross-departmental/cross-disciplinary study options to further increase the appeal of the degrees. As previously mentioned in our response to EEC's Comment 11, we intend to embark on systematic advertising through all relevant online and physical channels that reach an international audience. Moreover, we also intend to progressively increase our presence on social media channels, which tend to be very effective advertising outlets. Finally, the Faculty of Engineering is starting an effort to promote the English-language post-graduate programmes of all of its constituent Departments.

The University already provides adequate English-language support services to all incoming international students, and those services will surely be enhanced as more English-language Master programmes are created.

Regarding the avoidance of creating a large number of very small programmes, we completely agree with the EEC. In fact, before any new specialized Master programme is approved by the Department, a very thorough feasibility and sustainability study must take place and the impact of the new Master on existing/other Masters must be evaluated and taken into account. The goal is to have only provably self-sustainable Master programmes.

Regarding the communication of the rules and regulations to the students, those are readily available to everyone via both the Department's website and the University's website. Specifically, all rules and regulations regarding all programmes of study are succinctly and explicitly outlined in the official "Prospectus" publications (separate for undergraduate and post-graduate studies) found on the University's website:

https://newdev.ucy.ac.cy/publications/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2022/03/Undergr.Prosp_.En20-22.pdf

https://newdev.ucy.ac.cy/publications/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2022/03/Postgr.En_.21-23_sm.pdf

Of course, whenever there is a CHANGE in the rules and regulations, the students are notified by email and the changes are also reflected in the aforementioned publications and on the website of the Graduate School. Since all graduate-level programmes of study (including the Master) are overseen by the University's Graduate School (at the University-level), all important information regarding general Master rules and regulations is posted on the Graduate School's website.



Nevertheless, based on this suggestion by the EEC to further help the students, we have also advised all academics to go through the main requirements of the degree during the first meeting with their PhD students and proactively ask students during their advisor-advisee meetings if they have any questions regarding the rules, guidelines and programme requirements.

5. Learning resources and student support (ESG 1.6)

EEC's Comment 15:

The number of MSc students admitted annually is low but it is expected to increase with new programmes. The study progress of MSc students is slow. Yet, this problem is not easy to fix since many students are part-time. In new programmes the number of planned study specialisations is high, which may lead to increasing administrative load. The increasing number of MSc students may require more teaching spaces especially if the number of courses is increasing with new programmes. Increasing amount of student support will be needed when the number of students is increasing. The diverse backgrounds of international students may also lead to a need for further support.

HEI's response:

The part-time nature of most of our Master students (who are locals) inevitably leads to their slow progress through the programme. With the new English-language Master programmes, we will also target foreign students, who, most likely, will be full-time students, thereby mitigating this issue.

We are aware that the increasing number of new Master programmes will increase the administrative load. In fact, as part of the submission of the new Master programmes to the University for approval, we request specific numbers of new teaching and administrative staff positions.

The increased demand on teaching space due to the new Master programmes is not seen as a problem, given the fact that the University has adequate teaching rooms on Campus, and the Department is expected to move to its brand-new building facilities within the next 2 years.

Student support is currently handled at the University-level. The University already provides English-language support services to all incoming international students. Since internationalization is one of the key goals of the University, the student support services will continue to be expanded and enhanced to accommodate the needs of the increasing numbers of international students with diverse cultural backgrounds.



6. Additional for doctoral programmes (ALL ESG)

Not applicable.



7. Eligibility (Joint programme) (ALL ESG)

Not applicable.



B. Conclusions and final remarks

EEC's Comment 16:

The members of the EEC committee found the academic programmes to be compliant in all examined aspects. The existing course offerings provide a balance between engineering fundamentals and practice. Moreover, active learning is encouraged through lab work and other means presented by the faculty.

HEI's response:

The Department will continue its effort to maintain and improve these quality levels.

C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Chrysostomos Nicopoulos	Associate Professor, Chair of the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering	
Charalambos A. Charalambous	Associate Professor, Vice-Chair of the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering	
Georgios Ellinas	Professor, Department's Quality Assurance Evaluation Coordinator	GEllinas
Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	
Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	
Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	

Date: 5 July 2022

