

Doc. 300.1.2

Date: 24/07/2023

Higher Education Institution's Response

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

- **Town:** Nicosia

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

In Greek:

Διδακτορικό στη Φυσική (4 έτη/240 ECTS/3^{ος} κύκλος)

In English:

PhD in Physics (4 years/240 ECTS/3rd cycle)

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

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

- **Concentrations (if any):**

In Greek: Concentrations

In English: Concentrations



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
<p>The time-spans from admission to Ph.D. programme till completion of the Doctoral Dissertation are often too long.</p>	<p>The mean duration of PhD studies in our Department is 5.5 years (including a period of 2 years studies at the Master's level, in cases it applies). This is comparable to the duration of PhD studies in Physics in the USA and Europe. The lack of predictable and continuous funding of PhD students may cause delays in the completion of their doctoral studies since this may force them to take external jobs to cover their expenses. The Department makes extensive efforts to secure funding for PhD students via competitive grants through the Cyprus RIF and EU programmes, joint European Doctorate programmes, and other income resources. Apart from competitive funding, PhD students in good standing have been supported via the Evagoras Scholarship programme of the University, coverage of tuition fees via departmental funds, and teaching and research assistantships. It is very important for the University to reinstate and expand further the Evagoras Scholarship programme, supporting excellent PhD students, and allocate a larger portion of the University budget towards this aim. Adequate funding of PhD students allows the students to focus on their research work, which is imperative for the completion of the PhD studies. The faculty members will intensify their effort for securing competitive funding to support PhD studies at the Department of Physics. A new European joint Doctorate programme, AQTIVATE, which</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>

	<p>will provide full scholarships for PhD studies at the Department, has now begun its operation. The University and the School of Graduate Studies should prioritize and develop a central policy to support PhD studies in areas of fundamental research, including efficient redistribution of the University's own income via overheads and tuition fees for this purpose.</p> <p>The University should allocate more money to the Departments for seminar organization, participation in summer and training schools and visitor exchanges for research. This will enhance the exposure of students to research developments and their interaction with other scientists.</p>	
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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
No weaknesses have been identified by the Committee.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Choose level of compliance:
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3. Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

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<p>In view of the upcoming wave of retirement of as many as 50% of current faculty members within the next few years, it is absolutely necessary to fill-in the vacant positions with new hires, so that the current, adequate offer in teaching can be continued at the same completeness and level.</p>	<p>We fully agree with the EEC that the University needs to take immediate actions towards the replacement of all vacancies due to the upcoming retirements. The Department has already contacted and submitted to the Rector's Council, the Planning and Development Committee and the Dean of the School of Pure and Applied Sciences a detailed analysis of its needs in faculty personnel due to the upcoming retirements, taking into account its strategic plan for the period 2021 – 2025. We are expecting concrete feedback from the University Authorities and the allocation of new faculty positions in order to initiate the process of filling all vacancies due to retirements. This is imperative for the Department so as to continue fulfilling adequately its mission and its educational programmes.</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>
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4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification (ESG 1.4)

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<p>The admission and graduation criteria are appropriate; however, the duration of obtaining a Ph.D. degree is sometimes too long, conditioned by the necessity of doctoral students to find unrelated employment for covering their financial needs. Consistent and predictable doctoral fellowships are strongly recommended.</p>	<p>As mentioned above, the Department of Physics makes an all-out effort to secure funding for PhD students via competitive grants and other own income resources. The University should expand further the Evagoras Scholarship programme, supporting excellent PhD students, and allocate a larger portion of the University budget towards funding PhD studies in fundamental disciplines of research. Teaching Assistantships should be funded centrally in order to ensure continuous funding and a constant flow of support for PhD students. This will help them focus on their PhD studies and avoid delays in the completion of their doctoral work.</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>
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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
<p>A state-of-the-art Mechanical Workshop is necessary for the expedient execution of experimental research work in Physics and the Committee recommends that it be established with high priority.</p>	<p>The Department will consult with the Infrastructure Committee of the University and the School of Pure and Applied Sciences in order to investigate the possibility of establishing a Mechanical Workshop. A synergy with the School of Engineering is also being investigated. We agree with the EEC that such a Workshop will be useful end expediate the execution of experimental research work in Physics but also in other disciplines of science and engineering.</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>
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6. Additional for doctoral programmes
 (ALL ESG)

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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
<p>Following the discussion in the more specific sections above, the Committee concluded that the study programmes adhere to high international standards in all aspects: content, implementation, quality assurance, student support and connection to society. The continuation of these activities at the same level requires adequate scientific personnel, rendering thereby indispensable the filling of the upcoming vacancies in faculty positions through new hirings in the Department of Physics. The new hirings should reflect current trends in research and teaching, carrying thereby this unique Department in the Republic of Cyprus well into the 21st Century.</p>	<p>The Physics Department is the only tertiary education Institution in Cyprus offering undergraduate and graduate programmes and cutting-edge research in Physics. As the EEC recognizes it is "indispensable that the Department not only continues but also strengthens and expands its operation after the "generation change" induced by upcoming retirements of as much as 50% of its current staff." The University Authorities should allocate faculty positions to the Department in order to fill the resulting vacancies and not compromise in any way the smooth implementation of the Department's mission.</p> <p>The Department is committed in attracting excellent personnel, capable of producing high quality, cutting-edge research and supporting high quality educational programmes. It is our intention and part of our strategic plan to expand into novel, internationally booming areas of Physics, as suggested and discussed thoroughly with the EEC. Cutting-edge directions in Physics such as quantum computing, new materials – nanophysics – quantum and biomaterials, computational physics – data science – machine learning and their applications to elementary particle physics and biophysics, astroparticle physics and cosmology, elementary particle physics and ongoing international experiments and applications, and applications to medical physics can form the basis of future appointments and provide a succession plan to address the challenge of the</p>	<p>Choose level of compliance:</p>



	upcoming retirements. Excellent candidates in these areas will certainly help the Department face the challenge of evolving into the next generation and ensure continuity in research and teaching excellence and visibility at the international level.	
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C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Assoc. Prof. Nicolaos Toumbas	Chairperson	
Assoc. Prof. Spiros Skourtis	Vice Chairperson	
Assoc. Prof. George Archontis	Coordinator of Undergraduate Studies	
Prof. Fotios Ptochos	Coordinator of Graduate Studies	
Prof. Haralambos Panagopoulos	Member of the Departmental Quality Insurance Committee	

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