

07.14.318.027

Doc. 300.1.2

Higher Education Institution's Response

Conventional-face-to-face programme of study

Date: Date

Higher Education Institution: Frederick University

- **Campus:** Nicosia- Limassol
- **School:** School of Business and Law
- **Department / Sector:** Department of Business Administration
- **Programme of study under evaluation Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)**

In Greek:

Μάστερ Διοίκηση Επιχειρήσεων (3 ακαδημαϊκά
Εξάμηνα, 90 ECTS, Μάστερ (MBA))

In English:

Master of Business Administration (3 academic
semesters, 90 ECTS, Master (MBA))

- **Language of instruction:** English

Programme's Status: Currently Operating

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 2019" [N. 136 (I)/2015 to N. 35(I)/2019].

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.300.3.1) must justify whether actions have been taken in improving the quality of the department 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 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. 300.3.1).*
- *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)

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- a. The University may want to consider offering a preparational course to improve English language skills for students that need a refresher. The course could be offered before the start of the first semester.

Department's Response:

Indeed, the University offers preparational courses to improve English language skills for students on any of its programmes of study where the language of instruction is English.

If an applicant for the MBA Programme has completed their entire undergraduate degree in a non-English speaking university, they must demonstrate satisfactory knowledge of English language.

Suitable qualifications may include one of the following:

- TOEFL, IELTS, GCSE/ IGCSE or Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English, or equivalent, or
- High school leaving certificate from a High School where the language of instruction is English, or
- Satisfactory performance (>50%) at the English Placement Test offered by Frederick University.

In the case of candidates who satisfy one of the above minimum entry requirements but may still need to refresh their English language skills, they can attend preparational courses, offered by the Languages Centre of the University to improve the efficiency in the use of the language. However, it is noted that, although the University offers this facility, no student on the MBA Programme so far needed to take up this offer.

- b. The modules are taught primarily by local faculty but to enhance the international dimension of the program further consideration could be given in inviting visiting professors from abroad who could enhance the quality and research profile of the program.

Department's Response:

Clearly, it is not viable to have resident staff in a Business Department of a small University with expertise in all business disciplines. The Department's full-time staff already cover a wide range of specialization areas within the domains needed to support its programmes of study.

We agree with the Committees's recommendation that visiting faculty can bring various benefits, as it allows for the provision of specialised knowledge, exposes both students and resident staff to new ideas in specific fields and provides new opportunities for collaboration in teaching and research with universities abroad.

The core courses offered during the first semester of the MBA Programme are taught by resident faculty. During the second semester of the Programme, MBA students are required to select two electives from a pool of available elective courses (each corresponding to 10 ECTS). It is noted that, currently, two visiting professors from Greece contribute to the delivery of electives offered to MBA students. As the Programme grows and more electives can be made available to students, we are planning to invite visiting professors from abroad, wherever possible, to contribute to the teaching of MBA elective courses. This could clearly enhance the quality and research profile of the Programme, adding to its international dimension and benefiting the student experience.

To further enhance the international dimension of the programme the University and the Department has enlisted two Visiting Professors:

- i. Dr Marianna Makri from the University of Miami (Management / Entrepreneurial Management)
- ii. Dr Elena Chatzopoulou from Kent University (Digital Marketing)

that will enrich the programme with their specialized knowledge and expertise by the teaching of courses in their area of specialization as well as to collaborate in research activities with the academic staff and provide seminars that will be attended by both faculty and students. (Please refer to Annex 1)

- c. Organizational Behavior (OB) is typically offered as a foundational course in comparable MBA programs and not as an elective. The University may want to consider offering the OB course as a foundational course.

Department's Response:

In the current structure of our MBA Programme, the course on Organisation Behaviour is offered as an elective. We have taken the view of offering a course on Human Resource Management and Leadership as a mandatory module and a course on Organisation Behaviour as an elective module which further builds on the former foundational course. It is worth noting that, over the recent years, this elective has proved to be a very popular option among students.

Based on the recommendation of the Committee and reviewing current trends in international practice by many MBA Programmes, we have changed the course title of this elective to People and Behaviour in Organizations so that it better reflects the content of the module and it is also in line with the key sources recommended to students and basic journals in the field. However, it is noted that during the next major round of internal review of the MBA Programme structure, we will consider the Committee's recommendation to reflect on whether the best way of offering this course is as an elective or as a mandatory course.

2. Student – centred learning, teaching and assessment

(ESG 1.3)

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- a. There is evidence of a solid admission process with well-documented criteria, but this could be tightened up if the program is to become more competitive in the future (e.g., higher prior Bachelor marks to enter into the program etc.). The English language entry requirements could become somewhat higher as well.

Department's Response:

The minimum academic requirements for admission to the MBA programme include an undergraduate degree from a recognized university or the equivalent international qualification in any scientific discipline, such as, Accounting & Finance, Economics, Maritime and Transport, Engineering, Law, Life Sciences, Social Sciences. (also refer to previous answer 1a).

We thank the Committee members for their recommendation which we are happy to take on board at the appropriate point in time. Indeed, as the MBA Programme grows and becomes more competitive, our aim is to tighten up the entry criteria in order to gradually raise the standards of candidates in the selection process. For example, we can set a minimum Degree classification requirement for the successful candidates to enter into the Programme. In addition, given a larger number of applicants, we will apply specific English language entry requirements in terms of setting higher scores in corresponding qualifications, such as, TOEFL, IELTS, GCSE/ IGCSE, or Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English.

- b. The average mark for graduates is 81. This is rather high. While such high mark may be reflective of the students' achievement the EEC recommends a review of the marking process to ensure there is no grade inflation.

Department's Response:

We appreciate the comment and share the view of the Committee that the average mark for MBA graduates is rather high. For this reason, the Senate has undertaken an initiative to review the marking process used by the University to ensure there is no grade inflation in the



marks awarded to students. The findings of this process will be evaluated and discussed at the Senate and our programme will adopt the possible adjustments/ changes to the grading scales from the next academic year.

3. Teaching staff

(ESG 1.5)

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- a. While research is appreciated and encouraged, there is space for improvement in terms of how research is evaluated. In broad terms, quantity receives equal credit as quality. Although this approach has virtues as quantity has a quality of its own, focusing on higher quality publications informed by international metrics could further enhance the reputation of Frederick University in the long term.

Department's Response:

After careful consideration of the committee's suggestions, the Department updated its research policy in a Departmental meeting taking place on the 7th of June 2021 (attached Annex 2). The updated policy of the Department offers guidance and sets targets for its faculty members that relate to key performance indicators (KPIs) in the following:

- The number of publications as listed in Scopus
- High impact (quality) publications as measured by SJR index in Scopus
- Submitted funding proposals & funding
- h-index (measured in Scopus)
- Citations (measured in Scopus)
- PhD supervision (Number of students)

The Department has measured and assessed all KPIs listed above for each faculty member and has set overall targets in each KPI for a horizon of 3 years. These KPIs and each faculty member's contribution is evaluated every year against these targets. Specifically relating to publications, faculty members are expected to contribute to the research output of the Department with a focus on Scopus ranked publications. The expected output of each member is at least one Scopus ranked publication per year. In order to provide merit for high quality research output, the Department measures high rank publications for each faculty member based on SJR with high impact publications considered when a rating $SJR \geq 1$. The $SJR \geq 1$ appears highly correlated with other international rankings such as ABS.

Following the committee's suggestions, the department decided in the meeting of 7th of June 2021 to also adopt the guide for quality of publication-journal based on the Academic Journal Guide published by the Chartered Association of Business Schools. The journal list is a list widely used by academic business schools internationally. The list can be found here: <https://charteredabs.org/academic-journal-guide-2021-view/>

The list uses the AJG rank (1-4 with 4* for reserved for few leading journals in respective fields). The Department aims to also complement and measure the quality of publications of members according to this index.

Clearly, in line with the University's strategic plan to become an internationally recognized research-based institution, the Department proposes to use the above criteria to provide further transparency and clarity to faculty for research evaluations, in addition to the explicit criteria and guidelines for promotion set by the University. With regards new recruitments, these criteria will be applied where priority will be placed on high quality research output.

- b. Along the same lines, more encouragement, incentives and support for research activities among faculty is recommendable (e.g., increase of the research budget). The transition from college (i.e. teaching-focused institution) to university (i.e. research-based institution) seems not to have fully materialized yet (which is understandable as this is typically a lengthy process), and research output for more of the faculty members must be stronger. A means could be to find ways to reduce the required teaching load, which is 12 h/week (even though the department has managed to reduce it to some extent.). Another means would be to make the criteria for research evaluations more transparent and quantifiable.

Department's Response:

To accommodate for the fact that the university is still in transition from an era of teaching to an era of research focus, the Department is focusing on building the necessary culture of research and adding further support mechanisms for developing research output of existing and new members. More specifically the following support mechanisms are provided:

- Reduce faculty teaching load. The University's teaching load reduction scheme is applied in the case of faculty who are engaged in research activities, participate in research projects or supervise PhD students. This scheme will release time for

faculty to develop their research agenda and build up their research output. Furthermore, the Department's decision to proceed with the recruitment of visiting faculty to strengthen program development and delivery, contributes to the teaching load reduction of resident faculty and further concentration on their research activities.

- Increase research support mechanisms. It has been identified that many colleagues are reluctant to engage in funded research initiatives due to the administrative load this often entails. For this reason, a new research officer has been hired in the Research and Interconnection Service to offer support in this direction. Administering research projects, editing research proposals, and enhancing/facilitating the development of research networks are some of the duties of the new research officer.
- Offer opportunities for internal funding to encourage faculty members that require financial assistance to develop their research ideas. Notably, faculty members can take advantage of the decision taken by the Senate in Fall 2020 to fund competitive research proposals. The Senate has allocated a portion of the University's Research Fund to an internal funding scheme through which members of staff can apply for internal small-scale financial support (5,000 to 10,000 euros per project). The call was announced in January 2021 and several faculty members submitted proposals in their field of expertise.
- Encourage/ fund a greater number of visits from external academics and other collaborators to promote research engagement and identify areas for collaboration with resident faculty. To this end, the research seminar series can provide a platform for faculty members, as well as, invited speakers of international calibre, to present their research work. The use of online technology contributes in limiting the travel costs for invited speakers. For example, it is noted that the Department has already put in place arrangements with two visiting faculty members, one from the University of Miami (in the field of Management /Entrepreneurship) and one from the University of Kent (in the field of Digital Marketing) to provide research seminars to faculty members and PhD students of the Department. See Annex I for specific information. We believe this type of initiatives can have a positive impact in initiating potential research collaborations.

- Increase the funding for participation in Scopus indexed conferences that lead to publications. It is noted that the University already allocates a budget to the Department for such activities.
- Further encourage the use of European funds and in particular European COST actions. A number of faculty members already participated and expressed their interest to continue. They have also shared experiences with other faculty members to increase participation in this important form of European funding.

Furthermore, the University already has procedures in place for the evaluation of its academic staff. As per the Mission, the Regulation and Rules and of the University, the academic staff are evaluated based on four (4) pillars:

(1) Teaching, (2) Research, (3) Administrative Work, (4) Contribution to society.

These procedures are publicly available at the University's website ([Link](#)) and indicate specific criteria for the evaluation for each rank. These criteria include publications in peer reviewed journals, funded research projects, international recognitions, doctoral studies supervision, contribution in teaching and administrative work of the University, professional achievements and social contribution.

The University's Council has decided to further expand and specify the evaluation criteria and at the 150th Senate Meeting, after a first discussion the suggested framework of evaluation of each pillar was:

Teaching

- Student evaluation reports for the last 3 years
- Educational material that has been developed since the last evaluation
- Samples of two (2) detailed course descriptions
- Presentation of a sample course on the online learning platform
- Participation in training programmes
- Design and development of innovative courses

Research

- Total number of publications
- Number of scientific publications since the last evaluation
- Percentage of publications submitted, that appear in international databases (eg.

Scopus, Web of Science)

- Number of Citations
- Scientific recognition
- Research Work Autonomy
- Research projects
- Funding
- Laboratories
- Doctoral Student Supervision
- Creating / leading a research team

Administrative Work

- Election to an academic position such as Head, Dean etc
- Participation in Senate / Council Committees
- Participation in Departmental Committees
- Committee Chair
- Program of Study Coordinator
- Participation in the planning and submission of a new programme of study
- Participation in the design and delivery of training programmes
- Participation in activities for the development of the University

Social Contribution

- Participation and planning of programmes and actions for the society
- Representation of the University in National Committees
- Representation of Cyprus in European and International Committees
- Organizing events, open to the public
- Commons Participation (ex. Non-scientific articles, media presence etc).

The Rector's Council has been authorized to finalize the evaluation criteria in order for the process to be initiated before summer 2022.

4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- a. The students would like to study, what this program offers to their professional development, if they face any difficulties due to Covid pandemic, and in overall, if they find this program comprehensive. Students responded that they found the program to be designed to their needs, to provide the knowledge and the toolboxes that they need in their professional careers. We also asked open questions about their experiences with the transmission from traditional teaching to online tutorials, and what they would improve (we assume from our own experience that there are always things to improve). The responses were rather general but overall positive (e.g., “everything is perfect” or “nothing is to be improved”). The EEC felt that the program is well organized and the University provided all the assistance (academic and administrative) needed before and during the pandemic.

Department’s Response:

We thank the Committee for their positive comments regarding the overall MBA programme organization and delivery and the positive feedback conveyed to us from students with whom the Committee has met as part of the evaluation process.

It is our intention to continue providing high standards of quality of teaching to our students whether delivering our courses online during periods of pandemic or “face-to-face”.

5. Learning resources and student support

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- a. Access to more databases would be a welcome addition. This could be on subscription fee basis or through bilateral agreements with other Universities in Cyprus.

Department's Response:

The University of Cyprus Library is the sole higher education institution in the Republic of Cyprus that purchases access to highly specialized databases such as COMPUSTAT and CRSP achieved via subscription to WRDS (Wharton Research Data Services, Wharton University of Pennsylvania). It follows that their subscription is not facilitated by CALC – the Cyprus Academic Libraries Consortium - which is consortium of Cyprus universities where Frederick U. is a current member. We intend to explore the possibility of arriving at a special arrangement with University of Cyprus Library to cater for the remote access requirements of our students and researchers although this may not be possible based on the current agreements with providers. We also plan to raise the issue within the CALC consortium and explore whether some solutions can be reached at the consortium level.

- b. The University will need to ensure that the adequacy of resources is maintained and updated in light of changing student numbers (especially if the year-on-year increases are realized) and in light of ongoing advances in academic knowledge, and developments in professional practice.

Department's Response:

The Committee's comment is already taken into consideration during the planning stage of the required resources (such as, academic materials, subscriptions to journal databases, IT resources, staffing levels across the University, etc), taking place on annual basis, to cater for the changing needs arising as a result of various circumstances, such as, changing number of students, staff availability, advances in academic knowledge, developments in professional practice. In addition, the University is expanding its infrastructure; in particular, the Limassol campus is currently undergoing re-innovation and further modernization to keep-up with the changing needs and ensure adequacy of facilities. Further expansion plans for the campus

are planned for the coming years in anticipation of any future needs as a result of increasing student population.

- c. The uncertainty about 'face to face' teaching post-Covid19 faced by all education institutions means that the University will need to ensure that it has 'fail safe' contingencies in place to ensure that students can access materials and learning remotely at any times when this is necessary.

Department's Response:

We appreciate the impact of the uncertainty created as a result of the pandemic and we are proud of the speed and effectiveness with which the University has responded in addressing the emerging challenges. Significant investment has been made to enhance the IT infrastructure facilities and remote access capacity, deploy training programs for students and staff, setup virtual computer laboratories and more. For example, the university undertook the development of several hybrid classrooms that enable the seamless blending of teaching delivery and two-way communication with students both physically and virtually present.

Even before the pandemic, the University adopted a policy of shifting investment in educational resources to electronic ones. The library investment has shifted from 80% physical resources to 80% electronic resources over the past five years and had an almost 100% increase in its budget. Access to key academic electronic resources such as Elsevier and Springer is provided to all community members through VPN although an electronic solution for access to textbooks has not yet been found.

The University has invested in infrastructure and practices that allow for flexibility and has put in place contingencies to ensure its students can continue to learn remotely at times when this becomes necessary. For example, some online functionality using ZOOM will be maintained in the transition period for students that due to the pandemic may not be able to attend classes. The experience acquired in prior semesters of using the online quiz/ exam functionality will prove to be useful in the future. Classrooms are equipped with flexibility to adapt to hybrid mode of teaching where some students attend face to face while others (due to pandemic restrictions) may only be able to attend remotely using the in-class available screens. It should be noted that this technology has been tested during the pandemic so there is significant accumulated experience in the Department.



6. **Additional for doctoral programmes**

(ALL ESG)

N/A

7. Conclusions and final remarks

This program has great potential to appeal both to Cypriot and international students interested in careers in business, management, public sector and ministries, and in the private business sector. In the era following the financial and Covid crises, the focus of this program should be attractive to many but also needs to be communicated, locally and internationally.

The EEC would like to thank all involved at Frederick University for the high engagement throughout the evaluation process - and for providing a rich set of supporting documents and videos before, during and after the remote visit.

In addition, we appreciate the constructive and reflective spirit during the visit as well as the commitment to continuous improving and learning clearly expressed by the various representatives of the university.

The EEC has identified a number of strengths in the various sub-areas listed above but has also made concrete recommendations for specific improvements with a view to meeting these objectives. Rather than summarizing or selecting a subset of these recommendations, we prefer to refer the reader to the bullet points listed below. We strongly encourage the University to consider these recommendations. More encouragement, incentives and support for research activities among faculty. This may include further quantification of research outputs required for promotion, increased incentives for leading publications and reduction of teaching loads. The EEC recognizes that significant progress has been made over the years to strengthen the research profile of the University. But, it notes that there is remaining progress to be made. Our understanding is that the administration, including the Dean of the School, is keen for such progress to materialize.

We find that the strong points of the MBA program are as follows:

1. A well-structured and organized program following the ECTS standards.
2. The program of study is **well-designed and delivered** in line with its objectives and the University's strategy.
3. Management, teaching and administrative staff are committed to the delivery of the

program.

4. A **well-resourced** program.
5. The process of teaching and learning supports student needs and development.
6. **All faculty have proper educational qualifications (Ph.D.) and professional experience.**
7. **Extensive quality assurance (internally and externally) in place.** Many stakeholders are involved.
8. A **thorough process for the MBA thesis**, incl. a course on research methodology and project planning as well as a multi-faceted assessment.

In terms of recommendations, the EEC offers the following :

- a. Reflect on whether the best way to offer the Organizational Behavior course is as an elective or as a foundational course.
- b. More encouragement, incentives and support for research activities among faculty. This may include further quantification of research outputs required for promotion, increased incentives for leading publications and reduction of teaching loads. The EEC recognizes that significant progress has been made over the years to strengthen the research profile of the University. But, it notes that there is remaining progress to be made. Our understanding is that the administration, including the Dean of the School, is keen for such progress to materialize.

Department's Response:

Concluding we would like to thank the EEC for their hard work and candid discussions held throughout the rigorous process of the evaluation. We have adopted and implemented all suggestions by the EEC as shown in sections 1-6.

We are particularly pleased and gain much needed strength from the overall positive remarks and will strive to further improve and achieve our strategic goals in the near future.



B. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

| Name | Position | Signature |
|------|----------|-----------|
|------|----------|-----------|

Prof. George Demosthenous Rector

