

Doc. 300.1.2

Ref. Num: 7.14.318.028

# Higher Education Institution's Response

Date: 19/02/2021

- **Higher Education Institution:**  
Frederick University
- **Town:** Nicosia
- **Programme of study  
Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)**

#### **In Greek:**

Διοίκηση Επιχειρήσεων (4 ακαδημαϊκά έτη, 240 ECTS, Πτυχίο (BA))

Κατευθύνσεις:

1. Λογιστική
2. Επιχειρηματικότητα και Διοίκηση
3. Ψηφιακό Μάρκετινγκ

#### **In English:**

Business Administration (4 academic years, 240 ECTS, Bachelor (BA))

Specializations:

1. Accounting
2. Entrepreneurial Management
3. Digital Marketing

- **Language(s) of instruction:** English
- **Programme's status:** Currently Operating

- **Specializations (if any):**

**In Greek:**

1. Λογιστική
2. Επιχειρηματικότητα και Διοίκηση
3. Ψηφιακό Μάρκετινγκ

**In English:**

1. Accounting
2. Entrepreneurial Management

**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.300.1.1 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)

### *Areas of improvement and recommendations*

**We recommend that the University recruits more staff within entrepreneurial management and digital marketing.**

**We recommend that the University aims to invite more visiting faculty and undertakes more cooperation with relevant universities abroad.**

**We recommend that the University ensures that it is checked in the course evaluations whether the students feel that the structure of the programme works well, i.e. if the requirement of student development matches the order of the courses (e.g. to ease the transformation from high school student to university student).**

### Response:

We accept the Committee's recommendation. As discussed during the visit, it is obvious that, especially in small universities and departments, it is infeasible to have resident staff in all niche fields. The Department's full-time staff already covers a wide range of specialization areas within the domains needed to support its programs. The Program of Study under evaluation is served by the 12 elected Teaching and Research Staff (TRS) of the Department and a further 5 TRS faculty members from other departments of the University.

However, as discussed with the Committee we understand the Committee's suggestion that Visiting faculty can yield various benefits, especially to a small university like Frederick, as it will allow for the provision of specialised knowledge, expose both students and resident staff to new ideas in the specific fields and provide new opportunities for collaboration in teaching and research with universities abroad.

To this end, the Department has proceeded with the recruitment of visiting faculty to strengthen our program development and delivery. The new visiting faculty have considerable experience, and notable academic careers, which we expect will have a very positive impact on the delivery of the program and our students' learning experience. Their expertise lies in the fields suggested by the Committee, namely, Entrepreneurship and Digital Marketing, and will complement the Department's activities in these domains. Furthermore, the introduction of the Visiting faculty will have significant collateral benefits for our operations. The

communication of faculty members with experienced colleagues from highly esteemed universities will facilitate the exchange of ideas and promote collaboration by delivering research seminars and engagement in the PhD program. Simultaneously, the teaching load reduction to full-time staff members, stemming from the teaching allocation to the visiting faculty, will allow further concentration to research activities.

The faculty recruited are listed below, and summary of academic profiles are provided in Annex 1 of this response.

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

Importantly, it is also noted that further to the above new recruits, the Department also employs industry experts as visiting staff to complement theoretical delivery with practical skills acquisition and interconnection with the business world, something that was identified as a positive practice.

Concerning the course evaluation process, it is noted that students express their opinion on the structure and content of the Program of Study through a) their participation in various bodies of the Department and the University and b) the Internal Quality System.

Students are represented in the Council of the Department and various departmental committees, such as the Departmental Quality Committee and the Departmental Student Performance Committee. Students at the university level are represented in the Senate and various committees such as the Internal Quality Committee and the Studies Committee. Through their representatives, students may express their concerns, comment, and make suggestions on the Program of Study's issues. Whenever necessary, immediate action is taken to address issues raised by a student.

The Internal Quality System provides mechanisms for collecting feedback from students concerning the Program of Study. These mechanisms include a questionnaire answered by all students at the end of each semesters concerning all courses they have attended during the semester. Through these questionnaires, students provide feedback concerning both the instructor and the course itself. Student feedback concerning the course content and delivery is assessed by the Program Coordinator. Furthermore, a Program Self Evaluation Report is prepared annually by the Program Coordinator. This report considers feedback collected from

the students, either through course questionnaires mentioned above or through meetings with various focus groups, including students currently on the program and program graduates.

Both of the above constitute an effective form of input in the process employed for periodic reviews of the Program of Study.

We fully agree with the Committee's comments, and the quality process is enhanced with additional steps to directly focus on obtaining feedback for the progress structure and the various progression milestones experienced by students when embarking on higher education. Focus group discussions with students at the departmental level are organized to assess the program's quality and areas of improvement and address specific questions.

Furthermore, the Department will complement the student questionnaires given at the end of each semester that focus on course-specific details, with a new Program of Study questionnaire that concentrates on the students' expectations and experience at all stages of their studies, from admission until graduation. Outputs from these questionnaires will be discussed in the focus groups for program improvement, as per the standing practice in the University.

As discussed with the Committee, of critical importance is the transition period from high school to tertiary education and addressing the challenges faced. The Department has given particular emphasis in this area which has been admittedly not specifically but only indirectly addressed in the University's quality system. Further to the analysis and improvements described above, we proceeded with an analysis of the performance of the students in entrance and while continuing studies. The results are encouraging as (a) no significant deviation is experienced between courses offered upon entrance, indicating that the level and complexity of these courses selected are adequate, and (b) there is a small reduction in average grades of newcomers compared with higher years but we understand that this is marginal and a common occurrence in higher education. The actions described above will further assist us in identifying any shortcomings and further improve our performance in the specific area.

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

### *Areas of improvement and recommendations*

**Consideration should be given to the further development of internship opportunities for students.**

#### Response:

We believe that internship opportunities are a valuable addition, especially for a Business Administration program of study, and we agree with the suggestion that it should be further developed. The Department proceeded with engaging the Liaison Office of the University in the internship process, which will ensure that students' opportunities for internship will increase and cover a wider spectrum of industry sectors. The Liaison Office is a central administrative service of the University operating under the Research and Interconnection Service. It is staffed with two dedicated full-time members. It is responsible for providing the University's academic and student community and the regional business sector a partnering platform, enabling both sides to explore effective mechanisms for the transferring of specialized know-how in terms of research, technology and innovation.

Its involvement will assist with raising awareness and opportunities for internship in the Department, the administrative handling of such internships, and the significant expansion of the list of collaborating organisations.

Indicatively, the Office has already expanded the Department's network of participating organisations from different sections, such as, financial services, maritime and legal firms (PWC, EUROGATE, Harneys (Aristodemou Loizides Yiolitis LLC)), construction and land development groups (e.g. Cyfield Group, Paphilia Property Developers), software and technology firms (e.g. EAC, Powersoft, RedWolf), large trading firms (e.g. Epiphaniou Group, CA Papaellinas Group) and media groups (e.g. CyBC, Omega).

**More extra-curricular activities could be considered for students on the programme to promote a strong sense of community and esprit du corps among the students.**

Response:

We appreciate the comment and understand its importance. The University acknowledges the crucial role extra-curricular activities play in building sense of community and helping, especially first-year students, with their successful transition to tertiary education. With online instruction due to the pandemic last year, we immediately began shifting all our services and activities online, with the most significant challenge being ‘convincing’ our more sceptical students of the benefits of participating in such activities online. Examples of these actions include:

- The Careers Office offered a series of workshops for career development that included CV building, interview techniques, and brand-building in social media.
- The Counselling Centre offered a series of wellbeing workshops (for example, <http://www.frederick.ac.cy/events/2928-wellbeing-week-30-11-%E2%80%93-04-12>) for students in order to help tackle the stress and challenges of the lockdown but to also promote the interaction with fellow students and share experiences.
- The Sports Office organized and offered gym classes online with a daily activity schedule ranging from yoga to body pump (<http://www.frederick.ac.cy/latest-news-fu/2973-online-gym-classes-%E2%80%93-spring-2021>)
- The Peer Tutoring Centre, apart from student-tutors offering tutoring to fellow students in various disciplines, provided a space for students to meet virtually, interact and learn in a less structured environment.

A primary concern during the pandemic and especially during the first lockdown was for our International Students who stayed in Cyprus and could not reunite with their families. A group of student support staff took the responsibility of contacting students on a biweekly basis to provide support both on practical matters (keeping up with government Directives, access to basic goods etc) and on an emotional and social level. During Easter a care package was delivered to all our International students. To engage students and share student voices, we have created a new online segment called ‘Student Video Series’ where different students share tips on specific topics such as study tips, health habits, etc. Finally, a wellbeing website was developed during the Spring 2020 semester where tips and videos were posted for our students on how to navigate online learning and maintain their wellbeing. A ‘digital community’

section was developed where students are able to post videos and / or pictures with their experiences during the lockdown.

The Department of Business Administration is taking initiatives to improve extra-curricular activities engagement. The matter has been discussed with the Studies and Student Welfare Service (SSWS) of the University, responsible for these activities, as explained above. In addition to expanding the activities list, which is already broad and well attended by the student community, the following are decided:

- 1) Students mainly interact with the Department and not with central services, so to support participation we plan for a stronger interaction at the Department level. Specifically, it has been decided that the Department provides during registration days necessary information for the opportunities of extra-curricular activities available within the university such as participation in sports or other clubs, as well as monitoring and motivation. This information will be shared with students at all levels of study and not only freshmen so to encourage more students to participate in clubs and events organised by the University.
- 2) The Department aims to further expand its own activities with an educational focus organizing company visits or online seminars given by practicing managers and other external speakers.
- 3) Possibly most importantly, the Department designed and will effect a scheme for active interaction of its students with the Business world of Cyprus. This scheme will allow students to interview and communicate with successful managers on a breadth of topics that will have an invaluable impact on the understanding of the applications of the concepts they were taught. This also assist in project development within their studies. It is expected that the interaction with the Liaison Office for this scheme will be very beneficial.

Of course, as noted, for this academic year and given the severe limitations of the COVID pandemic, the emphasis of extra-curricular activities has been placed on the health, and particularly mental health, of our student community.

**The possibility of attracting international visiting faculty to contribute to the programme should be explored.**

Response:

We have elaborated in section 1 the actions we undertook to address this.

### **3. Teaching staff** *(ESG 1.5)*

#### ***Areas of improvement and recommendations***

- a. The University should more proactively seek to encourage a greater engagement in research on the part of all faculty members.**
- b. Consideration should be given to the delivery of research seminars by faculty members on a regular basis. Some activity can be useful in terms of the provision of feedback, the forging of research collaborations and the nurturing/strengthening of a research culture.**
- c. Incentives in the form of competitive funding might be considered as a way of jumpstarting research activity particularly for those faculty members whose research output is currently low.**
- d. High research performing faculty members should be encouraged to collaborate with low research performing faculty members. Funding of such collaborative research projects could be utilised to incentivise such collaborative working.**
- e. Since European COST Actions are a recognised way of forging international research links and collaborations with colleagues across Europe, the University should work with the Cyprus National COST coordinator and faculty members to maximise the involvement of faculty members in European COST Actions. Faculty members who have previously been involved in such Actions should be encouraged to continue to involve themselves.**

Response:

We welcome the Committee's suggestions that aim at improving research activity among faculty members. It is recognized in the report that some members publish in leading international journals, but there is indeed room for improvement among other members, and

significant variation in research output is a problem that must be addressed. It is noted that the Department has identified several challenges relating to its research output in its research plan. Under a broader university plan, the Department has identified a series of research-related KPIs so that members of staff can relate to tangible and quantifiable targets as well as a series of support mechanisms to help their achievement.

The Committee's recommendations are in line with the above research direction. In response to the recommendations, the Department has decided to take the following actions in order to promote the research culture and activity among staff:

- To further enhance the seminar series where all faculty members, as well as invited speakers, present their research work and receive feedback on their research work. The use of online technology was recommended to limit travel costs for invited speakers.
- To organize specialized research seminars by invited speakers of international research calibre. The Department has agreed with visiting faculty members to provide research seminars in their field to faculty members and PhD students (see point 1). We believe this will have a positive and immediate impact.
- To increase the research support administration capacity. It has been identified that many colleagues are reluctant to engage in funded research initiatives due to the administrative overhead this often entails. For this reason, a new research officer has been hired in the Research and Interconnection Service with such specific duties.
- To increase training capacity towards faculty members for matters relating to research engagement. In February 2021 the University hired a new research officer with experience in administering research projects, editing research proposals, and enhancing/facilitating research network development. The new recruit will focus on the provision of training and development seminars to faculty and assisting them in developing and enhancing their research collaborations.
- To establish a series of incentives and further enhance existing ones which aim at promoting research output. These include:
  - i. Teaching load reduction. The University's teaching load reduction scheme is enhanced to include eligibility for faculty that engage in research activities which mentor junior faculty or faculty with limited publication record. Equally importantly, the Department will enable faculty members for requesting load reduction in anticipation of future research results (publications/research grants) rather than the

standard University practice were such load reductions are given upon achievement of research outputs.

- ii. Internal funding for faculty members that require financial assistance to develop their research ideas. Notably, faculty members will take advantage of the decision by the Senate in Fall 2020 to fund competitive research proposals. Specifically, the Senate has allocated a portion of the University's Research Fund for an internal funding scheme through which members of staff that have lacked the financial support to further their research through external means and indicate a reasonable path to the generation of research output can apply for internal small-scale financial support (5,000 to 10,000 euro per project). The call was announced in January 2021 and several groups in the department have submitted proposals in their fields of expertise.
  - iii. Sponsoring of visits for external visiting faculty and other collaborators so enhance research engagement and identify areas for collaboration.
  - iv. Increase the funding for participation in Scopus indexed conferences that lead to publications by 50%. It is noted that the University already allocates a budget to the Department for these activities. In the past year the Department utilised ~3,000 euro for conference-support activities and a further 4,000 euro for research expenses. Clearly, the COVID pandemic has restricted expenditure in conference participation. As mentioned, in order to boost participation in high-impact publications, such activities will further boost the departmental budget by 50%.
- The Department has re-iterated the importance of utilizing European funds and in particular European COST actions in the last departmental meeting in December 2020. A number of faculty members already participate 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.

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

**a. The policies and procedures seem to be appropriate but the programme relies on a relatively small department. There are advantages to that small size in relation to teamwork and collegiality (we saw evidence of both these elements). On the other hand, the capacity of the faculty to support the programme and provide the specialist, research-led knowledge needs to be monitored and relevant support from the University may need to be forthcoming. The committee found the departmental staff to be fully engaged with the work and life of the students and the programmes. But appropriate investment in research would further buttress the capacity of the department. There may be opportunities to form strategic partnerships with international universities. These could focus on research development, as well as exchange opportunities for students and staff. The University and Department have relatively low recruitment of international students. This issue has been acknowledged by the faculty and managers we spoke to and there is an emergent strategy to develop a wider and more international mix of students, in ways which should benefit the student experience.**

##### Response:

We agree with the Committee's findings and the shortcomings that can arise with a small department size. Although the student-staff ratio is appropriate by international standards, as noted, the small size creates a challenge for specialist areas, and we believe the issue is adequately addressed with the incorporation of high calibre visiting professors that creates manifold benefits, as outlined in point 1 of our response.

The suggestions of the Committee for monitoring research activity is welcome, and the Department fully appreciates its importance. We highlight certain actions for improving research output in point 3 above.

The Department's goal is to seek and develop international partnerships with other universities. We believe that the initiative with visiting professors as outlined in point 1 can contribute towards this goal. Further to the points outlined in the application, actions were taken to establish international collaboration at the broader region, especially with the use of the Erasmus+ program, such as the establishment of links with universities in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The issue of a relatively low international recruitment of students is well identified and discussed at the University level, where it has been given a priority in the University's strategic action plan. This issue is also discussed in coordination with the other private universities in Cyprus as, except for certain niche programs of study, low international recruitment from non-EU students is evident in all universities. Discussions with the government are taking place to provide the appropriate framework that facilitates international student recruitment in a sustainable manner. One example of systemic issues that inhibit this is the access to work rights for students from third countries, something that has to be aligned with policies existing in competitive countries with respect to the fast-growing Asia market (such as Australia and Ireland). Despite the above, alternative ways are being considered both at Departmental and University level to attract more international students to our study-programs.

Complementary, the Department from 2018 pursues its activities for international recruitment. A faculty member established ERASMUS+ links with universities in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Whilst various exchanges of faculty and students were set up with institutions in these countries, other initiatives were taken to recruit students in those countries using local agents.

The above actions have yielded some modest results but are promising for future growth, and the Department has planned for expansion of these activities in the broader region. However, the impact of the COVID19 pandemic and the related restrictions for travel from non-EU countries have put on hold any such efforts.

## **5. Learning resources and student support**

### *(ESG 1.6)*

**a. The ongoing uncertainty faced by all education institutions about 'face to face' teaching post-Covid19 means that the department, School and University should be satisfied that it has contingencies in place to ensure its students can continue to learn remotely at any times when this becomes necessary. The School and Department needs to ensure that the adequacy of learning and teaching resources (i.e. academic materials and subscriptions, IT resources, staffing levels across the University) is maintained and refreshed. The move to online learning may mean that more investment is required in subscriptions to e-books and e-journals, and perhaps away from traditional provision of books and hard copies of resources. We heard from staff about**

**extra curricular opportunities and student associations and clubs at the University but the students we met (albeit a small sample) appeared not to have participated in these. We suggest that questions of participation, involvement and engagement in the broader student life on campus is an important element of the student experience.**

### Response

The University appreciates the impact of the pandemic's uncertainty and is proud of speed and effectiveness in addressing the challenges faced. 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. Notably, the university proceeded with 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, as well as the provision of suitably equipped teaching spaces for faculty that wish to deliver classes online but, at the moment, lack the necessary skills to do so on their own.

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 5 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 is still not found.

Although we believe that the University has reacted admirably concerning infrastructure and administrative resources, the COVID19 pandemic has generated several questions about the future of education and the appropriate management of face to face educational challenges for the immediate and medium-term future. To this end, the Senate has set up an ad-hoc committee to review the impact of the remote participation in the learning process, identify the challenges and support academic staff needs to best support teaching delivery, develop policies for adopting best practices, and incorporating educational technologies in the University's pedagogical framework.

Concerning the extra-curricular activities, the Department understands their importance and outlined remedial actions in point 2 of the response. Additionally, we believe that the impact that the Covid19 pandemic had and continues to have on students cannot be overstated.



Under the on-off lockdown environment and the uncertainties ahead, the primary focus of the University's welfare services is on the well-being and mental health of the community.

## **6. Additional for doctoral programmes**

*(ALL ESG)*

**N/A**

## **7. Eligibility (Joint programme)**

*(ALL ESG)*

**N/A**

## B. Conclusions and final remarks

Areas for improvement include:

- a. Consideration should be given to the further development of internship opportunities for students.
- b. More extra-curricular activities could be considered for students on the programme to promote a strong sense of community and esprit du corps among the students.
- c. The possibility of attracting international visiting faculty to contribute to the programme should be explored.
- d. More widely, the University should more proactively seek to encourage a greater engagement in research on the part of all faculty members. For example, consideration should be given to the delivery of research seminars by faculty members on a regular basis. Some activity can be useful in terms of the provision of feedback, the forging of research collaborations and the nurturing/strengthening of a research culture.
- e. Relatedly, High research performing faculty members should be encouraged to collaborate with low research performing faculty members. Funding of such collaborative research projects could be utilised to incentivise such collaborative working.
- f. The University could work to maximise the involvement of faculty members in European COST Actions. Similarly, other ways to encourage continuing professional development opportunities should be pursued.

### Response

In conclusion, we would like to thank the Evaluation Committee for its useful insights and constructive suggestions which we accept and adopt.

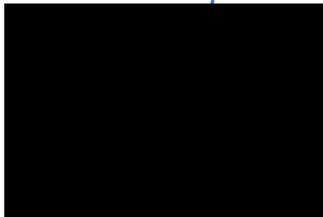
In this response, we outline the actions we undertook to address all the points raised. Specifically, as per the concluding areas of improvements shown above:

- The internship program has been enhanced as outlined in section 2 (first part) of the response (in reference to concluding remark a.)

- Strengthening actions, especially for increasing participation, for extra-curricular activities are provided in section 2 (second part) of the response (in reference to concluding remark b.)
- High calibre international visiting faculty have been attracted to strengthen the specified domains as outlined in section 1 of the response (in reference to concluding remark c.)
- The Department's research action plan has been enhanced with actions that are expected to yield short-term improvements according to the recommendations of the Committee, as described in section 3 of the response (in reference to concluding remarks d., e., and f.)

Our commitment is to continually improve the Program of Study under evaluation and thus the Department's service to the society and the fulfilment of its mission. We believe that the evaluation process is central to achieving this and would like to thank again for the recommendations given and the useful insights provided during the various discussions held.

### C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Signature</i>
<b>Prof. George Demosthenous</b>	Rector	

**Date:** 19/02/2021

