

07.14.318.054

Doc. 300.1.2

## Higher Education Institution's Response

Date:

- **Higher Education Institution:**  
Frederick University
- **Town:** Nicosia and Limassol
- **School:** Business and Law
- **Department:** Maritime Transport and Commerce
- **Programme(s) of study under evaluation**  
Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)

### Programme

#### **In Greek:**

Ναυτιλιακές Σπουδές (4 ακαδημαϊκά έτη, 240 ECTS, Πτυχίο (BSc))

#### **In English:**

Maritime Studies (4 academic years, 240 ECTS, Bachelor (BSc))

**Language(s) 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)

**All areas marked as Compliant**

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

1.a. The evaluation committee expressed some concern about the lack of dedicated research modules in this program. In addition, the committee has some concerns on the entry levels of the students in this program. Admission criteria are based on English language and school leaving certificate. This means that a (small) part of the student population may not be able to finish the program in four years and partly explains why a part of the student population takes more time than the designated four years; the other reason being that most students work during their studies.

We accept the EEC's recommendation and regarding dedicated research modules and we have amended a dedicate course, ATPR415 which incorporates instruction on Research Methodology. (Please refer to **Annex 1** – Course Descriptions).

The high quality of our graduates is an important factor that supports their employability consistently over our history. In relation to the comments of the committee about the duration of studies, it should be noted that approximately 75% of our graduates achieve graduation within four academic years. Students in employment are also included in this high percentage. It is noted that during the evaluation process, we were asked to present the number of semesters students required to complete the programme. This included summer semesters that are used for practicum so the Committee got the wrong impression that students require more time to graduate than the expected 8 semesters (4 academic years), where in fact, as stated, almost 75% of graduates complete their studies within 4 years, which is consider an appropriate percentage given the fact that several students opt to commence part-time work in the field during the later stages of their studies.

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

**All areas marked as compliant**

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

2.a. The teaching approach and assessment methods in the BSc could be modernized and expanded in terms of variety. It is recommended to tie this to an overhaul of the intended learning outcomes, we have recommended elsewhere.

The Department adopts the recommendations of the EEC. Please refer to **Annex 1** for the revised coursed descriptions.

### 3. Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- 3.a. Given the importance of practitioners in the program, their upcoming retirement is a cause for concern. The renewal of the faculty, especially practitioners, is already a point of attention for the department. We recommend considering finding replacements from the alumni of the program.

As discussed with the EEC, one of the key strengths of the Department is its strong network of external experts that complement the programme and offer students a unique blend of theoretical and applied knowledge. We are aware of the need for a renewal strategy and we completely agree with the Committee's comments. In fact, steps had already been taken towards succession planning before the accreditation with steps carefully considered and implemented by the Department to address retiring faculty in a timely manner. We have already identified external experts' replacements, as an example we are already in verbal agreement with Michel Christensen for this, and all necessary replacements will be effected from 2023 to 2025. Specifically, the Department has discussed the matter with the collaborating practitioners that are approaching retirement are and for the majority a succession plan has been set between 2023 and 2025. Importantly, as the EEC recommended, we have already proceeded with engaging young and promising alumni that are involved in the sector with research contracts. This allows for the appropriate training and induction of young practitioners to the operations of the Department and the collaboration with existing staff on various domains, this allowing for a smooth transition within the planned succession period.

#### 4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

##### Areas of improvement and recommendations

4.a. The panel observed that a relatively large group of students is unable to finish the program in four years and need normally one or two extra semesters. This is an area of concern. However, the panel found that statistics are kept in the Department about the student progression and the interviews of members of the Department did not result in any evidence that the issues is not closely monitored or that students not offered assistance, if required. The extra time needed is often due to students securing employment in the local shipping cluster and thus switch to part-time studies. It may be worthwhile to review what options may exist to help students in their progression. It should also be noted that entry criteria are set at a low level which could be a contributing factor to the delays in completion observed by this Panel.

As stated in point 1a of this response, we wish to state that the view of the EEC is misleading as in the 'relatively large group of students that ... need one or two extra semesters' the students that undertook a summer semester for practicum have also been included. Clearly these students, although taking 9 semesters to complete the program are not considered to be unable to finish the program in the appropriate time. In fact, almost 75% of the graduates achieve graduation within four academic years. The Department makes use of summer semesters, in complete compliance with regulations. Also bearing in mind the entry criteria, the quality of our graduates is ensured throughout the duration of their studies and have so far not been a source of major concern.

Of course the matter of quality and fitness of purpose is of high importance and, as noted, we will continue to closely monitor the performance of the Department and proceed with remedial actions should such be needed.



## 5. Learning resources and student support

**All areas marked as compliant**

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- 5.a. The committee suggests to spend some time on the development of new teaching material that strengthens the industry orientation of the program.

The Department adopts the recommendations of the EEC. Please refer to **Annex 1** for the revised coursed descriptions.

## 6. Conclusions and final remarks

The External Evaluation Committee would like to re-iterate a number of positive points that came out of this review. In particular, the following aspects are points of strength on which the Course management team should build upon further in order to guarantee future growth and success:

- An experienced academic team with strong links with the local shipping and business communities
- Courses that are well organised and are attuned to the needs and requirements of the local market thus providing students with solid practical skills.
- Strong links with the local shipping and finance clusters that enhances the employment prospects of graduates.
- Good administrative support (student affairs, IT, Library personnel).
- One should also comment on the transition from traditional, face-to-face delivery, to a remote learning environment during the recent pandemic. To a large extent, the courses were able to utilise the existing resources of the online course so as to offer a seamless transition to an online learning environment.

At the same time, the learning outcomes in the module specifications need to be streamlined and modified to reflect the learnings objectives of an MSc degree. It is recommended to revise the entire structure of intended learning outcomes for the program as a whole and all the underlying courses, stick to a hierarchical taxonomy, and reduce the number of ILOs overall. For the BSc course in particular, it appears that there are too many ILOs which creates challenges in module delivery and assessment.

In addition, the absence of a research culture and lack of a clearly defined research agenda is something that the courses need to address in order to maintain their competitiveness.

Finally, the fact a number of experienced visiting faculty are going to retire over the next few years will also affect the courses. The management team must draw alternative plans by drawing upon the expertise of industry contacts and alumni.



Firstly, we would like to sincerely thank the External Evaluation Committee for their hard work, the constructive discussions held during the virtual visit, and the valuable recommendations made for improving our proposed program.

In relation to the recommendations made by the EEC, we believe we have taken the necessary actions and have fully adopted them, as evident from our responses in sections 1 to 5 of this response. Specifically, in relation to the learning outcomes, we accept the comments made relating to the MSc program and we have drastically revised them according to the directions provided. The matter is addressed in detail in our response to the MSc program and please refer to the specific Annex in our response to that programme. Also, for the BSc the Department taking into account the recommendations provided has reduced the learning outcomes to improve clarity. Finally, we would also like to state that we accept the comments relating to the research culture and this is something that has been identified by the Department and remedial actions that have already started bearing fruit have been already made. A detailed analysis of this is provided in our response for the Departmental EEC report. Likewise, the matter of succession planning for visiting faculty has also been noted and adopted, as again explained in the response to the Departmental report. Finally, as presented in detail in our Departmental response, the Department has already developed a focused strategic plan with respect to the improvement of its research dimension, both in terms of quantity and quality. The plan is provided as an Annex in our Departmental response together with a listing of the achievements already made. Evidence of the effectiveness and the impact of the plan is the substantial increase in publications and funded research that the Department has achieved in the past 3 years, as provided in the corresponding Annexes.

We are looking forward to the positive decision by the Cyprus QAA and are eager to commence running the program from the coming academic year.



## B. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

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

Rector



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