

Doc. 300.1.2

Date: 01 October 2021

Higher Education Institution's Response

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

- **Town:** Nicosia

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

In Greek:

Σχεδιασμός Εσωτερικών Χώρων (4 έτη, 240 ECTS, Πτυχίο)

In English:

Interior Design (4 years, 240 ECTS, Bachelor of Arts)

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

In Greek: Concentrations

In English: N/A



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)

EEC Report

Sub-areas

- 1.1 Policy for quality assurance**
- 1.2 Design, approval, on-going monitoring and review**
- 1.3 Public information**
- 1.4 Information management**

Findings

The representatives of the institution make a clear and professional presentation of their study programme, including the various aspects related to it (facilities, objectives, outcomes, admission requirements, etc.). Together with the other presentations during the day, the EEC received sufficient information to assess the study programme, its design and development and the mentioned Sub-areas (see below).

The BA in Interior Design is fully integrated in the Department of Architecture, in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University. The choice to use the term 'design' rather than 'architecture' is motivated by the wish to give the BA a different identity in comparison with the Architecture degree.

The study programme of the BA is Design Studio centred, with the other courses (Technology and Construction, History and Theory, Management and Communication) set up as supportive. Various staff members emphasise the integration of these courses and the Design Studio. The study programme is structured around Major Requirements, Major Electives, Communications & Business Electives and additional, more general Electives.

The semestrial break down of the Design Studio shows a gradual increase of the complexity of design assignments and ensures a variety of projects in the field of Interior Design (namely retail, working environment, public interior, adaptive reuse, etc). Additionally, attention is given to furniture and garden design. The presentation on the programme gives further (brief) attention to research, competitions, collaborations, educational events, webinars, exhibitions, links with professional bodies and employability.

Strengths

The study programme of the BA in Interior Design, as presented to us, comes across as thorough and solid and seems to guarantee an education of expected standards for a BA course. Its structure and hierarchy reflect a professional approach and are comparable to other (European) BA programmes in Interior Architecture. The flexibility of the staff and the constant search for synergies between the different courses are in line with this and form an additional value.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The EEC is satisfied with the findings as presented and has no recommendations for improvement.

Response

The BA in Interior Design programme has been considered to be fully compliant with all criteria of this section. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified by the EEC.

The EEC members confirmed that the BA in Interior Design is fully integrated in the Department of Architecture, in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University. The policy for quality assurance has a formal status and is publicly available and supports all involved parts: the organisation, teaching and administrative staff and students and external stakeholders. The programme of study is designed with objectives that are in line with the institutional strategy having explicit intended learning outcomes, and is subject to a formal institutional approval process, is regularly monitored, reviewed and revised. Clear, accurate, up-to date and readily accessible information is published about the programme of study and information for the effective management of the programme of study is collected, monitored and analysed.

The EEC is satisfied with the findings as presented and has no recommendations for improvement.

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

EEC Report:

Sub-areas

2.1 Process of teaching and learning and student-centred teaching methodology

2.2 Practical training

2.3 Student assessment

Findings

The various presentations of the institution prove to the EEC a dedicated commitment to student-centred learning, teaching and assessment. The presentation of the BA in Interior Design, which also included teaching methods, assessment, and student support, confirms the institution's intended student-centred approach. Access to recordings of some courses reveal a one-to-one approach to teaching in the design studios and the constant availability of the teachers for the students.

The EEC met a selection of students and graduates of the Interior Design programme. Most of them are very complimentary about the school and the staff, which they describe as easily approachable and helpful during their studies, including considering personal matters. The graduates from abroad (mostly from Middle East) have fond memories of the programme and the staff. Some are still in touch with their former teachers. (In one case the brother of the graduate is currently also studying at UNIC.) The graduates also emphasise that the knowledge and skills they acquired in this BA formed a basis for the continuation of their studies in institutions in Cyprus and abroad.

Strengths

The variety in knowledge and helpful attitude of the teaching team and the conscious search for synergies between the courses seem to allow for an individualised or customised study trajectory throughout the four years.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The EEC is satisfied with the findings as presented and has no recommendations for improvement.

Response

The EEC has found the programme to be fully compliant with all criteria in this section. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified by the EEC.

The EEC recognised a dedicated commitment to student-centred learning, teaching and assessment. The presentation of the BA in Interior Design confirmed the institution's intended student-centred approach. The process of teaching and learning supports students' individual and social development and the teaching methods, tools and material used in teaching are modern, effective, support the use of modern educational technologies and are regularly updated. A one-to-one approach to teaching in the design studios and the constant availability of the teachers for the students was recognised by the EEC and supported by students and alumni.

The EEC mentioned that a major strength is the variety in knowledge, the helpful attitude of the teaching team and the conscious search for synergies between the courses, which seem to allow for an individualised or customised study trajectory throughout the four years.

The EEC is satisfied with the findings as presented and has no recommendations for improvement.

3. Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

EEC Report:

Sub-areas

3.1 Teaching staff recruitment and development

3.2 Teaching staff number and status

3.3 Synergies of teaching and research

Findings

The BA in Interior Design programme employs 8 members of staff which shares with other programmes of study in the Department of Architecture.

The teaching staff qualifications are very good with undergraduate and post graduate studies in international institutions, such as Columbia University, The Bartlett School of Architecture - UCL, Munich University of Technology, coupled with professional practice in their fields.

The management and teaching teams demonstrate a strong commitment to student-centred teaching. Current students and alumni commented on the staff's strong and consistent support on both academic and personal matters. A testament to the positive learning environment created by the teaching staff is that graduates keep in touch with their former tutors and seek collaboration with them and the programme.

The members of staff also should be congratulated on the seamless switch to online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Students noted that no teaching days were missed and that they managed to complete their studies successfully. The EEC agrees with the teaching team that studio-based programmes such as the BA Interior Design at the University of Nicosia are not conducive to online teaching, as it does not facilitate peer-to-peer learning and learning by doing that are at the core of studio, and any digital materials should be an additional "layer" to assist and enrich "face-to-face" teaching.

The EEC was concerned that there are only two members of permanent staff who teach on all Design courses (Interior Design I, II, III, VI) throughout the programme, as this does not allow for a multiplicity of perspectives to be offered to the students as they form their identity as designers. The teaching team reassured us that studio teaching is enriched by involving people with varied experiences and points of view such as colleagues from other courses, architects, members of local institutions and representatives of commercial companies and by initiating "live briefs" that link the students with the local community, enterprises, and organisations.

Strengths

- The programme coordinator and teaching staff are committed in creating a curriculum that equips the students with knowledge and skills appropriate for a BA award.*
- According to current students' and alumni's testimonies, the teaching team is approachable and creates a supportive learning environment.*
- According to current students' and alumni's testimonies, the teaching team facilitates each student to develop her/his own interests and identity as designer.*

- *The teaching team links the curriculum with the world outside the studio by creating connections with local businesses, institutions, and community through “live briefs” (e.g., collaborations with The Museum of contemporary Art, Ayios Kassianos School, Makario Hospital-Paediatic Ward).*
- *All members of staff are characterised by a high level of professionalism.*

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The EEC believes that a variety of voices should be heard within the design studio as this will allow the students to gain a better understanding of the range of potential design outcomes and solutions to a brief. The EEC recommends the recruitment of new permanent and visiting lecturers – potentially young design practitioners.

In the long term, the EEC believes that the programme should strengthen the potential synergies between teaching and research and to this aim recommends that any new members of staff should have expertise in Interior Design / Interior Architecture with a track record of research in this field and be able to use their research within the discipline to inform their teaching.

Response

The EEC has found the programme to be fully compliant in section 3.1 and partially compliant in sections 3.2 and 3.3.

The Committee stated that a testament to the positive learning environment created by the teaching staff is that graduates keep in touch with their former tutors and seek collaboration with them and the programme. The members of staff were congratulated by the EEC on the seamless switch to online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis and their high level of professionalism was recognized. Additionally, it was pointed out that the teaching staff publications are within the discipline and teaching staff studies and publications are closely related to the programme courses.

We welcome the EEC's recommendation regarding the merits of having a variety of voices heard within the design studio, as this allows the students to gain a better understanding of the range of potential design outcomes and solutions to a brief.

We would like to point out that full-time faculty members act as course leaders to the design studio courses, who coordinate teaching, oversee course material and outcomes. However, they are not the only faculty members who teach in design studio. Studio teaching is delivered by the course coordinators, a number of full time, as well as part time faculty members. Apart from the studio instructors, the classes are always enriched by involving people with varied experiences and points of view (such as practicing architects/ designers, members of local institutions and representatives of commercial companies) who frequently attend student reviews or workshops. Additionally, faculty members teaching under the thematic bands of Technology, Structure and Constructions, Communication Skills and Professional Practice often establish direct connections with the design projects and frequently collaborate with studio instructors with assignments and workshops, influencing student thinking in relation to the studio. The plurality of the design studio environment is also further enhanced by initiating "live project briefs" that allow students to get feedback from the local community, enterprises, and organizations. In Fall 2021 semester, fourth year Interior Design students will be collaborating with 4th year Architecture students and tutors on a live project for a design brief which engages a vulnerable social group, a local institution and a charity organization. Students will be directly exposed to a variety of opinions and approaches through the instructors as well as the other stakeholders involved in the project.

The EEC has recommended the recruitment of new permanent and visiting lecturers – potentially young design practitioners. We would like to thank the EEC for the recommendation and we reassure them that the intention is to increase staff numbers, when this can be justified by an appropriate increase in student numbers. New staff will have an expertise in Interior Design / Interior Architecture with a track record of research in this field so that they can use their research to inform their teaching, bring new areas of interest and strengthen so, the synergies between research and teaching.

By applying the above, we are certifying the compliance of all sub-areas of the section.

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

Findings

The BA in Interior Design programme at the University of Nicosia admits new students on the basis of their previous academic record, portfolio submission and interview.

The university ensures that prospective candidates have a clear understanding of the programme and its contents before students commit to a particular programme of study. A key aspect of the admissions process is the interview, which works as a two-way exchange between the applicant and the member of staff, who represents the programme. The member of staff has a discussion with the applicant to assess her/his interest on the subject and creative potential; at the same time, the interviewer explains to the applicant the content and character of the course and dispels any misunderstandings regarding the discipline of Interior Design and its study at university level. Each applicant is requested to submit a portfolio of personal work. However, the University recognizes that not all applicants have the opportunity to prepare a professionally looking portfolio or come to the programme with the knowledge of free-hand and technical drawing.

The university assists the students to successfully complete their programme of studies by closely monitoring their attendance and academic progress and by appointing a dedicated academic advisor to each student on the registration to the programme. The academic advisor explains to the new student what the expectations of the programme are, helps the new student to register to courses and choose electives and monitors her/his attendance and performance throughout the 4 years of study.

There is an expected drop-out rate of 10-15% during the first year of studies, which is an acceptable drop-out rate.

Pre-requisite courses ensure that students do not progress without having a clear understanding of all knowledge and skills required to complete assignments successfully. Students who face academic difficulties are scheduled for additional tutorials and meetings with their academic advisor.

Strengths

The University of Nicosia:

- ensures that prospective students have a clear understanding of the programme;*
- supports the students throughout the 4 years of study by providing each student with a dedicated advisor that monitors their academic progress and overall experience of the course;*
- In addition to the above, as mentioned before, the teaching team creates a positive and supportive learning environment that ensures that students fulfil their potential.*

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Student admission processes and criteria; student progression regulation and processes; student recognition regulations and procedures; and student certification regulations and processes are in line with European and international standards for equivalent courses.

The committee has no recommendation for this area.

Response

The BA in Interior Design programme has been considered to be fully compliant with all criteria of this section. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified by the EEC.

More analytically, it was recognised that predefined and published regulations regarding student admission, progression and certification are in place, access policies, admission processes and criteria are implemented consistently and in a transparent manner.

In particular, the EEC listed a number of strengths such as that the programme ensures that prospective students have a clear understanding of the programme and its content, and that the students are supported throughout the 4 years of study by providing each student with a dedicated advisor that monitors their academic progress and overall experience of the course. In addition to the above, the EEC points once more that the teaching team creates a positive and supportive learning environment that ensures that students fulfil their potential.

The Committee, after stating that all regulations, processes and procedures are in line with European and international standards for equivalent courses, concludes that it has no recommendation for this area.

5. Learning resources and student support (ESG 1.6)

EEC Report:

Sub-areas

5.1 Teaching and Learning resources

5.2 Physical resources

5.3 Human support resources

5.4 Student support

5.1 Teaching and Learning resources

Findings

In general, classrooms, laboratories and social spaces seem adequate. Of course the virtuality of the EEC visit largely reduces the relevance of this evaluation.

The meeting with the students was useful to understand their high level of satisfaction for the teaching and, in generally, for the friendly reception and support.

Foreign students remembered with gratitude the supporting attitude of teaching and not teaching staffs, and this is a relevant aspect for a programme which enroll students still quite young and coming from various continent.

Strengths

The EEC appreciated that the University recently built an Architecture Research Center that, from the received information, seems a remarkable asset for the development of architectural studies and a promise of further development of the Interior Design programme and, in general, for the architectural studies and research in the campus of University of Nicosia.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

From the meeting with the students, some light remarks came out about English, because it seems that not everyone uses it systematically, creating some problems to international students.

Internationalization could include some specific structures which can act as cultural mediators, managing and valorizing problems and opportunities of the cultural exchanges. In example, preliminary basic courses of Cyprus everyday life and culture.

Response

The BA in Interior Design programme has been considered to be fully compliant with all criteria of this section. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified by the EEC. The EEC pointed as a particular strength that the University recently built an Architecture Research Centre that, is acknowledged as a remarkable asset for the development of architectural studies and a promise of further development of the Interior Design programme and, in general, for the architectural studies and research in the campus of University of Nicosia.

The EEC report identifies clearly the adequate and readily accessible teaching and learning resources, the student-centred learning and flexible modes of learning and teaching, that are taken into account when allocating, planning and providing the learning resources. It is recognised that all resources are fit for purpose and students are informed about the services available to them.

The EEC noted that students made some light remarks regarding the use of English. We would like to reassure the Committee that the official teaching language of the programme is English and therefore all teaching is in English. Occasionally, in one-to-one tutorials mainly in the first years of study, Greek maybe used to support individual comprehension. We have supporting English language classes students are placed on based on entry English qualifications.

The EEC suggested that “internationalization could include some specific structures which can act as cultural mediators, managing and valorizing problems and opportunities of the cultural exchanges. In example, preliminary basic courses of Cyprus everyday life and culture”. We welcome the EEC suggestion and we would like to state that we already incorporate relevant activities as integral parts of our programme. We work repeatedly with local sites, local companies and practitioners and community representatives and we often organise visits to cultural sites. We offer a number of courses within our Major Requirements Section A and Major Electives Section B that include Cultural Heritage issues as part their course content. Catalyst workshops enhance also this approach. Moreover, the University and the Student Affairs Department organise many extracurricular activities for International students arriving in Cyprus that introduce the local life and culture and promote cultural exchanges.



6. Additional for doctoral programmes
(ALL ESG)

N/A



7. Eligibility (Joint programme) (ALL ESG)

N/A

B. Conclusions and final remarks

EEC Report

The BA in Interior Design is a well-organised and coherent programme of studies. The list of courses, the balance of various disciplines, and the character of outputs confirm the specific engagement in the field of Interior Design. The Major Requirements Course correctly balances studio work, learning by doing activities, and theoretical courses, which give the necessary basic skills in representation techniques, histories, technologies, and other subjects. The list of the Elective courses, thanks to the synergy with the other programs, is generous, and offers other fields of study and creative experiences.

The EEC expresses concern regarding the limited number of staff who teach on all Design courses throughout the programme, as this does not allow for a multiplicity of perspectives to be offered to the students as they form their identity as designers. The EEC recommends the recruitment of new members of permanent and visiting staff and the presence of visiting critics from other countries, taking advantage of the digital platforms available. Student work seems of acceptable quality, but a well-organized program, as this one, could produce outputs more interesting and braver. The EEC believes that new membership of staff will have a positive impact on the students' outputs.

The EEC suggests that a more developed link with the research activities will make the design studios, and the entire programme, livelier and more creative, better connected with the local and global issues of architectural culture. To this aim, any future recruitment of staff should require expertise in Interior Architecture / Interior Design with a track record of publications in this field and the ability to use research to inform teaching. In the long-term, this will strengthen the academic credentials of the programme.

As the overall impression of the quality of the BA in Interior Design, its integration in the Architectural department, the versatility and commitment of the staff and the diversity of the students is positive, the EEC advises the institution to reflect on further development in the future. A lengthy discussion amongst the members of the EEC brought up some considerations or suggestions which we wish to formulate as open questions:

- How to increase the number of students (currently 10 to 12 students per year) to develop a 'critical mass' in the Interior Design part of the Architectural department?*
- How to assure the quality of student admissions from countries not following the European body of educational regulations?*
- How to develop a sustainable programme of academic research on Interior Design that can also serve as a resource for education? What would be the focal points of this research unit?*
- Is the development of a MA in Interior Design realistic and of added value here and in the context of Cyprus?*

The EEC recognises that the answers to these questions depend on the broader strategy of the University for the future of the Department and aspects of the socio-economic and geographical context of the programme of which the EEC does not have a clear overview.

The EEC also wishes to raise attention to the complex position of the Architectural department as a whole vis-à-vis the University's larger ambition regarding the increase of distant learning. The practice-based nature of the discipline of Interior Design and Architecture (and other design related disciplines) implies a degree of live interaction, the social setting of an atelier in which



students can rely on teachers and peers in various ways, the possibility to develop and discuss real three-dimensional models and to experience and experiment with materials and textures, live sketching classes, etc. We believe that online teaching can form a strong component in the programme but cannot completely replace studio-based education.

Response

We would like to thank the EEC, both for the very positive and fair evaluation, as well as the constructive comments and suggestions and the fruitful discussion that we had with its members during the online visit. We also thank the Committee for the time and thoroughness it dedicated to the evaluation of the BA in Interior Design programme and for helping us improve through the suggestions made.

We note that the programme was found to be fully compliant in the majority of the sections. We are very pleased that the EEC articulated a positive overall impression of the quality of the BA in Interior Design, its integration in the Department of Architecture, the versatility and commitment of the staff and the diversity of the students. These remarks give us confidence to continue our work and strive for excellence.

The recommendations, which refer to further improvement and the potential academic success and growth of the programme, are seriously taken into account. We addressed each recommendation separately in the appropriate sections above. As evident in our responses, we are committed to taking active steps to incorporate the EEC's suggestions into considering aspects of our existing and potential new areas of operation.

We welcome the EEC's recommendation to the institution to reflect on further development of the Interior Design programme in the future and their consequent suggestions. We will reflect upon their comments and in collaboration with various University departments and stakeholders a forward-facing strategy will be developed.

We would like to thank once more the EEC for the valuable comments, the positive ground for discussion that they created and their ability to understand, recognise and interpret so effectively the identity and the specificities of the Interior Design programme.

C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Anna Efstathiou	Programme Coordinator	
Markella Menikou	Head of the Department of Architecture	
Angela Kyriacou-Petrou	Associate Head of the Department	
Prof. Klimis Mastoridis	Dean	
Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	
Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	

Date: 01 October 2021

