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External Evaluation Report (Conventional-face- to-face programme of study)

- Higher Education Institution: European University Cyprus
- Town: Nicosia
- School/Faculty (if applicable): School of Sciences
- Department/ Sector: Life Sciences
- Programme of study- Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)
In Greek: Βιολογικές Επιστήμες (4 Έτη / 240 ECTS, Πτυχίο)
In English: Biological Sciences (4 year/240 ECTS, BSc)
- Language(s) of instruction: Greek
- 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. Introduction

This part includes basic information regarding the onsite visit.

Due to the COVID19 pandemic, the on-site visit was conducted online via Zoom. The meeting started with a brief introduction of the members of the External Evaluation Committee (EEC). Subsequently, the Vice Rector of Academic Affairs gave a short presentation of the Institution and the EEC met with the members of the Internal Evaluation Committee. The Dean of the School of Sciences, the Department Chair and the programme's Coordinator then gave a short presentation of the School's /Department's structure. Following this, the programme's standards, admission criteria for prospective students, the learning outcomes and ECTS, the content and the persons involved in the programme's design and development were presented and discussed.

After a short break, the next sessions included a meeting with the programme's teaching staff, a meeting with a selection of students and student alumni, and the administrative personnel. The virtual visit was then concluded with a meeting with Dean of the School of Sciences, the Department Chair and the programme's Coordinator where final discussions and questions related to the visit were clarified.



B. External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>University</i>
Luc Lens	Professor	Ghent University
Ernst A. Wimmer	Professor	University of Göttingen
Lotte B. Pedersen	Professor	University of Copenhagen
Christina Papa	Undergraduate student	University of Cyprus
Name	Position	University
Name	Position	University

1. Study programme and study programme's design and development (ESG 1.1, 1.2, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9)

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**

1.1 Policy for quality assurance

Standards

- *Policy for quality assurance of the programme of study:*
 - *has a formal status and is publicly available*
 - *supports the organisation of the quality assurance system through appropriate structures, regulations and processes*
 - *supports teaching, administrative staff and students to take on their responsibilities in quality assurance*
 - *ensures academic integrity and freedom and is vigilant against academic fraud*
 - *guards against intolerance of any kind or discrimination against the students or staff*
 - *supports the involvement of external stakeholders*

1.2 Design, approval, on-going monitoring and review

Standards

- *The programme of study:*
 - *is designed with overall programme objectives that are in line with the institutional strategy and have explicit intended learning outcomes*
 - *is designed by involving students and other stakeholders*
 - *benefits from external expertise*
 - *reflects the four purposes of higher education of the Council of Europe (preparation for sustainable employment, personal development, preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies, the development and maintenance, through teaching, learning and research, of a broad, advanced knowledge base)*
 - *is designed so that it enables smooth student progression*
 - *is designed so that the exams' and assignments' content corresponds to the level of the programme and the number of ECTS*
 - *defines the expected student workload in ECTS*
 - *includes well-structured placement opportunities where appropriate*
 - *is subject to a formal institutional approval process*

- *results in a qualification that is clearly specified and communicated, and refers to the correct level of the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area*
- *is regularly monitored in the light of the latest research in the given discipline, thus ensuring that the programme is up-to-date*
- *is periodically reviewed so that it takes into account the changing needs of society, the students' workload, progression and completion, the effectiveness of procedures for assessment of students, student expectations, needs and satisfaction in relation to the programme*
- *is reviewed and revised regularly involving students and other stakeholders*

1.3 Public information

Standards

- *Regarding the programme of study, clear, accurate, up-to date and readily accessible information is published about:*
 - *selection criteria*
 - *intended learning outcomes*
 - *qualification awarded*
 - *teaching, learning and assessment procedures*
 - *pass rates*
 - *learning opportunities available to the students*
 - *graduate employment information*

1.4 Information management

Standards

- *Information for the effective management of the programme of study is collected, monitored and analysed:*
 - *key performance indicators*
 - *profile of the student population*
 - *student progression, success and drop-out rates*
 - *students' satisfaction with their programmes*
 - *learning resources and student support available*
 - *career paths of graduates*

- *Students and staff are involved in providing and analysing information and planning follow-up activities.*

Findings

The programme appears to have adequate measures for ensuring quality assurance at all levels, and includes the involvement of external stakeholders. The overall design, approval, on-going monitoring and review of the programme are satisfactory but improvements in some areas of the programme design could be envisioned, as indicated below.

Strengths

- The majority of the courses offered include practical exercises (laboratories etc.).
- Students are highly involved in course evaluation (response rates >65%) and appear enthusiastic about their university.
- Small number of students allows intense contact between students and teaching faculty.
- The programme has close contact to industry and other relevant stake holders, which is reflected in the topics of the Placement of Practical Exercise course.
- The teaching and laboratory facilities are well equipped and sufficiently spacious.
- The majority of graduates of this programme have successfully moved on to Master and PhD programmes or have found employment otherwise.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The ratio between compulsory and elective courses is highly skewed to the former, which limits the flexibility of the programme and makes it difficult for the students to obtain an individual profile. This also makes it difficult for students to free up a complete semester to do a foreign exchange (Erasmus etc.) or to do some other long term project (Bachelor outside the intramural curriculum). Such extramural activity could help the students to get some personal profile in addition to the good basic education provided by the very school-like programme. In case the number of compulsory courses cannot be reduced because of the required accreditation in several countries, it could help the students to take courses in the summer term not only to compensate for missing credits but already to sign up for such courses in advance. To increase the number of available elective courses, it could be considered to make courses offered in the Biomedical Sciences programme available to the students in the Biological Sciences programme, provided this does not pose a problem regarding language requirements.
- Experimental bachelor projects are restricted to the top-ranking students only. To make experimental bachelor projects available to more students it could be considered to offer the same experimental projects to multiple students that work in groups but each make an individual thesis.
- The small number of students currently enrolled, and the tendency towards a decrease in enrolment of local students makes the programme vulnerable to annual fluctuations. To ensure a future critical mass of students one may consider to strengthen the environmental sciences (organismal biology, ecology) component of the programme.
- The compulsory English courses in the programme do not lead to an internationally recognized certificate. Certification of the English courses (Scientific English I and II) to UNiCert III (European Level C1) or similar, would enable students to enter international English language master



programmes. This would benefit the students, who would not have to take additional TOEFL tests etc., and would thus encourage the students to fully engage in these courses.

Please select what is appropriate for each of the following sub-areas:

Sub-area		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
1.1	Policy for quality assurance	Compliant
1.2	Design, approval, on-going monitoring and review	Compliant
1.3	Public information	Compliant
1.4	Information management	Compliant

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

Sub-areas

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

2.2 Practical training

2.3 Student assessment

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

Standards

- *The process of teaching and learning supports students' individual and social development.*
- *The process of teaching and learning is flexible, considers different modes of delivery, where appropriate, uses a variety of pedagogical methods and facilitates the achievement of planned learning outcomes.*
- *Students are encouraged to take an active role in creating the learning process.*
- *The implementation of student-centered learning and teaching encourages a sense of autonomy in the learner, while ensuring adequate guidance and support from the teacher.*
- *Teaching methods, tools and material used in teaching are modern, effective, support the use of modern educational technologies and are regularly updated.*
- *Mutual respect within the learner-teacher relationship is promoted.*
- *The implementation of student-centred learning and teaching respects and attends to the diversity of students and their needs, enabling flexible learning paths.*
- *Appropriate procedures for dealing with students' complaints regarding the process of teaching and learning are set.*

2.2 Practical training

Standards

- *Practical and theoretical studies are interconnected.*
- *The organisation and the content of practical training, if applicable, support achievement of planned learning outcomes and meet the needs of the stakeholders.*

2.3 Student assessment

Standards

- *Assessment is consistent, fairly applied to all students and carried out in accordance with the stated procedures.*
- *Assessment is appropriate, transparent, objective and supports the development of the learner.*

- *The criteria for the method of assessment, as well as criteria for marking, are published in advance.*
- *Assessment allows students to demonstrate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved. Students are given feedback, which, if necessary, is linked to advice on the learning process.*
- *Assessment, where possible, is carried out by more than one examiner.*
- *A formal procedure for student appeals is in place.*
- *Assessors are familiar with existing testing and examination methods and receive support in developing their own skills in this field.*
- *The regulations for assessment take into account mitigating circumstances.*

Findings

The quality of the teaching is high, and the teacher-student relationships seem outstanding with a very high teacher:student ratio. This was also reflected by the high appreciation of both the quality and speed of feed-back provided by the teaching faculty to the students.

The teaching methods, tools and material used in teaching seem to be up-to-date and effective, and there is a good synergy between research and teaching, as well as between practical and theoretical teaching.

Strengths

- The teacher-student relationships seem outstanding with a very high teacher:student ratio.
- Almost all courses include practical exercises, which are well connected to the theoretical teaching.
- Training of students' presentation skills is an integral part of many courses.
- Students get extensive feed-back from teachers on any type of reporting.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Experimental bachelor projects are restricted to the top-ranking students only. To make experimental bachelor projects available to more students it could be considered to offer the same experimental projects to multiple students that work in groups but each make an individual thesis.
- Students with lower than average GPA in a specific course(s) need to re-take the entire course again in order to improve their GPA and qualify e.g. for the bachelor thesis. It could be considered to make it easier for students to improve their GPA by allowing them to repeat exams they have already passed, but with a low grade (without having to repeat the complete course again).
- Prior to the COVID19 pandemic, all exams were conducted on site using non-digital platforms. During the pandemic, the situation changed so that most, if not all, exams are now online. It could be considered to profit from the lessons learned during the pandemic and continue some of the digital procedures that worked particularly well, when the pandemic is over. Similarly, it could be considered to maintain some of the current digital teaching formats after the pandemic.

Please select what is appropriate for each of the following sub-areas:

Sub-area		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
2.1	Process of teaching and learning and student-centred teaching methodology	Compliant
2.2	Practical training	Compliant
2.3	Student assessment	Compliant

3. Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

Sub-areas

3.1 Teaching staff recruitment and development

3.2 Teaching staff number and status

3.3 Synergies of teaching and research

3.1 Teaching staff recruitment and development

Standards

- *Institutions ensure the competence of their teaching staff.*
- *Fair, transparent and clear processes for the recruitment and development of the teaching staff are set up.*
- *Teaching staff qualifications are adequate to achieve the objectives and planned learning outcomes of the study programme, and to ensure quality and sustainability of the teaching and learning.*
- *The teaching staff is regularly engaged in professional and teaching-skills training and development.*
- *Promotion of the teaching staff takes into account the quality of their teaching, their research activity, the development of their teaching skills and their mobility.*
- *Innovation in teaching methods and the use of new technologies is encouraged.*
- *Conditions of employment that recognise the importance of teaching are followed.*
- *Recognised visiting teaching staff participates in teaching the study programme.*

3.2 Teaching staff number and status

Standards

- *The number of the teaching staff is adequate to support the programme of study.*
- *The teaching staff status (rank, full/part time) is appropriate to offer a quality programme of study.*
- *Visiting staff number does not exceed the number of the permanent staff.*

3.3 Synergies of teaching and research

Standards

- *The teaching staff collaborate in the fields of teaching and research within the HEI and with partners outside (practitioners in their fields, employers, and staff members at other HEIs in Cyprus or abroad).*
- *Scholarly activity to strengthen the link between education and research is encouraged.*
- *The teaching staff publications are within the discipline.*

- *Teaching staff studies and publications are closely related to the programme's courses.*
- *The allocation of teaching hours compared to the time for research activity is appropriate.*

Findings

The teaching staff is highly qualified, which is reflected in publications in top ranking, peer-reviewed journals. Owing to the high teacher:student ratio, and the competences and engagement of the teaching staff, there is an excellent student-teacher relationship. The teaching staff is also regularly engaged in professional and teaching-skills training and development. While the teaching load is relatively high, mechanisms are in place that allow teachers to apply for reduced teaching load.

Strengths

- The teaching staff is actively engaged in research.
- Mechanisms are in place that allow teachers to apply for a reduced teaching load.
- The full-time staff seems to be hired in a permanent position from the beginning, which facilitates continuity.
- Teaching performance is appropriately assessed based on the high response rates (>65%) by students in course evaluations.
- The teaching staff receives adequate administrative support.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Referring to the above-mentioned comment regarding strengthening the environmental sciences (organismal biology, ecology) component of the programme, it could be considered to hire full-time faculty staff within these fields in the future. This is a long-term recommendation, which could go along with establishing a Master of Science programme in Environmental Sciences.

Please select what is appropriate for each of the following sub-areas:

Sub-area		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
3.1	Teaching staff recruitment and development	Compliant
3.2	Teaching staff number and status	Compliant
3.3	Synergies of teaching and research	Compliant

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

Sub-areas

- 4.1 Student admission, processes and criteria
- 4.2 Student progression
- 4.3 Student recognition
- 4.4 Student certification

4.1 Student admission, processes and criteria

Standards

- *Pre-defined and published regulations regarding student admission are in place.*
- *Access policies, admission processes and criteria are implemented consistently and in a transparent manner.*

4.2 Student progression

Standards

- *Pre-defined and published regulations regarding student progression are in place.*
- *Processes and tools to collect, monitor and act on information on student progression, are in place.*

4.3 Student recognition

Standards

- *Pre-defined and published regulations regarding student recognition are in place.*
- *Fair recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, are essential components for ensuring the students' progress in their studies, while promoting mobility.*
- *Appropriate recognition procedures are in place that rely on:*
 - *institutional practice for recognition being in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention*
 - *cooperation with other institutions, quality assurance agencies and the national ENIC/NARIC centre with a view to ensuring coherent recognition across the country*

4.4 Student certification

Standards

- *Pre-defined and published regulations regarding student certification are in place.*
- *Students receive certification explaining the qualification gained, including achieved learning outcomes and the context, level, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed.*

Findings

Pre-defined and published regulations regarding student admission seem to be in place. However, it was not fully clarified what access policies, admission processes and criteria are implemented.

Strengths

- Students applying to the programme can concurrently apply to a number of scholarships based on merit and performance or social needs.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The compulsory English courses in the programme do not lead to an internationally recognized certificate. Certification of the English courses (Scientific English I and II) to UNiCert III (European Level C1) or similar, would enable students to enrol in international English language master programmes. This would benefit the students, who would not have to take additional TOEFL tests etc., and would thus encourage the students to fully engage in these courses.

Please select what is appropriate for each of the following sub-areas:

Sub-area		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
4.1	Student admission, processes and criteria	Partially Compliant
4.2	Student progression	Compliant
4.3	Student recognition	Compliant
4.4	Student certification	Compliant

5. Learning resources and student support (ESG 1.6)

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

Standards

- *Adequate and readily accessible teaching and learning resources (teaching and learning environments, materials, aids and equipment) are provided to students and support the achievement of objectives in the study programme.*
- *Adequacy of resources is ensured for changing circumstances (change in student numbers, etc.).*
- *All resources are fit for purpose.*
- *Student-centred learning and flexible modes of learning and teaching, are taken into account when allocating, planning and providing the learning resources.*

5.2 Physical resources

Standards

- *Physical resources, i.e. premises, libraries, study facilities, IT infrastructure, are adequate to support the study programme.*
- *Adequacy of resources is ensured for changing circumstances (change in student numbers, etc.).*
- *All resources are fit for purpose and students are informed about the services available to them.*

5.3 Human support resources

Standards

- *Human support resources, i.e. tutors/mentors, counsellors, other advisers, qualified administrative staff, are adequate to support the study programme.*
- *Adequacy of resources is ensured for changing circumstances (change in student numbers, etc.).*
- *All resources are fit for purpose and students are informed about the services available to them.*

5.4 Student support

Standards

- *Student support is provided covering the needs of a diverse student population, such as mature, part-time, employed and international students and students with special needs.*
- *Students are informed about the services available to them.*
- *Student-centred learning and flexible modes of learning and teaching, are taken into account when allocating, planning and providing student support.*
- *Students' mobility within and across higher education systems is encouraged and supported.*

Findings

Teaching and learning resources are provided to students that adequately support the achievement of objectives in the study programme. The physical resources are excellent and up-to-date. Adequate human support resources, i.e. tutors/mentors, counsellors, other advisers, qualified administrative staff, are available to support the study programme. The majority of graduates of this programme have successfully moved on to Master and PhD programmes or have found employment otherwise.

Strengths

- The teaching and laboratory facilities are well equipped and sufficiently spacious.
- The experimental-based education provides advantages to the students of this programme compared to students of other programmes in the region.
- High faculty:student ratio (see comments above).

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The ratio between compulsory and elective courses is highly skewed to the former, which limits the flexibility of the programme and makes it difficult for the students to obtain an individual profile. This also makes it difficult for students to free up a complete semester to do a foreign exchange (Erasmus etc.) or to do some other long term project (Bachelor outside the intramural curriculum). Such extramural activity could help the students to get some personal profile in addition to the good basic education provided by the very school-like programme. In case the number of compulsory courses cannot be reduced because of the required accreditation in several countries, it could help the students to take courses in the summer term not only to compensate for missing credits but already to sign up for such courses in advance. To increase the number of available elective courses, it could be considered to make courses offered in the Biomedical Sciences programme available to the students in the Biological Sciences programme, provided this does not pose a problem regarding language requirements.



Please select what is appropriate for each of the following sub-areas:

Sub-area		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
5.1	Teaching and Learning resources	Compliant
5.2	Physical resources	Compliant
5.3	Human support resources	Compliant
5.4	Student support	Compliant

6. Additional for doctoral programmes (ALL ESG)

Findings

Not applicable.

Strengths

Not applicable.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Not applicable. Click or tap here to enter text.

Please select what is appropriate for each of the following sub-areas:

Sub-area		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
6.1	Selection criteria and requirements	Not applicable
6.2	Proposal and dissertation	Not applicable
6.3	Supervision and committees	Not applicable

7. Additional for joint programmes (ALL ESG)

Findings

Not applicable.

Strengths

Not applicable.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Not applicable.

Please select what is appropriate for each of the following sub-areas:

Sub-area		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
7.1	Legal framework and cooperation agreement	Not applicable
7.2	The joint programme	Not applicable

C. Conclusions and final remarks

The programme has a very high standard and is in a good state with highly motivated staff as well as students. The EUC is thus to congratulate for such an excellent programme. The EEC understands that the EUC is still considering expanding further in the long run. Since the concentration in “General Biology” of this programme could be clearly improved by strengthening the organismal biology and ecology part, the EUC might want to enquire about establishing a Master of Science programme in Environmental Sciences to share faculty between such a Master programme and the Bachelor in Biological Sciences. Such a programme on Environmental Sciences could also have some connection to Health Sciences and Engineering, which the EUC is also focussing on.

D. Signatures of the EEC

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Luc Lens	
Ernst A. Wimmer	
Lotte B. Pedersen	
Christina Papa	
Click to enter Name	
Click to enter Name	

Date: 14/12/2020