

Doc. 300.1.1

Date: Date.

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

- **Higher Education Institution:**
Cyprus Forestry College
- **Town:** Prodromos / Limassol
- **School/Faculty (if applicable):** N/A
- **Department/ Sector:** N/A
- **Program of study- Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)**

In Greek:

Ενδοτμηματική Εκπαίδευση των Νεοεισερχομένων
Δασικών Λειτουργών του Τμήματος Δασών (62 ECTS)

In English:

- **In-Service Training of the New Entrants Forest Officers of the Department of Forests (62 ECTS)**
- **Language(s) of instruction:** Greek
- **Program's status:** New
- **Concentrations (if any):**



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 2021 [L.136(I)/2015 – L.132(I)/2021].

In Greek: Concentrations

In English: Concentrations

A. Introduction

This part includes basic information regarding the onsite visit.

On Monday 24th of October 2022, the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) met the principal of the Cyprus Forestry College Mr Andreas Mavrogiakoumos and the vice principal Mr Konstantinos Georgiades at the premises of the College in the village of Prodomos, in Limassol. Beginning with a warm welcome by the people of the College, a following meeting was held with the Head of the Institution and the members of the Internal Evaluation Committee (IEC) : Mr Antonis Chorattas, Dr Areti Christodoulou, Dr Nikolaos Eliades, Mr Herodotos Kakouri and Mr Kyriakos Athanasiou. At this point, it has to be mentioned that due to a Union intervention on the preceding Friday, 21st of October 2022, the teaching staff involved in the program to be evaluated was not present at the meeting, hence no discussion took place between the EEC and the teaching staff, and the information on teaching was limited to the information provided in the written application document. To be informed on the Union's intervention, the EEC invited Union representatives to explain their position. For this purpose, a meeting was held with Mr Antonis Sarris (President) and Mr. Charalambos Michael (Secretary) of the Trade Union of Workers in the Department of Forests on Wednesday, 26th October, from 11:30-12:30. During this meeting, the background of the intervention was explained, and concerns expressed on the association "academic" for the teachers from the Department of Forests, as this may not comply with their qualifications or position within the Department. The EEC recognized the comments made, but considered that the additional information provided did not lead to changes in the assessment as already formulated. Some confusion may have arisen from the use of the word academic in the headings of the CYQAA templates.

During the meeting, the EEC had the opportunity to observe relevant presentations by the Principal of the College Mr Mavrogiakoumos, concerning the academic profile, the quality assurance, the administration and the proposed teaching of the proposed program by the Cyprus Forestry College. The program itself was presented in a subsequent presentation (i.e. in-service training of the new entrants forest officers of the department of forests), including details on the content of the subjects, teaching hours and the ECTS credits per individual course. During the presentations, questions were asked by the EEC to the presenters, and content and organization were discussed. Following the presentations, an open and extensive discussion took place among the representatives of the Cyprus Forestry College and the EEC members.

The on-site visit was completed with a tour to the premises of the institution, including an inside and outside view of the facilities i.e. herbarium, library, classrooms/computer rooms, and conference room.

B. External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>University</i>
Frits MOHREN	Professor of Forest Ecology and Forest Management	Wageningen University and Research, Wageningen (NL)
Hubert HASENAUER	Professor of Forest Ecosystem Management	BOKU University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna (AT)
Filippos ARAVANOPOULOS	Professor of Forest Genetics and Tree Breeding	Aristotle University, Thessaloniki (GR)
Michaella PIERI	Student	Technological University of Cyprus

C. Guidelines on content and structure of the report

- *The external evaluation report follows the structure of assessment areas.*
- *At the beginning of each assessment area there is a box presenting:*
 - (a) sub-areas*
 - (b) standards which are relevant to the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)*
 - (c) some questions that EEC may find useful.*
- *The questions aim at facilitating the understanding of each assessment area and at illustrating the range of topics covered by the standards.*
- *Under each assessment area, it is important to provide information regarding the compliance with the requirements of each sub-area. In particular, the following must be included:*

Findings

A short description of the situation in the Higher Education Institution (HEI), based on elements from the application for external evaluation and on findings from the onsite visit.

Strengths

A list of strengths, e.g. examples of good practices, achievements, innovative solutions etc.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

A list of problem areas to be dealt with, followed by or linked to the recommendations of how to improve the situation.

- *The EEC should state the compliance for each sub-area (Non-compliant, Partially compliant, Compliant), which must be in agreement with everything stated in the report. It is pointed out that, in the case of standards that cannot be applied due to the status of the HEI and/or of the program of study, N/A (= Not Applicable) should be noted.*
- *The EEC should state the conclusions and final remarks regarding the programme of study as a whole.*
- **The report may also address other issues which the EEC finds relevant.**

1. Study program and study program's design and development

(ESG 1.1, 1.2, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9)

1.1 Policy for quality assurance

The basic elements of quality assurance of the program of study are in place, however it appears that there is insufficient experience regarding quality assurance procedures *per se*. Most of the procedures presented and discussed are *ad hoc*, while there do not appear to be formal procedures in place. The results of student evaluation are not publicly available as this operation is an in-house training activity. Academic integrity may be or become a risk factor in the program because of the nature of the program: the students are employees of the institution (Department of Forests), pre-selected as forestry officers and their (internal) training may bring associated dependencies. Therefore, quality assurance remains unclear. More transparency in quality assurance processes and relevant quality management is needed. There is also a need for external input and qualitative indicators for students.

While there is not kind of discrimination in place, building access is currently restricted for disabled persons, and no arrangements are in place for trainees requiring special attention. In the past the training programs may have had an all-male attendance; at present, facilities may need attention to ensure appropriate and adequate male and female access and use. As an "in-house" training program, involvement of external stakeholders is not sufficiently foreseen, but should become substantial to achieve external input to the program.

1.2 Design, approval, on-going monitoring, and review

The institutional strategy is embedded within the Department of Forests, and this strategy is derived from the Departmental strategy; the learning outcomes are formulated correspondingly.

The program of study's specific objectives is not convincingly presented, hence the assessment of whether the content of the program (the courses) is logically chosen not made explicit. The student and stakeholder involvement in the program content is not clear, although senior forest officers and the Department of Forests Director, are instrumental in identifying topics to be included in the program.

The expected student workload is formulated in ECTS (62; 30/32 per semester); however, the planning of the program is unclear (ECTS vis a vis time allocation) and may invoke undesirably high workload for the trainees.

There is not sufficient evidence in the application that there is an internal review and support process. This is likely caused by the fact that the Department of Forests is not an educational institution. As the program aims at providing a Certificate of an internal training program, it is not necessarily subject to the National Qualifications Framework (the general guidelines from the ESP were considered).

1.3 Public information

As only forest officers newly hired by the Department of Forests are selected, the selection criteria are clear. Intended learning outcomes per course are clear, but the link of the courses with the specific objectives of the program is not convincingly explained. There is considerable room for improvement in this respect. The qualification awarded is clear, being an internally awarded certificate.

Teaching, learning, and assessment procedures are internal. Assessment is described in general terms (partly report/essay, partly practical exam), The assessment of the practical part (accounting for 30% of the final mark) remains unclear. There is a need for an external assessor, or for a structured exam with clear criteria, known in advance. It is unclear whether there are possibilities for re-takes of the exam.

Learning opportunities available to the students are limited by the existence of an outdated Library. There is an immediate need for establishing the link to the University of Cyprus Library through which access to professional journals and all relevant digital documents can be achieved.

A considerable advantage of the program is the guaranteed employment of the students as the student body consists of by the newly hired forest officers of the Department of Forests.

1.4 Information management

As the program is not yet operational the assessment is based on the submitted proposal only. The presence of key performance indicators is not apparent. Such indicators though are paramount as part of the student progress monitoring and should be present (besides student satisfaction for which there is a monitoring scheme in place). However, learning resources need to be updated. The profile of the students is well known as the student body will consist of the newly appointed forestry officers, while their career path is well established as it will be within the Department of Forests.

Findings

- While the mission statement is clear, the specific objectives are insufficiently apparent.
- Quality assurance is neither institutionalized, nor consistent, while relevant procedures are not fully in place.
- Monitoring, review, and information management are not clearly developed; hence performance of the new program remains unclear.

Strengths

- The program is application oriented.
- The program is covering knowledge gaps for the Cyprus Department of Forests

- The proposed training is the only educational activity in forestry in Cyprus
- Students are employees of Department of Forests
- The career perspective is clear.
- The commitment from teachers / and a mentoring program are clearly seen.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Need for implementation of quality assurance procedures, in a continuous improvement cycle.
- Identification of topical issues, more dynamic nature of the program.
- Continuous needs assessment is suggested, including external input.
- Development of own program strategy, with links to the strategy of the Department of Forests.
- Further involvement of external teaching experts.
- Comparison with comparable in-service training in Forest Service Agencies in other countries.
- Investment in student support for learning, and use of existing options (e.g. information access through the University of Cyprus).

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	Partially compliant
1.2	Design, approval, on-going monitoring and review	Non-compliant
1.3	Public information	Not applicable
1.4	Information management	Not applicable

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

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

Since this is a new program, no students could be interviewed. In addition, the teachers of the program had withdrawn their participation in the EEC site visit shortly before the assessment, thus no possibility in talking to the teachers existed.

The program is designed as a traditional classroom teaching in small classes or groups (max 15 participants). Although this provides an excellent ratio of teachers versus students, care should be taken, that a critical minimum number of students is ensured, so that the program does not become uneconomical and unattractive due to a lack of student interaction or ineffective group efforts. The program provides substantial practical tutoring which is positive.

The general mission of the program in addressing the knowledge gap between forest management conditions in Cyprus and the general forestry education gained outside the country is considered as very positive.

Currently no group work is foreseen, the teaching process is in principle quite flexible because of the low student numbers, and the required individual writing of reports as part of the grading scheme of the classes.

The role of students in taking an active role in creating the learning process remains unclear as the EEC has not been able to discuss with teachers.

Since the students have already a position with the Forest Service, we assume that most likely they are well motivated, the autonomy of the learning is not ensured but likely, adequate guidance is derived by excellent student/staff ratio. The motivation of the students is likely to be high because of their employment by the Department of Forests. The course program is obligatory, thus no formal consequences in case of failures are foreseen.

Teaching methods, tools and materials cover a traditional approach, with a good combination of lectures, exercises and practical work. The strong involvement of students in the preparation of special topics and presenting this to the group is suggested. Diversification of methods is encouraged, it remains unclear to which extent excursions to different forests in Cyprus are included. This may be encouraged to learn about local conditions.

Mutual respect and professional relationships will exist since the students are in an employment relationship.

Limited flexibility exists for a student-centered learning and teaching because of the relatively small program

No formal procedure is in place for student 'complaints'. This needs to be considered since we see here not only a teacher-student relationship but also a hierarchical employment relationship. Provisions to allow open discussions need to be foreseen.

2.2 Practical training

The practical and theoretical studies are by definition well connected because of the in-service training part.

According to the mission of the program the organization and practical training, by definition meets the needs of the stakeholder – the Department of Forests.

2.3 Student assessment

The assessment is fairly applied to all students and in accordance of the stated procedure.

The assessment is appropriate but needs consideration to avoid interference with hierarchical relations within the working environment of the Department of Forests. We see a student teacher relationship and a working relationship. Effectively the teaching is closely linked to the career path of the students within the Department of Forests.

The assessment criteria with its general description is clear, the overall description of course grading is clear, grading of the practical work is unclear. It is suggested to provide written feedback on the student assignments.

Assessment of the practical part and the feedback to students of the achieved outcomes including the final assignment is not specified in the document. The assessment should be clarified since it is an important aspect for the quality of the program.

Assessments by more than one examiner are not specified, but should be encouraged.

A formal procedure for students to appeal is not specified in the proposal and should be added.

Examination methods: Teachers and assessors (which are the same in this case) are coming from practice, as additional assignment. This does not imply that they have full access to pedagogic concepts and methods. However, a 15-day Train-the-Trainers course provided by HRDA is required to compensate for this. This appears an excellent addition to the expertise of the teachers from practice, and should be endorsed.

For mitigation circumstances procedures should be foreseen, which allow all envisaged trainees from the Department of Forests can actually follow the program. This may involve additional arrangements to account mitigating circumstances for individual students.

Findings

- Traditional teaching in small classes (< 15 participants), good possibilities for student-centred learning approaches
- Teachers from practice
- Trainees are professional foresters already employed, hence with high motivation

Strengths

- Small classes
- Excellent student to staff ratio
- Combination of lectures, practical work and assignments
- Application oriented with clear practical relevance

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Student assessment to be clarified
- More emphasis on skills and competences
- Project-oriented approaches by working on group assignments
- Separate learning assessment from professional working relationships
- Independent assessment, not only by responsible teacher
- Clarification on assessment criteria for field work

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-centered teaching methodology	Compliant
2.2	Practical training	Compliant
2.3	Student assessment	Partially compliant

3. Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

NOTE: due to intervention of relevant Union authorities (decision of Friday, 21th of October, 2022), participation of teaching staff was not possible, hence the evaluation of the involvement of the teaching staff is based on the written proposal with further explanation by the staff of the Cyprus Forestry College that was presented during the visit of Monday, 24th of October, 2022.

3.1. Teaching staff recruitment and development

The competence of the teaching staff is evident. The teaching staff has a vested interest in their own personnel, and in teaching their own employees. The staff presents a very good experience base as teachers. Moreover, there is an associated direct interest of the Department of Forests to offer a good education of their new forest officers.

The teaching staff is recruited from the Department of Forests and is restricted to existing (usually senior) forest officers. The selection process is determined by assignment within the Department of Forests and is unclear.

It is important to ensure that the teaching is within the field of expertise of skilled individual teachers who are given the availability of time to perform their teaching duties. In principle, the teaching staff qualifications are adequate to achieve the objectives and the anticipated learning outcomes of the study program.

The teaching staff takes a 15-days training on pedagogics, but the required need for continuous staff improvement is not clearly seen.

It is not specified in the application if the promotion of the teaching staff considers the quality of their teaching. As teaching is additional to their regular work, it is unclear if it plays a major role in their performance evaluation by the Department of Forests.

The level of innovation in teaching methods and the use of new technologies is not apparent. It is clear that teaching methods need to be improved and become more comprehensive.

Recognised visiting teaching staff participates in teaching the study program, but it is unclear to what extent this will be carried out.

3.2. Teaching staff number and status

The number of the teaching staff mostly originating from the pool of Department's employees is truly adequate to support the program of study. The teaching staff status appears to be appropriate to offer a quality program of study. The staff will teach on a part-time basis, and it is unclear in how

many rounds of the program a teacher will teach the same course or teach at all. Moreover, there is only limited involvement of visiting staff, and permanent staff all parttime

3.3. Synergies of teaching and research

There is no sufficient evidence that the teaching staff collaborates in the field of teaching with other partners, while by the definition of the program there is no link to research. Any academic activity to strengthen the link between education and research is not explicitly addressed in the proposal. Most of the teaching staff is internal to the Department of Forests therefore not being researchers may not present relevant publications. The (limited) availability of teachers (drawn from the Department of Forests employees), leads to teaching of subjects that are sometimes outside the immediate field of competence of individual teachers, hence expertise is sometimes not linked to course content. Therefore, staff studies and publications (if any) may not be closely related to course content.

Findings

- Teaching staff is competent and appropriate for the program offered.
- Staff recruitment and development procedures are not sufficiently clear.
- Teaching staff numbers and status are adequate for the program.
- Synergies of teaching and research are not seen, but this is anticipated by definition for the particular program.

Strengths

- The program is strongly practice based.
- Teaching staff is adequate and appropriate for the program offered.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Continuous attention for pedagogic skills and improvement of teaching.
- Application of modern teaching methods.
- Involvement of external experts in teaching.
- Attention for skills and competences of trainees.
- Careful and transparent selection of teachers according to their expertise.



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	Partially compliant
3.2	Teaching staff number and status	Compliant
3.3	Synergies of teaching and research	Not applicable

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

4.1 Student admission, processes and criteria

The program is dedicated to newly employed forestry officers. The program is obligatory for the entrance and further career within the Department of Forests in Cyprus

4.2 Student progression

The progress of the student within the program is monitored by the results of course exams. No consequences seem to be foreseen if the course is not passed. It also remains unclear what happens if a single class is failed e.g. number of re-takes etc. Ad-hoc procedures are in place.

No information is provided about the impact of a failed or passed course for the future career or employment status of the student.

4.3 Student recognition

This is an internal program designed by the Department of Forests for newly hired employees. Thus, it may be seen as an internal employment qualification effort rather than a general educational program. A similar and well-respected program existed until 2015. Here we see a new program which eventually (after a successful accreditation) might expanded to a broader audience.

Since is a proposal for a new (internal) program appropriate recognition procedures or quality assurance efforts cannot be in place and assessed.

4.4 Student certification

The program will provide a certification of successful completion, which will then be recognized within the Department of Forests, but without benchmarking versus other programs. As such it does not have wider recognition yet. The recognition within the Department of Forests is based on similar courses provided by the Cyprus Forestry College, under the same conditions, until 2015.

Findings

- Students are employed by the Department of Forests
- Admission conditions clear: obligatory course for every newly hired employee

Strengths

- Motivation based on newly appointed forestry officers
- Clear timeframe
- Strongly focussed program on the specific needs for managing the forests in Cyprus
- Networking platform for the newly hired employees

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Input from external experts needs to be ensured
- A minimum number of students (= critical mass) needs to be ensured to avoid a lack in motivation and learning
- Consider opening to participants from outside the Department of Forests and/or other countries (comparable to previous programs before 2015); this will require further elaboration and specification of the program, and entails a strategic decision.

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	Compliant
4.2	Student progression	Compliant
4.3	Student recognition	Partially compliant
4.4	Student certification	Partially compliant

5. Learning resources and student support (ESG 1.6)

5.1 Teaching and Learning resources

The teaching and learning resources will require some investment in technical facilities, the library and access to internet sources, as well as other professional information sources. The available resources are fit for small student numbers as indicated, the facilities cannot be enlarged without complete change in the setup. Practical training in forest management, under guidance of senior forest officer provides an excellent practice-based learning environment (learning by doing). For the program as proposed the resources (with some minor investments) are adequate.

5.2 Physical resources

The physical resources (building located in the mountains, the facilities, etc.) are -in principle- adequate and potentially very effective for teaching a small group of trainees. Nevertheless, some investment in the infrastructure and learning facilities is needed.

5.3 Human support resources

All the human resources are in place, some minor adaptation may be foreseen.

5.4 Student support

The students are restricted to employees of the Department of Forests, no other (national or international) students are foreseen.

Findings

- Nice outfit, but outdated

Strengths

- Small operation, confined environment, good opportunity for focus and interaction within student group

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Investment in teaching and learning facilities

Need for student officer / dedicated student tutor; lack of confidentiality advisor

Attention to program access for disabled persons

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	Partially compliant
5.2	Physical resources	Partially compliant
5.3	Human support resources	Partially compliant
5.4	Student support	Partially compliant



6. Additional for doctoral programs (ALL ESG)

N/A

D. Conclusions and final remarks

The proposal concerns a 62 ECTS Program developed by the Cypriot Department of Forests for newly hired forest officers in Cyprus. Since Cyprus has no Bachelor or Master program in forestry, all forest officers in Cyprus get their forestry education outside the country at different universities or higher education institutions. Having this diverse background in forestry education, it makes perfect sense and it is also very well received by the panel that the Cyprus Department of Forests wants to establish an internal training program for hired forest officers with the goal (= mission) to (i) harmonize the know-how of forest management of the new hired forest officers, (ii) educate them on topics which are specifically important for the forest management conditions in Cyprus, (iii) create network option, and last but not least (iv) the proposed training program for employed forest officers is important for the future career within the Department of Forests.

While the mission (= goal) of the program is clear, the links with the vision (= needs) of the program which is then followed by its implementation strategy (= the different courses) remain unclear. With vision we refer here to the specific needs for forest management in Cyprus:

- (i) What are the 3 to 5 specific forest topics identified as being needed for forest management in Cyprus and which are not covered by a general forestry education?
- (ii) How are the knowledge gaps identified, and what is the internal process?
- (iii) How is the process in monitoring the impact or success of the training program for reaching the vision (= filling the identified knowledge gaps) organized?

This part of the program is under developed and would need further clarification. It is not clear to the panel how the missing knowledge gaps have been identified and how the impact of the program in filling the missing knowledge gaps is monitored.

The third level in making this program a success is the implementation strategy which is given by the suggested courses for filling the identified knowledge gaps. The taught content within each course is well explained and clear. However, it is important to understand how a specific course adds to an identified knowledge gap. With other words, if a course with its content is adequate for this program will depend on the identified knowledge gap to be filled.

This will also apply to the qualification needs of the teachers and their recruitment for the program. They may come from inside the organization or from outside, depending on the required and/or available expertise. Actions have been taken to support and provide teachers in didactics, occasional training and/or continued education.

The overall idea of the proposed program is well received and has a high potential within the Cyprus Department of Forests. It may also be of high interest for people from outside the organization or from other countries. In general, it is advisable to invite external input, both in teaching as well as in student attendance. The location placed in the mountains is excellent; however, the facilities need investments but have a good potential.



In conclusion, the panel clearly identifies a need for forestry education with special focus on sustainable forest management in Cyprus. The proposed training program in principle addresses this. However, the proposal in its present form appears premature and may require further thinking and development.



E. Signatures of the EEC

Name	Signature
Frits MOHREN	
Hubert HASENAUER	
Filippos ARAVANOPOULOS	
Michaella PIERI	

Date: 26th October 2022