

Doc. 300.3.2

07.14.313.001

Higher Education Institution's Response (Departmental)

Date: 01/06/2021

- **Higher Education Institution:**
Frederick University
- **Town:** Nicosia
- **School:** Engineering
- **Department:** Architecture
- **Programme(s) of study under evaluation**
Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)

Programme 1

In Greek:

Δίπλωμα Αρχιτέκτονα Μηχανικού (Integrated Master) (5 ακαδημαϊκά έτη, 300 ECTS)

Δυνατότητα αποφοίτησης στα 4 χρόνια με Πτυχίο Αρχιτεκτονικής (240 ECTS, Πτυχίο Αρχιτεκτονικής)

In English:

Diploma Degree of Architect Engineer (Integrated Master)
(5 academic years, 300 ECTS)

Bachelor's degree in Architecture is obtained after 4 academic years (240 ECTS, Bachelor of Architecture).

Programme 2

In Greek:

Συντήρηση και αποκατάσταση ιστορικών κατασκευών και μνημείων (3 ακαδημαϊκά Εξάμηνα, 90 ECTS, Μάστερ (MSc))

Κατεύθυνση:

1. Αρχιτεκτονική
2. Πολιτική Μηχανική

In English:

Conservation and Restoration of Historical Structures and Monuments (3 academic semesters, 90 ECTS, Master (MSC))

Specialization:

1. Architecture
2. Civil Engineering

Programme 3

In Greek:

Αρχιτεκτονική (3 ακαδημαϊκά έτη, 180 ECTS, Διδακτορικό (PhD))

In English:

Architecture (3 academic years, 180 ECTS, Doctorate (PhD))

Department'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. Department's academic profile and orientation

Sub-areas

- 1.1 **Mission and strategic planning**
- 1.2 **Connecting with society**
- 1.3 **Development processes**

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- 1.1 Ensure that a mission statement is included on the department's public website.
- 1.2 Where possible, the Department should take any opportunities to internationalise its staff profile.
- 1.3 We note that the Department has a strategy to internationalise its students, through greater use of English as a teaching medium and other tactics. We encourage this direction.
- 1.4 Staff should be more aware of the tuition fees paid by their students

Department's Response:

- 1.1 The Department's mission statement is provided in the Departmental website ([Link](#)).
- 1.2 And point 1.3

The Department already forms a strategy in order to internationalise its staff profile and its students through the increase of mobility via the Erasmus program, further involvement in EU-Conexus networks (Frederick University is an associate member of EU-Conexus European University for Smart Urban Coastal and Sustainability; [Link](#)). Furthermore, international experience is a prerequisite for hiring new staff.

We are happy that the Committee agrees with our position that the Department needs to emphasize its international dimension and being able to offer the programs in the English language also is integral to this process. All the three programs are already available in English.

- 1.4 Staff are aware of the broad level of tuition fees of the programs of study offered by the Department but in many cases, we accept that some members may not be aware of the financial assistance and scholarship schemes available. To address this we have ensured that (a) the Department's secretariat posts on the Departmental announcement board all key information related to scholarships and financial assistance, and (b) within the first departmental meeting of each semester briefing is organized by officers from the Studies and Student Welfare Service to inform all staff of the running policies in relation to fees and record the information in the departmental minutes.

2. Quality Assurance

Sub-areas

- 2.1 System and quality assurance strategy**
- 2.2 Quality assurance for the programmes of study**

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- 2.1 (2.1.4.3) A more explicit procedure for ensuring that matters of research ethics would be advisable.
- The department could benefit from having more measurable data concerning their research outputs, such as numbers of citations, numbers of publications etc.
- 2.1.3 and 2.2.11 Matters of EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion) could be explicitly embedded in QA procedures and in staff awareness, and should be considered in relation to student performance.
- 2.2 (2.1.6) Although mechanisms for student evaluation of their programmes were described, we were not provided with examples of this evaluation, or evidence of actions taken as a result.

The Department and University could consider undertaking a student evaluation survey of their whole programme, to be enacted at the end of the degree being studied.

- 2.3 (2.2.2) The Department should ensure that detailed assessment criteria for each piece of assessment is explicitly available to students in the course documentation.
- 2.4 (2.2.6) Although students understand that they can question the marks awarded to them, in practice it seems that this opportunity is rarely – if ever – taken up
- 2.5 (2.2.20) A policy on authorship and intellectual property is required

Department's Response:

- 2.1 We agree with the Committee's comment that research ethics matters could be more systematically introduced into the University. At present, the University has a Research Ethics & Integrity Committee (REIC), which however is mainly concerned with research activities that include health, educational and personal data/privacy matters and there is minimal policy for broader research ethics concerns. Article 13 of the Internal Rules for Research & Innovation Activities (Annex 01) provides the framework of operation of the REIC, which is currently running and composed of three faculty members (Law – Dr Konstantinos Kouroupis, Social Work – Dr Stavros Parlalis, Education – Dr. Olga Lyra). The University has identified that there is a need for a systematic communication and training on staff in a wide variety of matters. To this end, the University Council has established the Professional Development Center (Professional and Personal Development at Frederick - PDF) at the University that is explicitly responsible for developing a policy ([Link](#)) and schedule for training and professional development for staff in an organized manner. The issue of research ethics has been communicated to the Center and appropriate training on the matter will take place in the coming academic year.

We agree that the existence of measurable data and tracking for research output is essential for promoting research and providing clear targets for faculty. This has been identified in the development of the University Research Strategy and all Departments of the University, including Architecture, were required to establish a 2-year research strategy at the end of 2018 which besides the overall strategic objectives and planned

actions, it included a set of relevant KPIs (including those noted in the review comment). These KPIs were measured as base values in 2018, monitored and documented again at the end of 2020 and their achievement will be evaluated against the set targets at the end of the 2-year period end of 2021 (attached in Annex 02 is the extract interim review report with the KPIs table for reference). The procedure will be iterated from there on with new targets against KPIs and revised objectives, taking into account the progress made and any issues faced.

Regarding points 2.1.3 and 2.1.11 in relation to EDI, it is true that the University's quality assurance system only systematically examines issues of gender equality and gender matters when tracking student performance. The information tracked will be expanded to include matters like religious and ethnic background and inclusion information for sexual orientation and minorities. This is a matter assigned great importance by the University and ensuring the provision of an inclusive environment is central to its internationalization efforts. Frederick University has signed the Cyprus Diversity Charter and via the center of Professional and Personal Development at Frederick (PDF) already has setup a series of trainings and seminars related to EDI matters for academic staff (Annex 03). Similar trainings and seminars will be scheduled for the students as well. Additionally, the University's policies for equal opportunities and zero discrimination have been recently updated ([Link](#)).

- 2.2 As per student evaluations, it is noted that students evaluate each course and each instructor at the end of every semester. The questionnaires (Annex 04 – Student Feedback Questionnaire) are collected after the instructor has posted the final grade and before the students know the results. Through requiring students to complete the questionnaire prior to viewing their grades we ensure a very high participation rates and the results are utilized by the Department for effective use. All responses are available to the evaluated instructors as well as the Chair of the Department. The quality assurance scheme at the University specifies actions depending on the results, for example, if grading is below a particular threshold the instructor must provide a report on remedial actions to address the problem and for second higher threshold, the matter must be discussed in the annual staff appraisal review. The University, as per the policy in its program review guidelines, used student focus groups to include the opinions of students for the program as a whole. However, the Department adopts the Committees

suggestion and will introduce program-wide questionnaires for students to be used in the next programmatic review.

- 2.3 We agree with the Committee’s suggestion that detailed assessment criteria must be available to students. In fact, this is done as the Course Outline (Annex 5) for each course offered is handed out to all students at the beginning of the course and contains detailed information on assessment criteria. Clearly, there is always room for improvement and the Department has decided that Course Outlines for the next academic semester are reviewed to ensure they explicitly provide assessment criteria at the appropriate detail.
- 2.4 Students are aware of their right to question the marks awarded to them. Since the students’ grading in architectural modules is less depended on the final assessment and more on the continuous assessment the questioning of the marks occurs informally during the semester and resolved within the class.
- 2.5 The University has a published ([Link](#)) policy for intellectual property rights that has been formed after external consultation in order to both protect the University but also promote and foster innovation and fairness. The existing policy is at University level and the Department has started review of the policy with the aim of further specializing it to the operations of Architecture. Additionally, we believe that to a great extent the issue is more of lack of awareness rather than lack of policy and to this end as a department we will ensure that students, and staff, are aware of the policy elements through announcements once the new academic year commences

3. Administration

3.1 Quality indicator / criterion

3.6	Statutory sessions of the Department are held and minutes are kept	3
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Areas of improvement and recommendations

3.2	Student representation on the department’s Council should meet the University’s 20% Requirement
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3.3 The department should ensure that minutes are kept of its statutory sessions and made available as appropriate.

Department's Response:

3.1 and point 3.3.

We fully agree with the Committee's comments and we adopt them. The Department holds statutory sessions in at least once a month where minutes are kept and available to Department staff, in line with international practices. We understand that the Committee has not seen such data as it was not part of the information package requested in the application pack. Unfortunately, we did not make the above clear during the visit; full data are available by the Department should it be required

3.2 The Department has actively encouraged students to participate at the students' elections 2021. The Department Council opens several sections to all students inviting them to participate in the debate, in order to increase awareness among them. We believe that there is a fruitful collaboration between staff and the student body in relation to the management of the Department. It must be noted that, as per the University regulations, in all academic bodies, including the Department Council, a 20% representation of students is applied.

4. Learning and Teaching

Areas of improvement and recommendations

4.1 The Department should ensure that detailed assessment criteria for each piece of assessment is explicitly available to students in the course documentation

Department's Response:

4.1 We agree with the Committee's suggestion that detailed assessment criteria must be available to students. In fact, this is done as the Course Outline for each course offered is handed out to all students at the beginning of the course and contains detailed information on assessment criteria. The Course Outline is uploaded to the learning

management system and is available to students throughout the semester. Clearly, there is always room for improvement and the Department has decided that Course Outlines for the next academic semester are reviewed to ensure they explicitly provide assessment criteria at the appropriate detail

5. Teaching Staff

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- 5.1 The department could be more explicit about the contract status of its staff, particularly those who are employed on a part-time, “special teaching staff” status.
- 5.2 A more formal consideration of student evaluation of teaching staff could be considered, possibly even linking this to annual staff appraisal.

Department’s Response:

- 5.1 We agree that, in order to ensure a positive and productive working environment, it is important that the contract status is clear for all employees. The “Special Teaching Staff” label is imposed by the governing law and regulations of the Cyprus QAA and it is needed to clearly distinguish between elected Teaching and Research Staff. A sample contract is provided in Annex 06.
- 5.2 We apologize for not making it evident in the evaluation visit, but student evaluations of teaching staff form part of the staff appraisal process as gradings are available to the Department Head and there is a policy to comment and react on ‘problematic’ and ‘below expectations’ markings. The matter has been reviewed in the Quality Assurance Committee and the policy has been updated to include in the appraisal process also high performing gradings in order to highlight and promote best practices.

6. Research

6.1 Quality indicator / criterion

6.7	The Department provides mechanisms which ensure compliance with international rules of research ethics, both in relation to research activity and the rights of researchers.	No Mark Given
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Areas of improvement and recommendations

6.2 A more explicit procedure for ensuring that matters of research ethics would be advisable. The department could benefit from having more measurable data concerning their research outputs, such as numbers of citations, numbers of publications etc.

Department's Response:

All points above

Additional to the answers provided in section 2.1, we agree with the Committee's comment that research ethics matters could be more systematically introduced into the University. At present, the University has a Research Ethics Committee which is concerned with such matters. Research ethics concerns are also addressed in the Research Regulation of the University as well as the IPR rules. The University has identified that there is a need for a systematic communication and training on staff in a wide variety of matters. To this end, the University Council has established the Professional Development Center (Professional and Personal Development at Frederick - PDF) at the University that is explicitly responsible for developing a policy and schedule for training and professional development for staff in an organized manner. The issue of research ethics has been communicated to the Center and appropriate training on the matter will take place in the coming academic year.

7. Resources

7.1 Quality indicator / criterion

7.6	<p>The Department's external audit and the transparent management of its finances are ensured.</p> <p>EEC Justification: <i>We are unaware that any kind of devolved departmental budget operates, and so this question may not be applicable.</i></p>	3
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Areas of improvement and recommendations

No comments were made by the Committee

Department's Response:

7.1 The issue of financial independence of the Department and transparency of its operations has been discussed during the evaluation visit. As explained, the size of the Department does not make it appropriate nor efficient to introduce such mechanisms at department level. Instead, financial management and transparency of operations is maintained and audited at University-level where the highest standards of financial management are held. We would like to point out that the operating budget of the whole University is comparable to small-to-medium size departments in large, established universities

B. Conclusions and final remarks

1. Although the Department has a very dedicated existing body of staff, it will need to carefully consider its future recruitment of staff in relation to EDI criteria and internationalisation.
2. Although the Department has a very clear existing research specialism, it will need to carefully consider its future research profile in order to support and sustain its viability, and its ability to attract students from Cyprus and elsewhere.
3. The Department should encourage more students to take advantage of the Erasmus scheme.

Department's Response:

Throughout our response we believe it is evident we have adopted the recommendations made and proceeded with improving/remedial actions.

1. In relation to the concluding remarks, we fully agree that the future of the department relies in internationalization, something that was discussed in depth during the visit. In answer 2.1 we have indicated the University's commitment to EDI and actions taken for internationalizing our Department through increasing our research networks and collaborations, and, notably, the offering of our courses in English. These actions are fully inline with the University's strategic goal for internationalization.
2. The Department has revised its research strategy to widen its research specialism by focusing also on interdisciplinary fields relevant to UN SDG that are attractive to international students and researchers (i.e. contemporary architectural technology, affordable housing etc.)
3. Finally, we adopt the Committee's recommendation for further Erasmus student mobility.

Concluding, we would like to sincerely thank the EEC for their dedicated work and invaluable comments provided both within their evaluation report and during the frank discussions held throughout the visit. We wish to note that we are particularly pleased with the very positive assessment in general of both the Department itself and the academic programs it operates.

C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

Name	Position	Signature
Prof. George Demosthenous	Rector	

Date: 01/06/2021

