

Doc. 300.3.2

Date: 19/4/2023

Higher Education Institution's Response

(Departmental)

- **Higher Education Institution:**
University of Nicosia
- **Town:** Nicosia
- **School/Faculty:** Life & Health Sciences
- **Department:** Life Sciences
- **Programme(s) of study under evaluation**
Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)

Programme 1

In Greek:

Επιστήμη του Αθλητισμού (4 χρόνια, 240 ECTS, Πτυχίο)

In English:

Sports Science (4 years, 240 ECTS, Bachelor of Science)

Programme 2

In Greek:

Επιστήμη της Άσκησης και της Φυσικής Αγωγής (1.5 έτος, 90 ECTS, Μάστερ)

In English:

Exercise Science and Physical Education (1.5 years, 90 ECTS, MSc)

Programme 3

In Greek:

Επιστήμη της Άσκησης και της Φυσικής Αγωγής (3 χρόνια, 180 ECTS, Διδακτορικό)

In English:

Exercise Science and Physical Education (3 years, 180 ECTS, PhD)



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].

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.*

Introduction

We would like to thank the members of the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) for their professional and academic approach during the on-site evaluation of the Department of Life Sciences and the Programmes of Sports Science and for producing a detailed and expertly written evaluation report. We greatly appreciate the EEC's positive comments and recommendations for further improving our Sports Science programmes and Department. This evaluation enhances the value to our programmes taking into consideration the EEC's members' expertise in the subject and/or related areas.

We appreciate the positive comments of the committee and we value them in order to proceed for even better outcomes. It was great to hear that the programmes of study offered by the Department reflect our academic profile and are aligned with the European and international practice and that our Department ensures that its operation and activities have a positive impact on society. Moreover we welcome the comment that the core activities related to teaching and research appeared strong and that the quality assurance system promotes a culture of quality. We are very pleased that the EEC has concluded that the department as a whole appears to be managed appropriately and some disciplines are thriving. We highly appreciate the EEC's constructive comments and recommendations for further improvement of our Department

Below you will find detailed responses to all recommendations whilst the findings of the EEC have been summarized. Any comments coming directly from the EEC are shown in ***italics and bold***.

1. Department's academic profile and orientation

Sub-areas

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

The Department of Life sciences has been considered to be compliant and partially compliant for this section.

Sub-areas

1.1 Mission and strategic planning

Justification of numerical scores:

- (a) ***“The Department is clearly newly established and we believe it is on the correct trajectory. The activities of the staff, lecturers and professors are clearly compliant with international research and teaching standards. Despite being presented to the panel, the departmental strategy was not obvious and is also not made available on the department's website. Importantly, it is unclear***

how stakeholders are involved in forming the departmental strategy. Indicators presented were limited to the number of publications, grants and rankings. More and well argued indicators are needed. The mechanism for analysing and collecting departmental data was not clear. A process for developing the departmental mission and strategy is needed.

Response/Action:

A departmental mission and strategy already exists but it can be modified based on the needs of the department, the School and the University. All the necessary changes and additions in the website will be made upon the end of the accreditation process.

A mission of discovering and disseminating knowledge in the field of Life Sciences through teaching & learning process and to address problems affecting health & welfare of the society.

UNIC Department of Life Sciences (DLS) mission is to:

- Empower, engage, and educate health care professionals, scientists and researchers who will lead their fields to best serve the health and well-being of people
- Respond to the health care needs.
- Educate healthcare professionals, educators and scientists for life.
- Undertake research that is relevant to the needs of our country and beyond.
- Be socially responsive to the needs of the people of our country and beyond.
- Contribute to the training of the next generation of research scientists, biotechnological entrepreneurs, educators, bioscience and allied health professionals.

Department's Strategic Plan

Provides a roadmap for the Department of Life Sciences

The new department aims to deliver excellence in research and teaching across the spectrum of Life Sciences

In pursuit of DLS vision, 7 key strategic pillars have been established

1. Growth
2. Student Learning and Services
3. Research Agenda
4. Business community engagement/External relations
5. Sustainability/Revenue generation
6. People and culture
7. Internationalisation and mobility

Each pillar outlines our strategic objectives and includes short, medium-term and long-term goals and objectives.

Regarding the public availability of the Departments' profile, based on the legal framework and the regulations of the CYQAA, all the information of the new department including its mission and vision will become publicly available after the completion of the accreditation process.

One of the strategic aims of the School of Life and Health Sciences is the provision of interactive and/or interprofessional learning and research experiences to the students of the various healthcare disciplines (Medicine, [Dietetics, Biology, Sports Science-Life Sciences], [Pharmacy, Nursing, Physiotherapy-Health Sciences]).

Through the curriculums of the different life sciences related programs, students are introduced to the roles of other members of the multidisciplinary health care team in their courses.

However, we acknowledge that further work is needed to provide a more systematic approach to Interprofessional Education, so in addition to the current practice, the new structure of the Life Sciences programs of the University of Nicosia has brought together the Medical School, the School of Life and Health Sciences and the Veterinary School. This has allowed the establishment of a Joint Steering Committee, which coordinate activities between the three schools, and has agreed to collaborate on towards the promotion of intersectional research and education.

In order to achieve this, the Head of Interprofessional Learning for the Medical School, the Head of Life Sciences (Dr Eleni Andreou), the Head of the Department of Health Sciences (Dr Christos Petrou) and the coordinators of the various programmes have already begun to work on interprofessional educational activities.

Such priority actions underway are:

- the interprofessional activities in the clinical setting of the UNIC Primary Care Clinic
- common PBL sessions in Life Sciences courses between the dietetics/ nutrition, human biology and sports science students

Regarding the of external stakeholders' role in quality assurance, the University has in place a multi-level system to ensure that quality assurance becomes an integral part of, and permeates, the culture of the Department and its core stakeholders, faculty, students and administrators.

(b) Additionally, provide information on the following:

“The three programmes evaluated were all compatible and clearly structured, both within the department and broader school structures.”

Provide suggestions for changes in case of incompatibility.

“There were no incompatibility issues in relation to coherence and compatibility of programmes”

Response/Action: We thank the committee for the positive comments.

1.2 Connecting with society

The Department of Life Sciences has been considered to be compliant in all but one criteria for this section.

Justification of numerical scores:

“A more effective alumni network is needed. The department should start collecting data of where their graduates have arrived after finishing their studies at the University of Nicosia.”

Response/Action:

In a collaboration with the Departments of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs the Department has setup an effective communication mechanism to stay in contact with the alumni. The collection of data and employment status of our graduates will be a priority.

We plan to collect and analyze data in several ways. Below, are some examples:

- Use alumni surveys to keep up-to-date information on the employment and demographic information of each alumnus. This information will go a long way towards informing our branding and digital marketing strategies.
- Keep detailed records on social mentions and user engagement: track which hashtags are most closely associated with our university, which users are most likely to follow us and what kind of posts get the most engagement.
- Keyword tracking: Knowing which keywords bring in the most traffic to our website can be especially beneficial

1.3 Development processes

The Department of Life Sciences has been considered to be partially compliant and compliant in all criteria for this section.

Justification of numerical scores:

(a)“There is a missed opportunity around developing business cases for investing in research within the department. For example, investing in support staff (e.g. technical/administrative staff) to help free up academic time.

Freeing up academics to write grants would mean if successful the overhead could be used to employ more research staff and provide new staff with more funded teaching opportunities.”

“We see that it is positive the university aims to recruit students from Greece and abroad. With regard to standards seen in Europe it is important that universities recruit the majority of their students from their home country. This is what we saw at the University of Nicosia.”

Response/Action:

The University has in place effective procedures and measures to attract, select, and retain the appropriate academic staff and to ensure that they possess the formal and substantive skills to teach, do research and effectively carry out their work. In addition, newly hired faculty -along with the older faculty- must go through additional training in pedagogy and online learning and an induction process. They also have access to funds to attend professional conferences to develop their own research agenda.

Publishing scientific research and contributing to global knowledge is a core objective for all faculty members at the University of Nicosia. The Research Recognition Policy (RRP) aims to encourage and recognize the efforts and success of UNIC faculty in publishing in Scopus-indexed peer-reviewed scholarly journals with significant reach and impact, which is consistent with UNIC's strategy for excellence in international research reputation and rankings.

The University (Office of the Vice Rector of Faculty and Research) supports all types of research by:

- Actively encouraging faculty to seek funding from a range of sources.
- Providing Research Time Release & Using Sabbatical Leave and Leave Without Pay

- Providing funding for attending and presenting papers in seminars and conferences
- Maintaining effective and efficient procedures for the management of research projects and for monitoring the progress of research students.
- Developing systems for the support of new researchers
- Ensuring that students conducting research benefit from an appropriate program of research training in addition to the pursuit of their individual research projects.
- Encouraging faculty and student researchers to publish their research results in peer-reviewed books, electronic media, conferences.
- Encouraging research links with the various relevant research funding organizations, government bodies, the community, industry, commerce, voluntary organizations and with the professions, regionally, nationally, and internationally.
- Establishing the Research Recognition Policy award.
- Establishing the University of Nicosia Seed Grant

The University of Nicosia through the Pedagogical Support Unit, the e-Learning Pedagogical Support Unit, the Department of Education, the Technology Enhanced Learning Centre, and the library offers 36-hours professional development seminars that lead to a certificate, in the areas of contemporary teaching methods, new technologies in learning and online education. Most of the faculty of the Department of Life Sciences have successfully completed these seminars.

The content of these professional development seminars is briefly indicated below:

- Developing Learners' 21st-century skills
- Cognitive and neuroscience research: Implications for education and learning
- Project and Problem Based Learning
- Developing a course with a critical and creative focus
- Measuring learning outcomes using Authentic Assessment, assignments, quizzes, tests and rubrics in online and face-to-face courses
- Developing effective learning environments
- Including students with diverse needs in a university classroom
- Online Learning and Adult Education
- Using video and multimedia in an online course
- Using interactive and collaborative tools in online learning
- e-Learning Authoring Software and the use of Moodle
- Library Resources & Open Educational Resources (OER)

The Department applies an effective strategy of attracting students / high-level students from Cyprus and abroad.

(b)“14 000 students, from 70 countries in the whole University. Internationalisation is clearly a priority. The projected student numbers were provided in the documentation, but no projected increase in faculty or resources were addressed. The planned numbers for nursing were not provided to the committee in the presentations, only on documents.”

Findings

“With regard to the specialties and areas of expertise of the lecturers and professors there is a clear emphasis on the biomedical disciplines”.

Strengths

“The core activities related to teaching and research appeared strong.”

Areas of improvement and recommendations

“Strategic management and mission development should be improved. Especially, the balance between biomedical and social sciences should be considered. A more diverse staffing base including social scientists would fulfil the requirements of the programme offerings of MSc Exercise Science and Physical Education and PhD Exercise Science and Physical Education more broadly. Additionally, further investment in research and teaching support should be prioritised.”

Response/Action:

Strategic Planning for DLS is carefully planned and aligned to the the School of Life and Health Sciences and of course the overall vision and mission of the University of Nicosia.

Strategic plan is a result of a collective effort, since all Faculty participated in the development. The procedure followed for the compilation of strategic planning included: (i) evaluating the current situation, wherein observations of the Department’s faculty members were collected, which were correlated with the provided teaching work in terms of quality, so that the changes to be made became obvious, (ii) planning the reformation of input, procedures and output by the Department’s faculty members, using the economic and technical method of cost – benefit, following the strategic planning wherein the reformed variables act dynamically, carrying along others, (iii) implementing the reformed input, procedures and output, and (iv) evaluating using quality control criteria – indicators. HoD and the Departments’ council are responsible for monitoring the implementation of the strategic plan.

Goals

Accomplish our mission through interdisciplinary education, research, and engagement with partners to advance sustainable economic prosperity, health and safety, ethical conduct, and responsible use of resources.

In pursuit of our mission vision, we have established 3 key strategic pillars

Education (Student learning, Transformative Education, Educational Programs)

Scholarship (Scholarly Activity, Economic and Social Development)

People (Community, Quality of Life, Infrastructure, Internationalization and mobility)

Education

Provide a distinctive and rigorous action-based learning experience grounded in science, engineering, technology, business, sustainability, and an understanding of the social and cultural contexts of our contemporary world.

Student Learning

Integrate instruction, research, and innovation to achieve the student learning goals for undergraduate and graduate programs.

Provide research, service-learning, project-based, entrepreneurial, and international opportunities for students.

Promote mutual appreciation of, and collaborative opportunities across, academic disciplines.

Continually assess, review, and improve programs and develop new offerings in emerging disciplinary

and interdisciplinary areas.

Transformative Education

Provide a technologically rich education grounded in a residential and experiential learning environment. Encourage and support high quality, innovative, and effective instruction and experiences to enhance student learning.

Provide student mentoring, career and professional development, and leadership opportunities.

Enhance student learning and experiences to promote long-term physical and mental health.

Foster mutual respect in personal and professional interactions.

Promote social and civic responsibility as well as ethical conduct.

Educational Programs

Expand programs in response to social and economic needs and challenges.

Develop and enhance pathways to completion of undergraduate and graduate programs.

Increase both scholarly productivity and number of doctoral and master's degrees awarded.

Improve access via online and other non-traditional delivery of educational programs.

Promote lifelong learning by providing opportunities for continuing education.

Encourage understanding of public policy issues.

Organize and deliver conferences for LLL for students, health professionals and public

Scholarship

Enhance research, scholarship, entrepreneurship, innovation, and creative activities that promote sustainable economic prosperity, health and safety, ethical conduct, and responsible use of resources.

Scholarly Activity

Grow research, scholarship, and creativity.

Increase external support for research, scholarly, and creative activities, including leadership of interdisciplinary multi-institutional collaborations.

Promote, recognize, and reward scholarly excellence and accomplishment.

Encourage and support entrepreneurial and interdisciplinary activities.

Promote sharing and growth of research facilities, services, and infrastructure.

Economic and Social Development

Promote innovation and development for economic and social progress.

Advance interdisciplinary research to address problems of social significance.

Create a culture of responsible innovation and entrepreneurship.

Support workforce development and social engagement through collaborative outreach and technology transfer.

Encourage and support technology commercialization and start-up businesses.

Expand international and cross-cultural engagement with universities, industries, non-governmental organizations, and governments.

Foster social development and economic growth of our state and the local community.

People

Foster and support an exceptional and diverse community of students, faculty, and staff.

Community

Cultivate an exceptional academic and professional community.

Recruit, support, recognize, and graduate bright, motivated, and adventurous students.

Attract, retain, and support faculty and staff and provide recognition, rewards, and competitive compensation.

Collaboratively develop opportunities for partner engagement.

Provide professional development and leadership opportunities for students, tenured, tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty, and staff.

Optimize numbers of tenured, tenure-track, and non-tenure-track faculty and staff to foster growth of University programs.

Quality of Life

Ensure a supportive environment for all members of the University community.

Promote equity, inclusiveness, and collegiality through openness, engagement, mutual respect, and understanding of diverse perspectives.

Increase diversity, and promote success of all students, faculty, and staff.

Provide a rich cultural environment and a welcoming campus.

Support the health and well-being of all members of the University community.

Engage with external partners to enhance the quality of life in our local community.

Infrastructure

Provide exceptional services and infrastructure.

Promote a university-wide culture of safety, responsiveness, effectiveness, and efficiency.

Provide exceptional technology, library, classroom, and laboratory facilities that support education, research, and innovation.

Create and maintain an aesthetic, sustainable, and effective infrastructure.

Internationalization and mobility

Input in international teamwork has a constructive effect on motivation, quality and networking in research and education.

Create strategic collaboration agreements with foreign research and educational organisations

Advance an exchange programme with efficient support functions as a strategic tool to intensify the quality of research and education, and to seek international collaboration

Represent its international profile on English language websites, in international news channels, at international meetings and as hosts for international events

Promote programmes in English

Participation to EU and International bodies and Organisations

Participation and/or Organization of International Conferences

2. Quality Assurance

Sub-areas

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

The Department of Life Sciences has been considered to be compliant in all criteria for this section.

Sub-areas

2.1 System and quality assurance strategy

Justification of numerical scores:

“Quality assurance structures at all relevant levels were presented and in place. No direct policy for countering discrimination was explicitly presented. It was unclear if the operation of the quality assurance system adequately ensures enforcement of high standards. For example, a sole focus on the number of publications may not result in high quality research.”

Response/Action:

The Quality Assurance structures are centrally coordinated by the Rector of the University of Nicosia. Among the committees of the Internal Quality Assurance Committees is the Department Internal Quality Assurance Committee (DIQAC) – Composition For each Department an Internal Quality Assurance Committee (DIQAC) comprising of: 1. The Head or Associate Head of Department (chair) 2. One faculty member of the department preferably holding the rank of at least Assistant Professor, and preferably experienced in quality assurance procedures 3. A third-year 1s Cycle (undergraduate) student representative.

The primary purposes of quality assurance are the enhancement of the quality of the student learning experience and the maintenance of academic standards in the context of an increasingly diverse student population and the particular nature of University of Nicosia's academic portfolio. The University, in its commitment to developing a genuine culture of continuous quality improvement shall set out how it shall meet its aims in a Quality Assurance Policy.

The aims of this policy are to ensure the following key principles:

- safeguarding of academic standards, and the
- assurance and enhancement of the quality of academic provision (academic quality) of all University awards. The policy, which shall reinforce the standards set out, are made available, along with all associated policies and procedures, to all staff, students and other stakeholders. Where appropriate, academic departments will have the freedom to tailor University-wide procedures and structures to their own requirements. Such customization will also be documented and evidence of their adoption is kept. The University works constructively with external quality assurance agencies and professional bodies. The University rigorously and continuously monitors the effectiveness of its quality assurance procedures to assure that they are operating in accordance with good practice, in the best interests of students and the maintenance of academic standards.

Managing quality and standards The principles presented above will be developed in more detail within subsidiary academic quality and standards policies, and the principles of all policies will be realized within

academic quality procedures, codes of practice and the academic regulations. In the main, responsibility for following policies, procedures, codes of practice and regulations will be devolved to Schools. However, the University recognizes that students, external quality agencies, employers, partners and other stakeholders need to be confident that standards and quality are being maintained, and that at an institutional level, the University is assured of the standards and quality of provision. A variety of techniques can provide such assurance including audit, internal review, continuous monitoring, and feedback from observers of internal quality processes.

The principles underlying these methods are that they should:

- highlight any need to change the practices of schools and services;
- highlight any need to change academic policies, procedures, codes of practice and regulations
- highlight any staffing or other resource requirements, including the need for staff development;
- ensure that necessary changes are made;
- make a valuable contribution to quality enhancement;
- be designed to give external agencies, employers, partners, students and other stakeholders confidence in the University's quality assurance policies and procedures;
- integrate as far as is possible or desirable with the procedures of external auditing organisations;
- be developed in consultation with those who deliver academic provision; and
- should be periodically reviewed for appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency.

2.2 Quality assurance for the programmes of study

The Department of Life Sciences has been considered to be partially compliant and compliant in all criteria except four for this section.

(a) Justification of numerical scores:

“2.2.5 No system for control of plagiarism was presented but may be in place.

2.2.12 Graduate employment information was unavailable.

2.2.17 Doctoral regulations might be in place but were not presented.

2.2.19 In general, funding during doctoral studies was raised as a critical issue including conference attendance.”

Response/Action:

- 2.2.5 There is a system of control for plagiarism through the Moodle. Turnitin enables seamless integration with Moodle. The administrator has configured Turnitin for our organization, therefore we can use Turnitin as a part of our Moodle workflow using Moodle assignments. The tutors set defaults that will apply to all assignments they create.
- 2.2.15 The Alumni office of University of Nicosia can give such information although improvement of the Alumni database is continuously in process. University of Nicosia as educational institution has an alumni network, formal or not, and they're used for a wide range of things. Alumni can build business connections, organize reunions, and serve as shining examples of the kind of people that their institution produces.

- 2.2.17 The University of Nicosia, as part of the internal regulations has the regulations of Doctoral Programs (CHAPTER TWELVE: CODE OF PRACTICE AND REGULATIONS FOR DOCTORAL PROGRAMMES). They can be found on the portal of the University. . The University of Nicosia offers Doctoral Degrees (3rd Cycle level). These programmes can be offered by: a specific Department of the University, two or more Departments of the University upon the approval of the Departments and the Schools which the Departments belong to, in co-operation with other Universities locally and/or abroad. As part of the Departmental contribution the Department Postgraduate Programmes Committee (DPPC).The role of the DPPC is instrumental as it provides a mechanism for monitoring the students' progress and welfare during their studies. The DPPC is responsible to evaluate all applications, appoint the members of the supervisory team as well as monitor the progress and oversee the process of all academic decisions. The Department of Life Sciences has its own DPPC .
- 2.2.19 The University of Nicosia offers various ways for Research Support.The University supports all types of research by:
 - Actively encouraging faculty to seek funding from a range of sources, including government, commercial and industrial sources at a national and international level;
 - Facilitating research funding through inter alia the support of University-affiliated research centres, inter-disciplinary research, collaborative research with other institutions and individual research projects of proven or potential quality;
 - Providing funding for attending and presenting papers in seminars and conferences, and providing access to research material such as books, journals and conference proceedings; • Investing in Information Technology and on-line access to research databases;
 - Developing systems for the support of new researchers, and for other research staff, considering the principles advocated under the European Charter for Researchers;

Ensuring that students conducting research benefit from an appropriate programme of research training in addition to the pursuit of their individual research projects;

Encouraging faculty and student researchers to publish their research results in peerreviewed journals (e.g., indexed in Scopus, Web of Science), books, electronic media, conferences, exhibitions and performances;

Establishing the University of Nicosia Seed Grant (UNICSG) scheme. UNICSG encourages research through internally allocated funding meant to foster the research activities of the University of Nicosia researchers as follows: a) the fund supports an internal research grant scheme designed to provide seed funding to encourage and support UNIC researchers particularly those who are in the initial stages of building up their experience and with a potential to secure external research grants; and b) the fund is targeted at track-record improvement of UNIC researchers supporting the publication of SCOPUS covered documents, implementation of small pilot research projects for obtaining data and the potential for development of external grant application.

Moreover, as far as concern the conference funding, the University offers an annual budget for conferences where the faculty can attend and present their work at the various conferences internationally.

Findings

“Structures were in place to assure various aspects of quality assurance.”

Strengths

“Facilities and equipment are superb. It is very clear that the responsible staff and professors are highly motivated to meet the highest standards, and that they are on a very good way to reach it soon. We were convinced that the organisation was open to learning and developing in line with

other European universities.”

Areas of improvement and recommendations

“Graduate employment information was unavailable. We recommend systematic collection of graduate employment via alumni network.

Doctoral regulations might be in place but were not presented. We advise to make these more visible.

In general, funding during doctoral studies was raised as a critical issue including conference attendance. We advise to ensure better financial support for phd students.

Usage of student feedback and other data was not clearly outlined. We advise establishing formal ways of integrating student feedback in development processes.”

Response/Action:

The first three items are analyzed extensively above. As far as concern the PhD students, they are supported through the funds received for their projects, but currently new ways are explored by the School and the PhD..

Thank you for the recommendations establishing formal ways of integrating student feedback in development processes. Below are some ways we are using and planning to elaborate.

Formal feedback is planned and systematically scheduled into the process. Usually associated with assessment tasks, formal feedback includes the likes of marking criteria, competencies or achievement of standards, and is recorded for both the student and organisation as evidence.

Formative feedback, Summative feedback, Student peer feedback, Student self feedback

3.Administration

The Department of Life sciences has been considered to be fully compliant for this section.

Justification of numerical scores:

“We must assume policies are in place although they were not presented to us during our site visit.”

Findings

“We are not sure whether the students are having a voice in the management of the department”.

Strengths

“Structures and processes are implemented and professionally led.”

Areas of improvement and recommendations

“3.6 indicates that some of the policies were not presented to the committee.”



Response/Action

The Department of Life Sciences is fully aligned with all the policies of the University of Nicosia which are presented in the various chapters of the Internal Regulations: Admissions Policies, Academic Policies, Policies of Programs of Study, Research Policies, Faculty Matters Policies, Student Rules and Regulations.

4. Learning and Teaching

Sub-areas

4.1 Planning the programmes of study

4.2 Organisation of teaching

The “Department of Life Sciences” has been considered to be fully compliant in all criteria of this section.

Sub-areas

4.1 Planning the programmes of study

Justification of numerical scores:

“It is unclear to what extent students are involved in program review and development.”

Response/Action:

University of Nicosia provides an effective system for designing, approving, monitoring and revising Programmes of Study. The Policies for Programs of Study can be found in the Internal Regulations and clearly describe the procedure for the Introduction of New Programs and their monitoring through the Internal Program Evaluation Process (IPEP). Both faculty, administration and students participate in the process.

New programs of study are assessed by various committees, both internally and externally, at the department and school levels with the input from academic, professional and industrial partners, submitted to the Curriculum Affairs Committee of the Senate, to the highest academic body of the University, the Senate, and finally submitted to the Council of the University as there is a financial implication with the design and establishment of a new programme of study, before they are submitted for evaluation to DIPAE.

Moreover, in the Department Council, there are elected students’ representatives who are involved in the development of the programs and updating of the curriculum.

Furthermore, the programme committees which is composed by all full-time faculty will be expanded to include elected students’ representative from each year of study for every program of study. These students will participate in regular program meetings and they will have the opportunity to provide their feedback.

4.2 Organisation of teaching

(a)Justification of numerical scores:

“It was unclear how assessment allows students to demonstrate the extent to which the intended learning outcome have been achieved.”

Response/Action:

Assessment of learning refers to strategies designed to confirm what students know, demonstrate whether or not they have met curriculum outcomes or the goals of their individualized programs, or certify proficiency and make decisions about students’ future programs or placements. It is designed to provide evidence of achievement to other educators, the students themselves, and sometimes to outside groups (e.g., employers, other educational institutions).

Because the consequences of assessment of learning are often far-reaching and affect students seriously, faculty have the responsibility of reporting student learning accurately and fairly, based on evidence obtained from a variety of contexts and applications. Effective assessment of learning requires that tutors provide • a rationale for undertaking a particular assessment of learning at a particular point in time • clear descriptions of the intended learning • processes that make it possible for students to demonstrate their competence and skill • a range of alternative mechanisms for assessing the same outcomes • public and defensible reference points for making judgements.

(b) **Findings**

Teaching activities have clearly been a departmental priority.

Strengths

There is a strong focus on development of an efficient and relevant program.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Student involvement in curriculum development is unclear and should be clarified or developed.

Response/Action:

As it was explained above, the University of Nicosia provides an effective system for designing, approving, monitoring and Programmes of Study which this includes students involvement in curriculum development. However, the Life Sciences Department tries to explore new ways of student involvement in curriculum development within the spectrum of the university regulations. One of this the Participatory design (PD). PD is a collaboration of all stakeholders, including students, whereby they design and develop innovations that are tailored to the learners and context. The goal of PD is to improve quality of educational innovations by ensuring use, usability and utility of educational design for both teachers and students. Starting from the idea that all stakeholders' knowledge and expertise is highly valued, teachers, educational designers, and students collaborate. Terms that are intertwined are co-design, collaborative design, student voice and student participation (when only listening to students), and student engagement .

5. Teaching Staff

The “Department of Life Sciences” has been considered to be compliant and partially compliant in all criteria of this section.

(a) *Justification of numerical scores:*

“5.3 More visiting professors could support development of the department and program, which must be considered relatively small in a European context.

5.7 The relatively limited permanent staff and the relatively high usage of part time lecturers may be a challenge for teaching continuity and especially for research development and thus research based education.”

“It is a concern that a high number of part time employees are forced to work elsewhere at the same time as being hired by the University of Nicosia. A primary concern is that the research based teaching is compromised, since not all teachers have the possibility to engage in research.”

Response/Action:

The Department ensure that the majority of the course taught within a program are taught and monitored by full time faculty. Part time faculty are normally reserved for specific course to which their expertise will be important. Thus, the quality of teaching is ensured. Additionally, many of the part-time faculty are encouraged and supported to be to engage in research.

(b) *Findings*

Teaching is a clear priority of the department.

Strengths

Obviously a well developed study program, which is in full accordance with European standards. Highly motivated group of teachers. Interaction between research methodology and teaching was clearly demonstrated during the laboratory visit. Students were enthusiastic about the openness and availability of teachers for help and questions.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Seeing the university’s strategic goal to further accelerate research outputs from the university, there is much room for improving synergies of teaching and research in that professors should be given more time and resources to invest in doing research (so that the teaching may profit even more from it).

Response/Action:

We value this recommendation of the EEC. The Department is expanding its network and has appointed one international visiting professor and research associates who will leverage existing opportunities in the synergy of teaching and research.

6. Research

The Department of Life Sciences has been assessed as partially compliant to all criteria of this section.

(a) Justification of numerical scores:

6.1 We were unable to review a research policy for the department and it was not clear if one had been produced.

6.8 The external, non-governmental, funding of research activities of teaching staff appeared well below other Departments abroad. The comparability to other departments in Cyprus was unclear to the panel.

6.9 The policy, indirect or direct, of internal funding of the research activities of the teaching staff appeared inadequate based on European and international practices.

Response/Action:

The Research Policies are presented in chapter four under the Internal Regulations of the University of Nicosia. The University of Nicosia believes that research is vital to the provision of a stimulating learning environment in which faculty and students flourish and fulfill their potential. The University also believes that involvement in research ensures the design and delivery of the University's curriculum are both up-to-date and relevant. Research encourages the development of open and critical minds — a vital part of the University's educational philosophy through which students interact with faculty and researchers who are working at the forefront of subject knowledge and professional practice and are also involved in research through student projects and case studies. The University considers interdisciplinary and collaborative research to be of particular importance in support of its mission and its desire to attract and retain high quality faculty and developing stronger relationships with institutions (government, industry, organizations) nationally, regionally and internationally. The University expects that Teaching Research Faculty (TRF) will be active in research, an activity monitored as part of the Faculty Performance Appraisal. The University accepts that the nature of research differs from discipline to discipline and covers a wide range of scholarly and intellectual activities. The University differentiates between (1) research and scholarship, which leads to the advancement of knowledge and involves, among others, journal articles, books and conferences, and (2) other scholarly activities, which involve keeping abreast of subject developments, curriculum development, and the writing of textbooks.

(b) Findings

Research strengths and weaknesses existed within the department.

Strengths

Staff appear to be publishing their research as indicated by the high number of publications (related to the number of full-time staff) over the past few years.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

In general, in order to write successful grant proposals the professors obviously need more time to focus on this part of their duties. This could be achieved, for example, by supporting them with workforce from administrative and or technical staff for everyday business.

The department is expected to continue to improve the quality and quantity of research outcomes over the next few years. The development of a research framework engaging staff from multidisciplinary backgrounds where research themes can have a positive impact on society should be developed.

Response/Action:

We thank the EEC for this constructive comment. We acknowledge the need to continue multidisciplinary research and continue the high number of publications in peer reviewed journals of the whole Department of Life Sciences. .

Research Areas in Life and Health Sciences

The School of Life and Health Sciences aims at the generation of new understanding and knowledge of the principles of Life and Health.

Based on this knowledge, the School attempts to address the various current and future challenges in the field.

Living organisms are complex entities both at their molecular and macroscopic levels. The complex networks embedded in living organisms regulate diverse functions with significant impact on health and disease. The research goal of the School and the Department of Life Sciences is to bridge a variety of diverse disciplines ranging from molecular biology to health care provision and to generate new knowledge in both basic and applied science. The Faculty aims at developing an interaction with local and international research institutions to address everyday challenges in the area of Human Health.

The Key Research Areas are indeed multidisciplinary

- Nutritional Sciences

The thematic research area of Nutritional Sciences examines the effect of diet on the organism's health. It includes focus areas such as health education and nutrition, behavior modification for weight management with special interest in the influence of early nutrition and weaning practices in childhood obesity, aging and nutrition, analysis of Cypriot nutrition and health database, sports and nutrition, as well as health education and dietetics. The Department also carries out research projects aiming at studying the role of diet in the development and progression of human diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer.

- Sports Science

The thematic area of Sports Science covers a multidisciplinary spectrum of research related to exercise. The focus areas include: effects of exercise training in the prevention and management of chronic diseases such as chronic kidney disease, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and multiple sclerosis, sleep physiology/exercise, cardiovascular exercise physiology in health and disease, chronic hydration levels of adults and adolescents athletes, and potential effects on exercise performance and overall health, training adaptations, hematological, hormonal and immune responses to young and elite soccer players, nutritional intervention and exercise, High Intensity Interval Training (HIIT), and sport pedagogy and sport psychology, among other subjects.

- Biomedical and Biological Sciences

Research in this fast-growing field encompasses a diverse spectrum of themes ranging from molecular to environmental biology. More specifically, faculty research interests include but are not limited to: biodiversity, ecology and conservation, signal transduction mechanisms responsible for the abnormal cell proliferation and/or cell apoptosis in cardiovascular and aging related diseases, the role of lipids in cell aging, the role of microRNAs in various physiologic and pathologic biological processes, molecular nutrition, isolation and identification of biologically active compounds occurring in natural products, effects of antioxidants on human health, understanding nutrient transport in the gastrointestinal track and its relevance to disease states, the role of the Unfolded Protein Response (UPR), the development and plasticity of the nervous system and effects of injury and drugs in the developing brain, aging and neurodegenerative diseases.

It is necessary to state in this part that the research framework of the Department of the Life Sciences is explicitly supported by the departmental research centers:

Research Centre for Exercise and Nutrition (RECEN)

- The Research Centre for Exercise and Nutrition (RECEN) is a multidisciplinary research centre consisting of scientists from different life and health disciplines.
- RECEN aims to conduct high-quality and innovative research focusing on the role of exercise and nutrition on health and the quality of life-related parameters in various population groups, including healthy people of all ages, as well as patients with chronic diseases.

Non-coding RNA Research Laboratory

- Non-coding RNA Research Laboratory (ncr-RESLA) aims to investigate the role of non-coding RNAs in human physiology at both basic and applied levels. The laboratory is composed of faculty members and students who work together on non-coding RNAs.
- The main objective of the work performed in ncr-RESLA is to provide a better understanding of the biology of non-coding RNAs and utilise this knowledge for the improvement of human health.

Bioactive Molecules Research Centre (BioMoReC)

- BioMoReC is a unique centre in Cyprus that uses modern processes to discover and develop bioactive molecules in order to enhance the drug development endeavors of the pharmaceutical industry and support the wider scientific academic community in Cyprus.
- The Centre facilitates and supports a continuum of research and development activities, from discovery and characterisation of bioactive molecules, to development, regulation and evidence based clinical application for humans as well as for veterinary purposes.
- It contributes to bridging the gap between basic drug research and clinical applications by using the existing research potential and know-how in pharmaceutical development and quality accreditation, promoting the level of pharmaceutical and medical research at a national level

7.Resources

The Department of Life Sciences has been assessed as partially compliant to the criterion of this section.

(a) *Justification of numerical scores:*

7.4; 7.6: *The Department's finances and budget appear to be in good overall shape. However, the details have not been presented to us.*

Response/Action:

The draft budget of the Department is developed at the level of the Department by the Head of the Department, the Program Coordinators and the faculty and it is approved at the first level by the Dean of the School. The budget is prepared in a transparent way on an annual basis using a bottom-up approach and is ultimately discussed and approved by the Council.

The financial budgets relating to revenues and expenses of the university are managed centrally by the relevant Offices and Bodies.

(b) *Findings*

The department and the programs are led professionally with a clear focus on efficiency. It is clear that the university leaders will invest in future departmental developments if provided with rational arguments.

Strengths

The laboratory space and specific laboratory equipment were generally very good and to a high standard. It was excellent to hear that new facilities are to be built in the near future which will continue to improve the sport science offer at the University of Nicosia.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

In general, the impression was that the University is run very professionally as a business entity with teaching as the primary product. This is not in itself a problem but carries the inherent risk that investment in classical university core tasks like research and development is under prioritised. Also, it generates a risk that faculty staff priorities are not aligned with overall goals of the business.

Response/Action:

We thank the EEC for the overall good comment for the University. We would like to assure that the University and the Department of Life Sciences will continue to invest on the adequate facilities, human assets and resources to support the research, teaching activities and contribution to the high educational standard in Cyprus and abroad of the faculty and students in addition to the standard support provided by the University.

B. Conclusions and final remarks

We wish to thank the EEC for the professionalism they showed during the execution of their duties. We appreciate the positive comments of the committee and we value them in order to proceed for even better outcomes. It was great to hear that the programmes of study offered by the Department reflect our academic profile and are aligned with the European and international practice and that our Department ensures that its operation and activities have a positive impact on society. Moreover it was welcomed the comment that the core activities related to teaching and research appeared strong and that the quality assurance system promotes a culture of quality and that the Department's mechanisms, processes and infrastructure consider the needs of a diverse student population. The comprehensive discussion of all issues pertinent to the Department and Programs under evaluation, led to a productive discussion between the members of the EEC and the official representatives of the University and faculty members of Department of Life Health Sciences. The discussion was extremely beneficial due to the expertise of the members of the EEC and their willingness to share their suggestions and recommendations for further improving the Department.



We have assessed and carefully reviewed the EEC report and we express gratitude to the EEC for their affirmative and constructive comments. We thank the EEC for concluding that the department as a whole appears to be managed appropriately.

Following the final remark of the EEC, the University of Nicosia has decided to take all the necessary measures, according to the findings/recommendations of the EEC in order to strengthen the academic profile of the Sports Sciences Programmes. We value the EEC concluding remark that all three Sports Science Programmes have a strong foundation and well-established platform for future development, so we are moving into improving on these strong fundamentals.

Accordingly, the suggestions for further improvement and investment in research offered by the EEC are taken very seriously into account. We consider the suggestions of the EEC as very valuable and we will try to incorporate them to the largest extent possible.

All answers/actions to the findings and recommendations of the EEC are addressed in the corresponding sections above.

C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

Name	Position	Signature
Eleni Andreou	Associate Professor, Head of Life Sciences Department	
Kyriacos Felekis	Professor, Dean of School of Life and Health Sciences	
FullName	Position	
FullName	Position	

Date: 19/4/2023

