



Doc. 300.2.2

Date: January 24, 2023

Institution

Response

(Institutional Evaluation)

- **Higher Education Institution:**
American University of Beirut - Mediterraneo
- **Town:** Paphos
- **Institution Status:** New Institution

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.300.2.1) must justify whether actions have been taken in improving the quality of the Institution in each assessment area.*
- *In particular, in the section building facilities, student welfare services, infrastructure, the HEI must respond on the comments and scoring of the EEC.*
- *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. 300.2.1).*
- *In case of annexes, those should be attached and sent on a separate document.*

BUILDING FACILITIES - STUDENT WELFARE SERVICES - INFRASTRUCTURE

1. Building facilities

1.1 Plans and licenses

The EEC rated this section as “**Satisfactory**” and did not suggest areas for improvements or recommendations.

Institution’s Response: We thank the EEC for their positive feedback.

1.2 Other facilities

The EEC rated this section as “**Satisfactory**” and did not suggest areas for improvements or recommendations.

Institution’s Response: We thank the EEC for their positive feedback.

2. Student welfare services

The EEC rated this section as “**Satisfactory**” and did not suggest areas for improvements or recommendations.

EEC commented in section “2.1. Special access for students with disabilities (PWD)”: *“The University must address the legal issues related to the work permit of international, non-EU students.”*

EEC commented in section “2.6 Career office” and “2.7 Service linking the institution with business” that:

1. “The University should address the legal issues related to the work permit of international, non- EU students, to provide the employment/work experience opportunities to all the students.
2. The University should consider the possibility to introduce the work placement/internships within the programs of studies (part of the program of studies), giving the opportunity to the students to gain relevant work experience and develop their skills and knowledge, based on pre-approved learning outcomes. Furthermore, a clear operating model regarding the placement of the students should be applied at a university level, describing the role and responsibilities of the academic departments/ faculty members and the administrative services (career office).
3. A strategic plan for skills development will help the several offices/entities of the University (e.g Career Office, Counselling Office, Mobility Office, Faculty Departments) to design and provide a comprehensive services package to the students that will enhance their employability and wellbeing. This will help the offices/entities to better collaborate and avoid overlapping, but at the same time will give to the students a clear student-career journey plan to follow.”

Institution's Response:

1. The university legal team in Cyprus (Dr. K. Chrysostomides & Co LLC) studied the regulations and legal restrictions for EU and non-EU students' planning to do internships. If the student are a third-country national and was not in Cyprus on 31/01/2022, they will not have any right to work while present in Cyprus under their student visa. If the student is Cypriot/EU/EEA/Swiss, the average maximum weekly working hours over a reference period of four months shall be 48 hours, which can also be derogated from by agreement between the parties under certain conditions. In this case, all regular obligations, like all other employees, such as registration with the Social Insurance Services, apply. Given the above, the university plans to adhere with the current laws and facilitate unpaid short-term internships for non-EU students, and short-term paid internships for Cypriot/EU/EEA/Swiss students.
2. The majority of the existing programs do offer placement/internships as part of the curriculum. In some cases, the internship is replaced with a one-year research project.
3. Training and development activities are already part of the activities the university conducts, such as orientation for staff, faculty members, and students; mentorship program for faculty members; and career development activities. The various training activities are captured in the Institution Evaluation Application in sections A-12, E-8, G-3, and H-7. A consolidated training manual could be developed to combine all these training activities and make them more detailed.

3. Infrastructure

The EEC rated this section as "Satisfactory" and did not suggest areas for improvements or recommendations.

Institution's Response: We thank the EEC for their positive feedback.

1. Institution's Academic Profile and Orientation

Sub-Areas

1.1 Mission and strategic planning

1.2 Connecting with society

1.3 Development processes

The American University of Beirut - Mediterraneo is highly appreciative for the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) and is very pleased with the **“Compliant”** rating [scores of 4-5] of two sub-areas and **“Partially Compliant”** of the third.

The university underlines the findings of the EEC:

- **“Excellent infrastructural and financial planning**
- **Great involvement of AUB staff in the planning**
- **Excellent levels of professionalism and organization**
- **Strong financial backing**
- **Willingness to partner with the local and national environment?”**

EEC noted also the strengths that **“The institutional plan is impressive in many ways and based on highly professional planning and strong market research.”**

Areas of Improvement and Recommendations include:

1. Lack of clarity about planned academic staffing levels after the first two years
2. Insufficient involvement of students in the planning
3. Lack of clarity about the extent to which AUB-M will function as a truly autonomous university or an extension of the mother AUB institution.
4. Very high planned tuition fees, which may discourage Cyprus and European citizens from applying and affect both quality of recruitment, quality of experience, and viability.

The university's response to these recommendations includes:

1. The first two years are crucial for the establishment and the launch of the university. Before instruction begins, the leadership team (President, Rector, Founding Deans, Chairpersons, and seconded faculty members) will strategize (short, medium and long-term) the disciplines and areas for recruitment to attract and recruit high-quality local and international academic staff who will teach and conduct research at AUB Mediterraneo. This is a top priority as the university aims to provide adequate support and resources to students in line with the institutional 2023-2032 staffing plan. Following other top quality institutions of higher education, the student-faculty ratio is set at 15. Around 50% of the teaching staff will be of professorial rank, i.e. professor, associate professor, and assistant professor. The other 50% will be lecturers and instructors, both full-time and part-time, such that no more than 30% of the total teaching staff are part-timers. The table below shows teaching staff with respect to students for the first 10 years of operations:

Year	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032
Students	200	396	600	873	1041	1259	1477	1692	1873	2091
Teaching Staff	14	27	40	59	70	84	99	113	125	140

2. All stakeholders were involved in the strategic planning of the twin campus [faculty, staff, administrators, students and trustees]. The strategic geographic expansion was communicated to the AUB community through a series of activities, including several presentations to the Board of Trustees, Board of Deans, and Administrative Committees of faculties/schools; multiple town hall meetings with students, faculty and staff; a Senate presentation; a presentation to the University Student Faculty Committee (USFC); and a special issue of the President's Perspective. The President's Perspective reaches an audience of approximately 60,000 people and is widely read by alumni around the world as well as the on-campus community.
3. AUB Mediterraneo is a twin campus of AUB Lebanon, and as such, it will be governed at the highest level by the AUB Board of Trustees (BoT) and the AUB President. However, it has full autonomy with its own governance structure including the rector, deans, chairpersons, senate, and standing committees at both the senate level and at the faculty/school level, with faculty and student participation (Section A-5 of the Institution Evaluation Application).
4. It is true that the tuition is higher than local universities; however, AUB Mediterraneo has a robust financial aid program to assist qualified undergraduate and graduate students in good academic standing who may not be able to afford the cost of tuition. We believe that financial considerations should not prevent students who meet our academic criteria from receiving high-quality education. Financial aid ranges from 0 to 80% allowing needy students to enroll at AUB Mediterraneo. In addition, 20% discount will be given to all students in the first cohort, and 5 full scholarships will be offered.

2. Quality Assurance

Sub-Areas

2.1 System and quality assurance strategy

2.2 Ensuring quality for the programmes of study

The American University of Beirut - Mediterraneo is highly appreciative for the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) and is very pleased with the “**Compliant**” rating [scores of 4-5] of this section and the quality indicators of its two sub-areas.

The university underlines the findings of the EEC: ***“The EEC overall has been satisfied with the Quality Assurance Strategy.***

Building a new university is a colossal task. There are so many issues to consider in order to have everything settled. AUB-M has already achieved major steps. The council of the University is determined to provide quality services to the students. Having this in mind they are determined to make all the required investments in order to achieve their tasks. The EEC believes that the close ties with the American educational system and the experience of the mother university in Lebanon will help the AUB-M progress well over the years.”

The EEC did not suggest areas for improvements or recommendations.

Institution’s Response: We thank the EEC for their positive feedback.

3. Administration

The American University of Beirut - Mediterraneo is highly appreciative for the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) and is very pleased with the **“Compliant”** rating [all scores of 5] of this section.

The university underlines the findings of the EEC: ***“The committee had the opportunity to meet and discuss with several administrators. Those will be the key persons that will support the AUB-M and govern its top processes. The EEC discussed with administrators in place and was well informed about their plans for the future.”***

Areas of Improvement and Recommendations include: “Significantly more teaching personnel will be needed as the institution grows. The EEC was informed about a recruitment plan that answers to the institution’s future needs but is underdetermined with reference to numbers, specializations, and competencies.”

The university's response to these recommendations includes: Indeed, as the student population at AUB Mediterraneo grows, there will be a corresponding need for more academic staff to teach new courses and sections, as well as to support the launch of new programs. This will also require additional support services such as counselling, advising, and mentoring, which will increase the need for staff. This is in line with institutional 2023-2032 staffing plan outlined in the institutional application, particularly with the launch of new programs each year.

4. Learning and Teaching

Sub-Areas

4.1 Planning the programmes of study

4.2 Organisation of teaching

The American University of Beirut - Mediterraneo is highly appreciative for the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) and is very pleased with the “**Compliant**” rating [scores of 4-5, with 1 score of 3] of this section and the quality indicators of its two sub-areas.

The university underlines the findings of the EEC: **“Overall, this is a university with an excellent track record of providing high level teaching and learning experience to their students in the AUB and will hopefully do so at AUBM. In principle, there is potential for a quality learning experience and diverse assessment.”**

Areas of Improvement and Recommendations include:

1. The EEC could only assess intentions and not implementation and had to rely in part on the experience of students in the mother institution.
2. It is very important that students feel that they can give feedback freely, anonymously, and without any pressure and that this feedback will be taken seriously. Some experiences by students at the mother institution were not sufficiently positive - and sometimes really problematic - on that front and it will be essential to ensure that there is no risk of similar problems at AUB-M

The university's response to these recommendations includes:

1. The institution is committed to implement the plans included in the Institution Evaluation Application that stress greatly on ethics and integrity, ensuring that the design, delivery and support of student experience meet the standards of CYQAA, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, and at a later stage the program specific accreditors such as ABET and AACSB.
2. Both AUB and AUB Mediterraneo take students' feedback as input to assist them in improving and assuring the quality of education. The university is keen on and have processes in place to address student feedback, but students may not be aware of the processes or may not see the changes/improvements immediately. Also, to ensure freedom of expression, students always have the chance to follow a grievance procedure as detailed in [Appendix 8 - 07.14.687_appx8- Student Grievance Policy and Procedures]. At AUB Mediterraneo we will raise enough awareness to inform students about the various ways they can adopt to eventually receive fair treatment.

5. Teaching Staff

The American University of Beirut - Mediterraneo is appreciative for the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) and is very pleased with the **“Partially Compliant”** rating [scores of 3-5] of this section.

The university underlines the findings of the EEC: ***“The quality of identified teaching staff is internationally competitive with strong pedagogical credentials and research profiles. The established internal processes of evaluating academic staff (some of whom will be transferred to Paphos) offer additional reassurance on quality. The balance between permanent and contract (or part time) staff is very good initially and the mix of seniority of those delivering teaching is appropriate. Given the strong research profile of staff, the availability or research-led teaching is to be welcomed. The parent institution has an established procedure of evaluating teaching, which includes student-led evaluation.”***

EEC noted strengths:

- ***Evidence of the strong pedagogical commitment of members of staff to ensure a more personalized educational experience***
- ***Strong research profile of staff allowing for the delivery of research-led teaching (although this may be impacted by the small number of staff based in the AUB-M in the first years of operation.***
- ***Small student-staff-ratio which is compatible with the pedagogical mission of the university. Commitment of the institution to sustain this ratio as student number expand over the next few years.***
- ***Established record of the parent institution in delivering student-focused teaching based on the US Liberal Arts College tradition.”***

Areas of Improvement and Recommendations include:

1. “The list of staff who will be transferred to the AUB-M needs to be finalised as soon as possible and the appropriate employment contracts should be signed.
2. It is not entirely clear to the members of the evaluation committee whether all units listed in the programme of study can be serviced effectively by the number of staff who have ‘committed’ to join the AUB-M.
3. Special care should be taken in the advertisement of the new programme to ensure that potential students are not misled about the availability of units.
4. It should be expected that the first years of operating the new university may generate a higher number of student complaints, as the new structures bed in. The leadership of the university should embrace this challenge by designing student evaluation processes that are temporarily even stronger than the routine processes without compromising anonymity while allowing the department to ‘learn’ quickly from its mistakes.”

The university's response to these recommendations includes:

1. The Rector has been officially appointed and is located in Pafos. This is in addition to local staff and multiple local consultancy companies to assist the institution in legal matters, accounting, payroll, procurement, communications, and talent acquisition. The Deans and teaching staff have been identified and they will be seconded from AUB Lebanon to start up the campus and increase the faculty body by conducting local and international recruitment.

The plan is to contract them once the institution receives the license; they are expected to move to Pafos in summer 2023.

- In line with top quality institutions of higher education, the student-faculty ratio is set at 15. Around 50% of the teaching staff will be of professorial rank, i.e. professor, associate professor, and assistant professor. The other 50% will be lecturers and instructors, both full-time and part-time, such that no more than 30% of the total teaching staff are part-timers. The table below shows teaching staff with respect to students for the first 10 years of operations:

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Teaching Staff	14	27	40	59	70	84	99	113	125	140

As for the recruitment of non-academic personnel, it will be also done in accordance with the 10 year institutional staffing plan, which extends over three phases that correspond to the three phases of campus construction. Staff will be increasingly recruited to accommodate for the growing number of students at the university. Non-academic staff will provide support to the operations of AUB Mediterraneo and will assume the following functions:

Unit	Positions
Secretarial Support (Executive Leadership)	Administrative Assistant
Academic Support/Student Affairs	Accessible Education Officer; Career Services and Mobility Officer; Student Counselor
Academic Support/Student Enrollment Services	Registrar; Student Services/Records Assistant; Financial Aid Officer; Admissions Officer; Admission Advisor; Data Management Specialist
Academic Support/Library	Librarian; Library Assistant
Academic Support/Office of Research	Grants Officer
HR and Benefits	HR/Benefits Officer; HR/Benefits Assistant
Information Technology	IT Manager; Field Support Engineer; Systems Engineer; Computer Lab Supervisor
iPark	iPark Manager
Finance	Finance Manager; General Accountant; Procurement Agent
Communications & Events	Communications and Events Officer
Quality Assurance and Institutional Improvement	Quality Assurance and Institutional Improvement Officer
Advancement	Stewardship Coordinator; Advancement/ Development Gifts Coordinator
Facilities	Facilities Engineer
Institutional Compliance & Ethics	Institutional Compliance Officer

It is to be noted that any shortage in academic or non-academic staff will be mitigated by tapping into the many resources that already exist in Cyprus via hiring part-timers, and also the resources that exist at AUB.

- The recruitment team will provide transparent, accurate and up-to date information about new programs on the website, hold open houses, and information sessions for potential students to learn more about the program and ask questions.
- Student learning and student success are core at AUB Mediterraneo. The university acknowledges that in the first few years, the deans and department chairs will conduct focus groups to solicit student feedback on their studies, learning, teaching by faculty, advising, grading, etc. These will be conducted by a trained administrator who is not involved in teaching.

6. Research

The American University of Beirut - Mediterraneo is highly appreciative for the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) and is very pleased with the **“Compliant”** rating [scores of 4-5] of this section.

The university underlines the findings of the EEC:

- ***“Policies are well organized and well thought through in general.***
- ***AUB-M could benefit from the strong research profile of AUB and will second a number of AUB academics to the new university.***
- ***One particularly noteworthy aspect of research relates to access to EU funding which will be possible for AUB-M in ways that such funding was not for AUB. The EEC pointed out the specificity of EU funding as well as EU grants management and implementation, including reporting, data protection, etc.”***

EEC noted the strengths below:

- ***“Quality academic staff***
- ***Sensible and comprehensive set of policies that will be largely mirrored from AUB”.***

EEC commented that:

1. “Also, the University should pay particular attention to EU regulations pertaining to research and notably to employment law.
2. The staff size of the proposed research office is minimal in the first instance, and it is unlikely that the team of AUM-B will be able to successfully pursue an ambitious agenda of externally funded research until more staff are recruited.
3. The university intends to use consulting services to prepare for EU funding applications, but the panel would encourage the new university to consider autonomous recruitment instead of hiring service providers since in this field many service providers are far from adequate in the support they sell to universities.
4. Research prospects may also suffer from the lack of PhD students and MA programmes, at least in the PPE department.
5. Finally, the online only library suffices in the initial phase of the new university but is a limiting factor on the university’s research activity.”

Areas of Improvement and Recommendations include

1. “Research ambition of AUB-M specifically is still not very clear
2. No PhD programmes
3. Limited research office in the first instance (pre award, post award, and research policy require very different skills)
4. It will be important to focus on the specificities of EU funding and the choice of relying on an external service provider may not be the most effective way to achieve success.
5. Online only library in the first instance may be an issue”.

The university’s response to these comments and recommendations includes:

1. Building the research profile of the institution takes time. The ambition of AUB Mediterraneo is to conduct quality research that is focused first on addressing the needs of the local community and then expanding beyond the borders of Cyprus. The university gives a lot of support to faculty members to conduct quality research, such as sabbatical, summer

research leaves, internal funding, extra incentives, etc. Quality research is a requirement for promotion and tenure for all faculty members, and hence faculty members would be keen to enhance their research profile and consequently that of the institution. Tapping into EU funding and tackling local and EU priorities will be the driver of the university's research direction.

2. Proposing Ph.D. programs will surely come few years down the road. As noted in the Institution Evaluation Application, the university plans to open one new graduate program every two years. In the meantime, AUB Mediterraneo faculty members will serve as advisors or member of thesis committees and supervise graduate students at AUB Beirut and other reputable institutions within Cyprus and beyond.
3. At the start-up phase, we believe that one experienced research officer is sufficient. Staffing for the research office will be scaled up as the size of the faculties grow.
4. The consulting services will only act as a support arm and will not do any decision making. They will help the faculty members become more familiar with the European funding opportunities and processes, and they will only be hired for a limited time.
5. In addition to providing the faculty and students with the needed online resources and e-books to facilitate teaching and research, the library also facilitates the procurement of local and foreign books, teaching materials, and paraphernalia. The library coordinates with every department to identify the books needed for teaching and the expected number of books. The library then procures for them whether the books were online or hard copy, and provides them to the students at cost. The library will also join the Cyprus Libraries Consortium to tap into its resources and also to contribute to it with the valuable resources at AUB Mediterraneo and support its research agenda.

7. Resources

The American University of Beirut - Mediterraneo is highly appreciative for the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) and is very pleased with the **“Compliant”** rating [scores of 5] of this section.

The university underlines the findings of the EEC: ***“The establishment of the entire new University is backed by a strong investment (50 million US dollars) by the parent institution (AUB) over the next few years. AUB is an established academic institution with a reputable presence for over 150 years. The parent institution is supported by a substantial endowment and a steady supply of financial support from its large alumni base and other donors. The accounts of the parent institution are monitored by a Board of Trustees in line with best international practice.”***

EEC listed the strengths below:

- ***“Strong financial support for establishing the new university.***
- ***Reputable financial procedures in line with international best practice***
- ***Non profit institution with a generous commitment to staff and student welfare***
- ***Investment delivers strong returns for the local community”.***

Areas of Improvement and Recommendations include: “The high level of fees may pose a financial risk in terms of student recruitment. This issue may need to be revisited in light of student recruitment performance over the medium term.”

The university’s response to these recommendations includes: It is true that the tuition is higher than local universities; however, AUB Mediterraneo has a robust financial aid program to assist qualified undergraduate and graduate students in good academic standing who may not be able to afford the cost of tuition. We believe that financial considerations should not prevent students who meet our academic criteria from receiving high-quality education. Financial aid ranges from 0 to 80% allowing needy students to enroll at AUB Mediterraneo. In addition, 20% discount will be given to all students in the first cohort, and 5 full scholarships will be offered.

B. Conclusions and Final Remarks

EEC conclusions and final remarks: *“The EEC was impressed by the amount of preparation that went into the AUB-M project, including financial commitment, infrastructural planning, market research, and staff involvement. The project, backed by the ethos and experience of the mother institution, has the potential to result in an excellent university of local, regional, and international reputation.”*

Institution’s Response: The American University of Beirut - Mediterraneo expresses its sincere gratitude and appreciation to the members of the External Evaluation Committee for their time and effort in this thoughtful review. The university welcomes the EEC’s suggested areas for improvements in its Evaluation Report that aim for the assurance of continuous improvement. The university is particularly pleased/satisfied by getting “Compliant” rating by the EEC in the 7 areas. The University has accepted the constructive comments and suggested areas for improvements put forward, and will address them during the implementation phase.

EEC commented that “Nevertheless, the EEC has identified a number of potential risks and challenges that should be considered:

1. There is a certain gap between the financial and infrastructural plan which is very clearly laid out to cover a whole decade in contrast to the academic and staff plan which is underspecified.
2. There is some uncertainty regarding the long-term relationship between AUB and AUB-M whether AUB-M should be considered as a fully-fledged university or a branch of the AUB. This will have significant implications for both institutions in terms of their outlook, teaching delivery, staff experience, research profile, and international reputation.
3. Tuition fees across the entire academic offer are disproportionately higher than those of local competitors in Cyprus and other EU countries, notably for EU students. This pricing strategy involves financial risks for the institution as well as putting off EU students which could affect recruitment diversity and the intellectual environment of the university.”

The university's response to the EEC comments:

1. The institution budget presented in Annex 12 [07.14.687_Annx12- *Institution’s Budget based on the mission and strategic planning*] clearly highlights the 10 year budget for AUB Mediterraneo. It includes the expected revenues and all expenses derived from construction, academic staffing, non-academic staffing, marketing, student recruitment, IT infrastructure, utilities, etc. Annex 13 [07.14.687_Annx13- *Two-year growth budget and funding processes*] also presents a similar budget but for only two years.
2. AUB Mediterraneo is a twin campus of AUB Lebanon, and as such, it will be governed at the highest level by the AUB Board of Trustees (BoT) and the AUB President. However, it has full autonomy with its own governance structure including the rector, deans, chairpersons, senate, and standing committees at both the senate level and at the faculty/school level, with faculty and student participation (Section A-5 of the Institution Evaluation Application).
3. It is true that the tuition is higher than local universities; however, AUB Mediterraneo has a robust financial aid program to assist qualified undergraduate and graduate students in good academic standing who may not be able to afford the cost of tuition. We believe that financial considerations should not prevent students who meet our academic criteria from

receiving high-quality education. Financial aid ranges from 0 to 80% allowing needy students to enroll at AUB Mediterraneo. In addition, 20% discount will be given to all students in the first cohort, and 5 full scholarships will be offered.

C. Higher Education Institution Academic Representatives

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Fadlo R. Khuri	President	
Wassim El Hajj	Rector	
Arne Dietrich	Vice Rector	
Boushra Rahal	Quality Assurance and Institutional Improvement	



Rania Hussein	Strategy and Risk	
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Date: January 24, 2023

