



**Reply to Programme Accreditation Report by
the External Evaluation Committee (EEC),
acting on behalf of Cyprus QAA for Higher Education.**

MBA with Shipping

(12 Months FT/24 Months PT)

Limassol, 17 May 2017

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*Report approved by the Academic Committee and
the Internal Quality Assurance Committee*

Introduction

Our Institute would like to express its sincere thanks towards the members of the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) for visiting our premises on 17 May 2015. We thank them for their professionalism and we thank them for their valuable and constructive input.

The report of the EEC has been carefully read and meticulously analysed by a team of four members, who present their reply below. The response has been approved by the Academic Committee (under the Academic Director) and the Internal Quality Assurance Committee (under the Director of Quality & Research), which met at an extraordinary session at our Limassol campus a few days ago.

Before we turn to addressing each issue raised by the ECC, we would like to draw your attention to some considerations that pertain especially to CIM's character and ethos, and the nature of the course under review.

As you will be aware, The Cyprus Institute of Marketing is a private education Institute which has been providing high-quality education services for the past 39 years. Beginning with a Bachelor in Shipping (introduced in 1991), in 2014 we launched an MBA with Shipping. Over the years, our Shipping courses have proved very popular; we number more than 500 Bachelor in Shipping graduates, and we are heartened to see them thrive in their careers.

We have always insisted that our programmes followed European educational standards. Our Master programmes in particular have a strong and very good reputation in Cyprus, something which we have earned through decades of hard work, careful planning, and considerable financial investment. We are very pleased that the feedback from our alumni and business partners has been so encouraging and reassuring. This is despite the fact that our Bachelor in Shipping programme and our MBA with Shipping were not accredited by the local authorities in Cyprus (the majority of our students were coming from the private sector).

The success of all the CIM Master programmes, including this MBA with Shipping, is chiefly down to the fact that they have a strong practical orientation. We have designed a programme that allows students from diverse backgrounds, whether in possession of academic studies in the field of Business or not, to acquire essential management skills immediately applicable in the Shipping business world. The majority of our students are individuals who desire to succeed in the local Shipping world, and the main reason they join us (as revealed by internal marketing surveys) is because our Institute has a reputation for being one of the most business-oriented programmes in Cyprus.

One way in which we ensure that our graduates are world-ready, is by employing the skills and expertise of Visiting Lecturers – individuals with many years of work experience. In fact, this is one of our competitive advantages: that we maintain a nice balance between instructors who are members of top companies and acclaimed academics. This practice has allowed us to differentiate our programmes from programmes of other public or private institutions that are of considerably larger scale. It has also enabled us to maintain our share in the highly competitive market of education. For us, it is vital to preserve this comparative advantage in order to be able to remain competitive. Furthermore, as a dedicated Business institute, we believe in bridging gaps between academia and industry.

The Institute's Council has approved of the Academic Committee's plans for the future and has placed the accreditation of key programmes offered in Nicosia and Limassol at the heart of our Strategic Plan 2015-2020.

The Institute has decided to apply for accreditation of its MBA with Shipping programme for several reasons. These include the following: to improve itself through the process; to attract more quality students and instructors; to improve the employment opportunities of its graduates; to remain competitive towards other similar institutions; and to enable CIM to develop to a larger scale. For all these reasons, we wish to assure the EEC that we are truly thankful for their recommendations, which we graciously accept, and we look forward to a positive outcome.

Reiterating our gratitude and in the spirit of professionalism and congeniality that marks all of our interactions with EEC, the members of the team ask to be allowed in the following part to address some points raised by the EEC and comment accordingly.

Response to specific comments raised by the EEC:

1. EFFECTIVENESS OF TEACHING WORK – AVAILABLE RESOURCES

Organisation of teaching

- *The current student numbers are low and this could endanger programme viability, both financially and academically.*
 - CIM has conducted a feasibility study and is satisfied that the programme will remain viable;
 - In its first year, the programme recruited 6 students but already in its second year 2 the student cohort increased to 10;

- Experience from accrediting other programmes has shown that accreditation leads to a significant increase in quality and quantity of students;
- The recent accreditation of the programme by the world's leading Professional Body on Shipping, The Institute of Chartered Shipbrokers (ICS), coupled with CIM's intensified promotional push will result in greater interest for the programme;
- The aim to increase the cohort to 20 in September 2017 is judged to be feasible based on experience, increased promotional push, and provided always that accreditation is secured and also there is sufficient time to promote the new status of the Degree;
- The ultimate objective is to maintain a cohort of 30 students, which will make the course very viable both academically and financially.

Teaching personnel

• *With regards to teaching personnel having one qualification higher than that delivered and meeting the 70% target, we calculate that CIM have 5 from 8 personnel with PhDs, which suggests that may not meet this criterion at present.*

- We would like to kindly correct the EEC's calculation;
- As detailed in the MBA with Shipping Accreditation Application, out of the 8 modules on the programme 6 have as Module Leaders teaching personnel with PhDs; as such, the percentage of teaching personnel having one qualification higher than that delivered is actually 75%;
- Moreover, looking at the 6 modules which are actually being delivered at the time being, 5 out of 6 have as Module Leaders teaching personnel with PhDs, making the percentage of teaching personnel having one qualification higher than that delivered actually 83%

2. PROGRAMME OF STUDY AND HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS

Purposes and objectives

• *In the view of the EEC, the programme requires some modification in order to meet the expected content of a specialized MBA programme.*

- The EEC's recommendation is most welcome; and as discussed during the deliberations of the accreditation visit (and the EEC's notes on page 16 of the Report) we undertake to re-organise the course as follows, and in a way that allows us to incorporate the majority of the EEC's recommendations while at the same time not affecting the programme's crucial professional accreditation by ICS

(who have granted us exemptions by matching their modules on our programme's content):

Compulsory modules (to be increased from 4 to 5)

1. Strategic Management (including clearly demarcated elements on Strategic Marketing)
2. Organisational Behaviour
3. Research Methods (including clearly demarcated elements on Business Research, Action Research, and Consulting)
4. Maritime Economics, Finance & Accounting
5. Marine Insurance & Maritime Law

Optional Modules (1 out of 3)

1. International Marketing & Trade
2. Maritime Logistics
3. Shipbrokering & Chartering Practice

Compulsory Dissertation (title to change from 'Thesis' and the handbook to allow more explicitly for a breadth of research interests, including Consultancy Projects where applicable)

In addition to the above, the Institute undertakes to make all necessary clarifications and Improvements asked by the ECC of its module objectives, with more appropriate wording to be used where required.

Management of the programme

- *The present exemption clause on credit transfer is ambiguous and may allow for misrepresentation.*
 - We fully agree with the EEC's recommendation and apologise that this ambiguity was created by an error while drafting the application; we have already adapted accordingly.

4. ADMINISTRATION SERVICES, STUDENT WELFARE AND SUPPORT OF TEACHING WORK

Infrastructure and support

- *There is room for improvement in relation to the student learning resources available on this programme.*
 - As discussed with the EEC, the Institute's investment has increased ahead of the increase in the cohort size, and will continue to do so. Increase in the cohort size will bring further reinvestment in learning resources. As an indicator, subscription to 5 new Shipping Journals have been added on our online Library in the last 6 months;
 - The student evaluations, carried twice a year, show that satisfaction with regards to resources available is very high.

Financial Resources

- *CIM's fees are significantly lower than comparable institutions in Cyprus at around 6,600 euros.*
 - As discussed with the EEC, the Ministry of Education regulates the fees of private Institutions in Cyprus. Although we tend to agree with the EEC's comment, this is not something in our control;
 - That said, the fees have been increased (through a special permission of the Minister of Education) to 7,500 euro for 2017-2018 onwards; this will allow for further reinvestment.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS OF THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION COMMITTEE

- *The syllabi of the modules should include links to relevant academic research.*
 - The syllabi of the modules currently refer to titles of academic journals, but we welcome EEC's recommendation that actual titles of academic articles are included in the syllabi; this will make it easier for students to access journal articles (opening them up to new research). We are in full agreement with this valid point and we will proceed to include titles of articles in the syllabi.
- *Over-assessment of individual modules, where three methods of assessment are typically used.*

- As explained to the EEC, the standard in Cyprus for Master programmes is to have 3 methods of assessment for 12 ECTS modules;
 - If the Ministry of Education and Cyprus QAA HE were to deem it appropriate to have only 2 methods of assessment, we would happily have 1 Assignment worth 40% and 1 Exam worth 60%.
- *Over-emphasis on description and explanation in exam questions and underuse of questions that test critical evaluation and application.*
 - We are in agreement with the EEC's recommendation that more case-studies could be used in exam questions and we will put forward this concern at the end-of-year Board of Examiners meeting.

OTHER COMMENTS FROM ANNEX ON PAGES 10-26

1.1.2 *Consideration should be given to students being able to enter the program with no first degree but with a minimum of five years post qualification managerial experience.*

- We strongly support the recommendation of the EEC and we believe that this is in line with international practice;
- However, as explained to the EEC, the standard admission requirement in Cyprus for Master programmes is to hold a Bachelor Degree, with admission being based on experience (APEL) not allowed.

1.1.5 (a) *The course may benefit from a higher proportion of international students.*

- At CIM, our focus is on quality rather than quantity;
- As such, we believe that provided that the accreditation process is completed successfully, we will be able to market the programme internationally with the purpose of recruiting top-class students, mainly from European countries.

1.2.7 *We recommend that thought be given to specifying only one key textbook as required rather than multiple texts.*

- We find this recommendation by the EEC very reasonable and the Programme Coordinator has already put a recommendation for this change on the agenda of the next Academic Committee.

1.3.10 *Some thought should be given to succession planning and team-teaching to avoid single point failure on particular modules.*

- Succession planning is an area being carefully looked at by the Institute's management and by the Director of HR;

- Several modules are jointly-delivered with the exact purpose of avoiding single point failure on particular modules;
- Most of the modules are concurrently being delivered in Nicosia, so there is a contingency arrangement for unexpected problems facing Lecturers.
- Set reading lists and detailed and inclusive notes and material guard against single point failure

4.2.7 *Some thought should be given as to whether or not faculty should attend a structured training and development programme for teaching, learning and assessment in higher education.*

- On the recommendation of the Academic Committee, CIM Faculty attend on regular occasions training and development programmes for teaching, learning and assessment in higher education; these are delivered by both internal and external trainers, the most recent being a training session on Teaching Skills by a Professor from UCLAN Cyprus University;
- Owing to the partnership with the University of West London, members of CIM Faculty frequently attend training and development programmes for teaching, learning and assessment in higher education, coordinated by our colleagues in London.

Names of the Panel that has produced the above Reply to the Report:

Name	Position
Christos Hadjiyannis	Director of Quality & Research
Adamos Vlittis	Academic Director
Valentin Mavrinac	Director of Shipping Studies
George Zachariades	Director of Postgraduate Studies