

Doc. 300.1.2

Date: 5 July 2022

Higher Education Institution's Response

- **Higher Education Institution:**
UNIVERSITY OF CYPRUS

- **Town:** Nicosia

- **Programme of study
Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)**

In Greek:

Πτυχίο Ηλεκτρολόγου Μηχανικού (4 χρόνια/241 ECTS)

In English:

Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering (4 academic years/241 ECTS)

- **Language(s) of instruction:** Greek
- **Programme's status:** Currently Operating
- **Concentrations (if any):** None



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.300.1.1 or 300.1.1/2 or 300.1.1/3 or 300.1.1/4) must justify whether actions have been taken in improving the quality of the programme of study 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 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.300.1.1 or 300.1.1/2 or 300.1.1/3 or 300.1.1/4).*
- *In case of annexes, those should be attached and sent on a separate document.*

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

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

EEC's Comment 1:

The criteria for registration in the field of Electrical Engineering in the Scientific and Technical Chamber of Cyprus (ETEK) are not documented or published, although the students are informed by their advisor in the First Year of study. The suggestion is to document and publish information at all times of their four year study.

HEI's response:

The criteria for registration to the relevant fields of the Scientific and Technical Chamber of Cyprus (either Electrical or Electronic Engineers) are communicated to the students right before the start of each Academic Year. Following the advice of the EEC, two detailed documents that precisely list said criteria are now posted on the Department's website at the links below and are easily and readily accessible to all students:

<https://newdev.ucy.ac.cy/ece/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/2022/06/ETEK-Requirements-ETEK-official-document.pdf>

<https://newdev.ucy.ac.cy/ece/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/2022/06/ETEK-Requirements-UCY.pdf>

EEC's Comment 2:

Although the University has a well organised communication with graduates and the Department helps graduates with their employment in organisations and big companies, it needs a mechanism of analysis and publishes graduate employment information as well as industry needs.

HEI's response:

The Department's view on this very important issue is that the mechanism to keep track and analyze graduate employment information should be implemented at the University-level through the office responsible for the alumni.

Nevertheless, recognizing the importance of this issue, and in the absence of a mechanism at the university-level, the Department has made an effort in the past to create an archive with the contact and employment information of all its graduates. That document includes this information for all the graduates from 2007 (the Department's first graduates) to 2012. Based on the EEC's recommendation, we will now resume this documentation effort and we will gradually contact all the remaining graduates (from 2013 onward) to complete our archive. This archive will be updated periodically (every few years), in order to ensure that it remains as up-to-date as possible. It should be noted that the key impediment in maintaining contact with our graduates is the fact that they lose access to their university email address upon graduation. The Faculty of Engineering has recently initiate an effort to raise this issue at the University-level, in order to find a way to provide graduates with some form of "alumnus" email address.

Regarding the probing of industry needs, our academic staff has strong connections with local industry (e.g., the Electricity Authority of Cyprus, various telecommunication companies, start-ups, etc.) , mainly through numerous collaborative research efforts and internship programmes. We always ask our industrial partners for feedback regarding both our research and teaching

activities, but this is done mostly in an ad-hoc manner. Based on the EEC's recommendation, we will formalize this process; we will start inviting all pertinent stakeholders to annual meetings held at the Department's premises, where we will ask for feedback regarding the needs of the industry and how those can be served by the activities of our Department.

EEC's Comment 3:

The completion in 2023 of the new building to house the Department and the activities of the programme will strongly enhance and improve the quality of the lectures, labs and research. Also new perspectives are offered to increase the programmes, number of students and academic staff.

HEI's response:

Indeed, the new School of Engineering building that will house the Department will strongly enhance the quality of our Department and allow us to increase the number of our offered programmes. As highlighted in the recently crafted Strategic Plan 2021-2025 of the Department (submitted to the University in June 2021), the creation of new English-language Master programmes is one of our priorities. A new Master programme in Key Enabling Technologies was approved by the Department in April 2022 and the official application documents will soon be submitted to the Graduate School of the University. Another new Master programme in Smart Grid Technologies was submitted in February 2022 for funding within the context of Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees (EMJMD). The additional new programmes will increase both the number of students and, correspondingly, the number of academic staff. They will also expand the courses available to the PhD students, further enhancing their theoretical/experimental background. Moreover, new laboratory facilities and new equipment will enhance teaching through the development of new teaching laboratories as well as research activities through the development of additional research laboratories and testbeds.

Currently, we do not believe that there is a need for additional Bachelor-level programmes to be offered by our Department, since we already offer two distinct programmes (BSc in Electrical Engineering and BSc in Computer Engineering).

EEC's Comment 4:

There are no official formal procedures for the career and promotion of the academic staff.

HEI's response:

There must have been a misunderstanding regarding this issue, because the procedures for promotion of the academic staff are formally and explicitly stated in the official rules/law of the University. There are very detailed rules and procedures regarding the promotion of the academic staff at all the ranks (from Lecturer to Assistant Professor, from Assistant Professor to Associate Professor [tenure], and from Associate Professor to Professor).

EEC's Comment 5:

One potential improvement is to have more bi-directional communications between the students and the department, which is particularly important to quality assurance. Currently, the department

has some mechanisms for students to feed their opinions back to the department, but the department may also want to introduce some mechanisms to allow students to be aware the changes made by the department. For such a purpose, regular staff-student meetings during the semesters can be quite useful.

HEI's response:

We agree that such staff-student meetings would be very beneficial to the students. Nevertheless, we believe that it is probably not necessary to have multiple (regular) such meetings per semester, but perhaps one such meeting per year. We feel that an annual meeting suffices to inform the students of any changes made by the department, since the changes are typically not so drastic from year to year. We will start holding these annual staff-student meetings starting with the next Academic Year.

EEC's Comment 6:

Consider to switch to a fully English taught BSc programme.

HEI's response:

All the post-graduate programmes (Master and Ph.D.) have received approval by the University Senate to be offered in English, and we will start offering them only in English from the 2023-24 Academic Year. However, the undergraduate (BSc) programmes must be offered in Greek, as per the law of the University. For that law to change, the Cyprus Government and Parliament must approve such change. Hence, a switch to English for the undergraduate programmes is a much more complex and difficult process as it requires approval at the country's Parliament level, where political opinions differ as regards to this issue.

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

EEC's Comment 7:

Consider getting student feedback during the term/semester to benefit the students and courses in the ongoing term/semester.

HEI's response:

The official policy of the University is to obtain the student evaluations/feedback at the END of each semester. The instructor of each course then uses the student feedback and makes appropriate (where needed) adjustments to the course syllabus/teaching the next time the course will be taught again. Students can provide feedback for any course during the semester though the course's designated office hours either in-person or anonymously through their student representatives. Further, to receive feedback DURING the semester, the Department has advised all faculty and teaching staff to periodically ask for unofficial student feedback during the semester and take appropriate action on-demand, if needed. To make this process (i.e., mid-semester feedback) official, the decision would have to be made at the University-level.

EEC's Comment 8:

Consider a proactive strategy for increasing the number of BSc students.

HEI's response:

The Department is very active in outreach and promotional activities, but we intend to further increase our efforts in this domain. Specifically, every year we send academics on high-school visits to give presentations about the Department and we participate in all Open-Day and Summer School activities organized by the University for prospective students. We also host high-school students whenever they visit the university and provide laboratory/facility tours to them. Furthermore, we intend to embark on systematic advertising through social media channels, which tend to reach a much wider audience and are very effective advertising outlets.

EEC's Comment 9:

Consider how the process can be made easier when the students have to choose elective courses for a given semester.

HEI's response:

Before the start of each semester, all students are actively encouraged to arrange one-on-one meetings with their Academic Advisor to discuss the various elective courses. Further, the grouping of elective courses in areas of specialization, as well as the description of each course are provided in the Department's undergraduate guide. Based on the EEC's recommendation, we will also start to host a departmental annual meeting for all students to discuss specifically the various options for course electives.

3. Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

EEC's Comment 10:

The department may want to recruit more technicians in order to provide better support for the teaching labs and facilities.

HEI's response:

We appreciate this comment by the EEC. The Department will continue to submit requests to the University for additional technical/lab staff positions. We sincerely believe that our requests to have additional technical staff are fully justified by the large number of laboratory-based courses offered by the Department.

EEC's Comment 11:

In order to support the teaching staff's career development, the department may also want to provide regular (e.g., annual) meetings between the faculty members and the management group of the department. Such meetings provide more dialogues between the staff and the department, and help the staff to better understand the departmental policies, such as the criteria for promotion. Setting up mentorship could be another possible way to support the teaching staff's career development.

HEI's response:

Based on the EEC's recommendation, the Department will initiate annual meetings between the faculty and the management (Chair/Vice-Chair) to discuss all issues pertaining to career development. The issue of establishing a mentorship programme was discussed in the past, but it was not implemented due to questions regarding potential issues that may arise when the mentor's recommendation to the candidate faculty is not in agreement with the final formal evaluation of the faculty at the end of a promotion procedure.

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

EEC's Comment 12:

No notable challenges were identified in the BSc programme. Since the applicant pool is limited in Cyprus, it is recommended that in the long term an English BSc programme is established in parallel with the current Greek BSc programme. This may require changes in local laws/regulations. We also recommend more systematic use of student feedback to further improve courses and the BSc programme.

HEI's response:

We thank the EEC for this suggestion. Indeed, we will seek help from the University in initiating an effort at the country's Government/Parliament level to enable the appropriate amendments of the law that would enable the establishment of an English-language BSc programme. Currently, the law of the country dictates that the official language of teaching for the BSc programmes at the University of Cyprus is Greek.

Of course, we will escalate our efforts in using student feedback to further improve our courses and the BSc programme, overall.

5. Learning resources and student support (ESG 1.6)

EEC's Comment 13:

Work is needed to identify factors that attract more female students. Since gender balance is a challenge in many engineering fields, joint work could be done with other departments to fix the problem. It is recommended that faculty are also in future assigned to the student advisory work. Yet, due to increasing workload it is proposed that the department check whether more support resources for students are needed. It is also recommended that faculty workload in general is monitored. While new facilities are taken into use, department should consider whether there are enough places for informal social interaction between student and faculty to facilitate the feeling of togetherness. The development of digital teaching materials is recommended. Herein the learnings from the Covid- 19 time could be utilised.

HEI's response:

The issue of gender imbalance is definitely an issue that we must tackle. The Faculty of Engineering has recently created a new committee on "Women in Engineering" and this committee has already started exploring various actions/events/activities to attract more female students to all fields of engineering. The Department is, of course, actively participating in this effort.

Student support is typically handled at the University level with various services provided to the students (including tutor services, for those eligible). In any case, the Department has added a tutorial section to all offered courses, precisely to help the students.

Regarding faculty workload, the law of the University dictates the teaching load of all academics, so the Department has no control over the amount of teaching each colleague has to do; the teaching load is, in fact, exactly the same for all academics, irrespective of their rank. Regarding administrative duties, the Departmental Council always tries to balance the load and duties as evenly as possible to all academics during the formation of the various committees and whenever new obligations arise. In terms of research load, indeed the Department is one of the most active within the University (both in terms of attracting research funding and coordinating/participating in research projects, as well as in terms of publications). Nevertheless, the increased funding allows for the hiring of a large number of post-doctoral fellows, research associates, as well as research faculty that assist the Department's faculty with all research-related activities, thus considerably lightening their load.

The new building has been designed in such a way as to have various places for social interaction, so we expect that the feeling of togetherness will be strengthened considerably once the Department moves to its new facilities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has already allowed us to develop a full range of digital teaching material, so we believe that this material can further enhance the teaching process in the future.



6. Additional for doctoral programmes (ALL ESG)

Not applicable.



7. Eligibility (Joint programme) (ALL ESG)

Not applicable.



B. Conclusions and final remarks

EEC's Comment 14:

The members of the EEC committee found the academic programmes to be compliant in all examined aspects. The existing course offerings provide a balance between engineering fundamentals and practice. Moreover, active learning is encouraged through lab work and other means presented by the faculty.

HEI's response:

The Department will continue its effort to maintain and improve these quality levels.

C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Chrysostomos Nicopoulos	Associate Professor, Chair of the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering	
Charalambos A. Charalambous	Associate Professor, Vice-Chair of the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering	
Georgios Ellinas	Professor, Department's Quality Assurance Evaluation Coordinator	GEllinas
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