

Doc. 300.1.2

Higher Education Institution's Response

Date: 08/07/2024

- Higher Education Institution: University of Nicosia
- Town: Nicosia
- Programme of study Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)

In Greek:

Επιστήμη Δεδομένων (4 έτη, 240 ECTS, Πτυχίο)

In English:

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

- Language(s) of instruction: English
- Programme's status: Currently Operating
- Concentrations (if any):

In Greek: Concentrations
In English: Concentrations



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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 300.1.1/1 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. The answers' documentation should be brief and accurate and supported by the relevant documentation. Referral to annexes should be made only when necessary.
- In particular, under each assessment area and by using the 2nd column of each table, the HEI must respond on the following:
 - the areas of improvement and recommendations of the EEC
 - the conclusions and final remarks noted by the EEC
- The institution should respond to the EEC comments, in the designated area next each comment.
 The comments of the EEC should be copied from the EEC report <u>without any interference</u> in the content.
- In case of annexes, those should be attached and sent on separate document(s). Each document should be in *.pdf format and named as annex1, annex2, etc.

0. Introduction

We would like to thank the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) for their thorough work during the on-site evaluation of the BSc in Data Science programme on April 3rd, 2024. During the visit, the EEC met the faculty supporting the programme, and had separate meetings with current students as well as alumni of the programme.

We would like to note that the report of the committee is **extremely positive** with 14 out of 18 quality indicators receiving the top rating of "Compliant" (amongst the choices of: Compliant/partially compliant/non-compliant) and four indicators receiving the rating of "partially-compliant".

More specifically, the EEC states, amongst other:

- The programme is timely and its content, objectives and learning outcomes are overall in line with the current standards.
- The contribution of each course to the learning outcomes of the programme is clear.
- Courses are structured coherently across the programme.
- The course distribution in semesters is clearly and properly identified with a coherent list of compulsory and elective courses, allowing for a smooth learning progression.
- The program was established with clear motivations and input from external stakeholders in academia and industry, as well as following international standards (e.g. ACM recommendations).
- The teaching staff of the Data Science BSc Programme of the University of Nicosia includes experienced scientists in the data science domain with qualifications that meet the objectives of the programme, and collaborations with both academia and industry.
- The EEC has observed various aspects of collaboration with other universities in the form of bilateral exchanges, joint degrees, or alliances. These achievements of outward looking collaboration are a strength.

1. Study programme and study programme's design and development (ESG 1.1, 1.2, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9)

- "The content and topics covered by the programme are consistent to the objectives of the program, and appropriate to support the development of the students' general competencies, where students not only get the chance to build their academic background, but also have the opportunity to build their communication and teamwork skills."
- "Communication and team skills are in fact shown to be present in many of the courses with a combination of group and individual projects and a clear focus on these skills in the program. These are very good practices."
- "The fact that the program includes a compulsory subject to deal with privacy and ethics, a very relevant aspect in data science, is also considered a good practice."
- "The EEC has observed various aspects of collaboration with other universities in the form of bilateral exchanges, joint degrees, or alliances. These achievements of outward looking collaboration are a strength."
- "Furthermore, the EEC observed an overall culture of flexibility and willingness to make things work among the staff on all levels (management, teaching, administration) engaged in this course. This is highly commendable."
- "The programme is timely and well-designed. The programme management and teaching staff are overall of high quality."

| Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC | Actions Taken by the Institution | For Official Use ONLY |
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| 1.1 The EEC recommends that a long term strategy is designed, aiming to reduce this dropout rate. | As indicated in the EEC report in this section: "Given the limited historical records (the programme ran for the first time in 2020), it is early to assess the dropout rate for students in the programme". As for the long term strategy of addressing dropout rates, the Department is already analysing course and degree completion to identify bottlenecks by utilizing a dashboard tool. This is in addition to the tutorials, and personal guidance offered to each student by their academic advisors. | Choose level of compliance: |
| 1.2 "The EEC recommends ensuring that all adjunct teachers | All adjunct faculty are guided and advised by the respective coordinator of their | Choose level of compliance: |





| are informed and aware of their role, as well as the role of others in the design /design change of a course." | program. In addition, they are assigned a full-time faculty member in the relevant area of expertise to oversee the delivery of the course and mentor the adjunct faculty throughout their employment. In addition, all faculty (adjunct and full-time) use a faculty portal that contains, among other, all the relevant Internal Regulations documents. | |
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| 1.3 "The EEC recommends that more employment information be obtained over time and applied for recruiting purposes." | The University already has a Careers Office that collects employment information of our graduates on a yearly basis. Indeed we already utilize "success stories" of our graduates as it can be seen in linkedin profiles of our programs (see for example the MSc in Data Science) as well as landing pages of our programs. It should be noted that at the time of the visit in April 2024, there was only 1 graduate of this particular program due to the program's recent launch in 2020. | Choose level of compliance: |
| 1.4 "The EEC recommends that the full policy of quality assurance is made publicly available, not only upon request, but stated openly on the university's website." | The Quality Assurance policy is in Chapter 5 of the Internal Regulations of the University and is available to all students through the UNIC Portal. Furthermore, the link to the policy has been included on our website and is found here: https://www.unic.ac.cy/unic-at-a-glance/quality-assurance/ | Choose level of compliance: |
| 1.5 "The EEC recommends that student presence is made compulsory to all meetings of the quality assurance committee, to ensure that students are always represented in the quality assurance process." | The student member in the Quality Assurance Committee is an equal member of the committee as the faculty members and has the same rights and responsibilities. The attendance to the meetings by all members is a responsibility and it is compulsory unless excused. We are not sure how the EEC suggests we enforce attendance. | Choose level of compliance: |
| 1. 6 "The EEC recommends that the student members of all three quality assurance committees be selected directly and independently by the student body, without any input by any other body of the | The composition of the University quality assurance committees is in line with the 'Private Universities (Establishment, Operation and Control) Law 109(1) of 2005', as well as the CYQAA guidelines and regulations". | Choose level of compliance: |





| university, to increase the impartiality of the selection." | | |
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| 1. 7 "The EEC therefore recommends that the quality assurance policy supports the involvement of external stakeholders in an explicit way, for instance by their representation in the quality assurance committees." | As mentioned in point 1.6 above, the composition of the University quality assurance committees is in line with the 'Private Universities (Establishment, Operation and Control) Law 109(1) of 2005', as well as the CYQAA guidelines and regulations". | Choose level of compliance: |
| 1. 8 "The EEC recommends that the following information be included in each course description, so that students can readily see the expected student workload in hours (for the duration of the whole course): Student workload Number of lecture hours Number of preparation hours Number of hours spent in coursework Number of hours spent in exam preparation Number of hours spent in exam | The requested information is included in the course outline. The course outlines of all courses are included in Appendix A, that accompanies this response. | Choose level of compliance: |
| 1.9 "the EEC recommends that the programme covers generative AI, both theoretically (as is partially done by some of the current courses), but also with practical hands-on projects and assignments involving, for instance, prompting openly available generative models, or fine-tuning them on large scale datasets requiring GPU computational resources. " | All students of the BSc Data Science program already follow two compulsory courses were Generative Al tools (e.g., chatgpt) are used either as a tool in action (in e.g., COMP-242 Data Privacy and Ethics) or they cover the underlying theory behind generative models (in COMP-447 Neural Networks and Deep Learning). In addition to that, a new course was has been introduced to this the program, COMP-348 Natural Language Processing that covers the fundamental concepts of large language models (LLMs), including model training over publicly available and large datasets, as well as the prompting popular LLMs offered as cloud services (e.g., OpenAl's chatGPT, Google's Gemini). | Choose level of compliance: |





| | It should also be noted that two of the students that were interviewed by the EEC, have been involved in research projects on conversational agents and language models at both the BSc and MSc in Data Science level. Moreover, devices embedding GPUs units (e.g., Nvidia Jetson and AGX Orin) are also available to students undertaking topics for a final year project and requiring GPU acceleration (e.g., an example of such a project from a BSc graduate in 2024 is entitled "Performance Analysis of Deep Learning Models"). In turn, students are also provided with cloud credits (free of charge, no credit card required) for GPU-supported cloud machines via partnerships with Amazon Web Services and Google | |
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| 1. 10 "The EEC therefore recommends that more practical elements, such as practical assignments and projects on data science components on large-scale datasets, be introduced to the programme." | Cloud Platform. It should be noted that a significant percentage of course assessment is on practical assignments and projects. This can be seen in the courses outlines which are included in Appendix A of this response. In addition to the examples of practical components for Generative AI referenced in response 1.9, we denote that students also gain practical experience with large datasets through the course COMP-340: Big Data. Specifically, students face through assignments the complexities of Big Data by developing solutions for managing and processing overwhelming volumes of data and high-velocity streaming data. | Choose level of compliance: |
| 1.11 "the EEC therefore recommends that students always receive some formative written feedback along with their grades." | Along with their grade and the relevant graded rubric (see Appendix A), students will be receiving formative written feedback for all assignments. | Choose level of compliance: |
| 1. 12 "The EEC recommends that formal procedures are in place guiding the selection and basic | The selection of the student tutor/Teaching Assistant is guided by set criteria such as: a student in their final year of study, with | Choose level of compliance: |

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| training of tutors in the | excellent (A) grades in the courses to be | |
| programme." | assigned to and an overall excellent | |
| | performance throughout their studies. In | |
| | addition, good communication skills are | |
| | also needed. At the time of the visit, the | |
| | Teaching Assistant (TA) was the top | |
| | performing student of the School. The TA's | |
| | do not deliver presentations or lectures. | |
| | Instead they answer questions and provide | |
| | assistance on a one-to-one basis. Hence, | |
| | the formal training of the students on | |
| | didactic skills is not considered mandatory. | |
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2. Student – centred learning, teaching and assessment (ESG 1.3)

- "EEC found that the process of teaching and learning of this program is appropriate to the topics covered by the program, and the delivery of the program is also appropriate for the expected learning outcomes."
- "Students are provided the opportunity to give their suggestions to the program."
- "The Department provides a supportive and encouraging learning environment to students, where students are not only supported by faculty members but also by the well organized administrative team."
- "The department implements a flexible process of teaching and learning which ensures the quality of the provided program."
- "The assessment methodology and procedures are overall appropriate."
- "The student-staff ratio is healthy, and there is evidence from interviewing students that the staff are friendly and helpful towards students in achieving the learning outcomes."
- "The university's close collaboration with industry fosters a dynamic learning environment, where students have the opportunity to gain hands-on experience through industry placements and benefit from the expertise of industry professionals. This collaboration also ensures that the curriculum remains relevant, aligning with industry needs and preparing students for successful careers."

- "Additionally, the institution encourages students to participate in competitions, where they
 have achieved some success. These are all examples of good practices."
- "Proactive student welfare mechanisms and support with personal tutors are in place.
 These initiatives are commendable."
- "The university seems very well equipped and prepared."

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| Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC | Actions Taken by the Institution | For Official Use ONLY |
| 2.1 "The EEC recommends that rubrics are designed and used in all courses, with explicit mappings between the numerical grades and their corresponding textual descriptions of student performance. The EEC also recommends that rubrics are shared with students in the activity guide of each course." | Rubrics have been incorporated in all courses and are included in the course outlines shown in Appendix A, that accompanies this response. These rubrics will be shared with students in the activity guide of each course. | Choose level of compliance: |
| 2. 2"The EEC recommends that all staff interacting with students, permanent and adjunct, be trained on their pedagogical and didactic skills." | All full-time faculty members of the Department have undergone a 12-week 36-hour training and development Seminar on "Teaching and Learning Theory and Practice," consisting of twelve 3-hour workshops. | Choose level of compliance: |
| | As acknowledged by the EEC, there is "a range of staff training options in terms of teaching and learning". These seminars are open to adjunct faculty as well. | |
| 2.3 "The EEC recommends that tutors receive some basic formal training" | This comment refers to the student teaching assistants/tutors. This point was addressed in point 1.12 above. | Choose level of compliance: |

3. Teaching staff

(ESG 1.5)

- "The teaching staff of the Data Science BSc Programme of the University of Nicosia includes experienced scientists in the data science domain with qualifications that meet the objectives of the programme, and collaborations with both academia and industry."
- "The teaching team includes both genders, senior and young faculty members at different ranks."
- "Several members of the teaching staff have established collaborations with both industry and academia internationally, therefore strengthening the outward looking nature of the programme."
- "The network of industrial partners of the staff engaged in this programme includes well known international companies, such as Expedia, NVIDIA, the Deep Learning Institute, Amazon Web Services, Google Cloud, bank of Cyprus, as well as the universities of Arkansas in the USA and of Orebro in Sweden."
- "It is an achievement for such a young programme to have this type of network. This is commendable."
- "The university offers opportunities for internal seed funding and opportunities for sabbatical leave to permanent staff."

| Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC | Actions Taken by the Institution | For Official Use ONLY |
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| 3.1 "The EEC recommends that appropriate structures are put in place to ensure that all teaching staff use the same unit for measuring their teaching versus research time on a day to day basis, not only on paper." | The University confirms that all faculty measure and report their working time in hours per week. For each faculty there is detailed information recorded in an information system. Example of information recorded: • Teaching hours • Research hours • Student advising hours • Overtime hours • Research time release • Hours worked in EU projects • (all per week) | Choose level of compliance: |



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| • | On top of | that, each addit | ional |
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| | academic | responsibility | like |
| | Programme | e Coordination | |

- Final Year Project Supervision
- MSc Thesis Supervision
- is also recorded as hours per week and compensated if appropriate.

This information is available to the faculty's academic supervisors (head of department and dean).

All the above information is well documented and well defined based on University Policies.

3.2 "The EEC recommends that the university takes concrete measures to increase the research engagement of the teaching staff, and following this to boost the link between research and teaching in the programme."

As indicated in the University of Nicosia Internal Regulations (Chapter 4), the University believes that research is vital to the provision of stimulating learning environment in which faculty and students flourish and fulfill their potential. The University also believes that involvement research ensures the design and of the University's delivery curriculum is both up-to date and relevant. Research encourages the development of open and critical minds — a vital part of the University's education 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 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; Choose level of compliance:





- Facilitating research funding through inter alia the support of University-affiliated research centres, inter-disciplinary research, collaborative research with other institutions and individual;
- Using Sabbatical Leave as an important element of research development and support;
- Providing Research Time Release to faculty members who engage in research, as defined in the University's Policy and, more precisely, the Internal Regulations and Collective Agreement;
- 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;
- 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, 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 peer-reviewed journals (e.g., indexed in Scopus, Web of Science), books, electronic media, conferences, exhibitions and performances;





- Encouraging research links with the various relevant research funding organizations, government bodies, the community, industry, commerce, voluntary organisations and with the professions, regionally, nationally and internationally;
- Developing and using performance indicators related to research in evaluating the implementation of this research policy and its associated plans;
- Establishing the Research Recognition Policy (RRP) award. 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 Scopus-indexed publishing in peer-reviewed scholarly journals with significant reach and impact, which is consistent with UNIC's strategy for excellence in international research reputation and rankings;
- Establishing the University of Nicosia Seed Grant (UNICSG) scheme. UNICSG encourages research though 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 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. In achieving the above, the University of Nicosia's policies and procedures are included as Appendix B, attached with this response. | |
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| 3.3 "The EEC recommends that efforts are made to lower the number of adjunct staff." | The employment of adjunct faculty provides the industry expertise in the program, which is particularly important in such an interdisciplinary field. In that context we view the number of adjunct faculty to be adding value to the program. It is noted that, according to the Ministry regulations, as many as 30% of the teaching needs in the program may be covered by adjunct faculty. | Choose level of compliance: |
| 3.4 "The EEC strongly recommends that measures are taken to minimize instructor shortage that leads to canceling courses." | Elective courses are not cancelled due to instructor shortage. The courses are cancelled due to small student enrollments. According to CYQAA regulations, for BSc level courses the minimum number of enrollments in a class is 8 students. The cancellation of an elective class happened only once in the 4 years of running the program, when only 2 students enrolled for that class. | Choose level of compliance: |
| 3.5 "The EEC recommends that all teaching staff interacting with students have received compulsory pedagogical training." | This point has been addressed in point 2.2. above. | Choose level of compliance: |
| 3.6 "The EEC recommends that a careful long term gender balance strategy is designed, communicated to all staff members, and implemented in practice" | The University already has a gender equality plan which is communicated and implemented in practice. The Gender Equality plan as well as the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan of the University are included in Appendix C, attached with this response. (They can also be found online under: | |

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| | https://www.unic.ac.cy/unic-at-a-glance/university-of-nicosia-gender-equality-plan-gep/and https://www.unic.ac.cy/unic-at-a-glance/equality-diversity-and-inclusion-strategy/ | |
| 3. 7 "The EEC recommends that all teaching staff (both permanent and adjunct) are up to date with basic day to day procedures and D&I initiatives, and that these are implemented by all." | All University practices and processes that are necessary for faculty to carry out their duties are included in the Internal Regulations. The Internal Regulation are listed and easily accessible to the faculty portal. All faculty are instructed to familiarize themselves with the regulations. In addition, every new faculty member (full-time or part-time) has a mentor faculty (the program coordinator) who guides the faculty on all important University processes. | |

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

- "According to the students interviewed by the EEC, teaching staff is highly accessible and readily available for support and guidance whenever needed."
- "Faculty members are readily available to address student inquiries and provide guidance beyond regular class hours."
- "The student to teacher ratio was also praised by students. This accessibility fosters a conducive learning environment and facilitates effective communication between students and instructors, ultimately enhancing the overall educational experience. This is a strength of the programme."
- "The EEC acknowledges that the university offers robust support and services to students."
- "Their support covers a wide range of student needs, including psychological, academic, and professional assistance, as well as help with the interactions related to enrollment, daily activities, and special requirements"

| Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC | Actions Taken by the Institution | For Official Use ONLY |
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| 4.1 "The EEC recommends universal adherence to the practice of providing formative written feedback consistently at all times" | Along with their grade and the relevant graded rubric (see Appendix A), students will be receiving formative written feedback for all assignments. | Choose level of compliance: |
| 4. 2 "The EEC recommends making the marking rubric publicly accessible to students. In addition, the EEC suggests that the expected author of the marking rubric and the process of revisions should be explicitly stated in the Quality Assurance policy." | Rubrics are implemented as shown in Appendix A and will be accessible to all students. | Choose level of compliance: |
| 4.3 "For industry-based projects, the EEC recommends that information about relevant intellectual property issues are provided to students before the commencement of their project work, not upon request or after the industrial placement has commenced." | A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) will be signed between the students and the companies, in which students acknowledge that they have been informed about the patent or copyright status of a specific product or service they will be working with during their practicum. | Choose level of compliance: |

5. Learning resources and student support (ESG 1.6)

- "After evaluating the university's physical and technological resources, the ECC concludes that the environment is suitable to support the study program."
- "The classrooms and laboratories are appropriately sized, and the technological infrastructure meets the necessary requirements. Additionally, the library offers resources in formats suitable for both physical and virtual access by students, on a 24/7 basis."
- "The Teaching Certificate Program for Faculty is also a good practice."
- "The processes to detect and provide the necessary assistance to students with special needs is also considered a good practice and is highly commendable."







| Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC | Actions Taken by the Institution | For Official Use ONLY |
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| 5.1. "The EEC recommends that course instructors always provide written feedback to students" | This is standard practice. Course instructors always provide written feedback on students' work. | Choose level of compliance: |
| 5.2. "it is important that all the faculty who teach in the programme have completed these courses and are aware of the aforementioned documents." | These were addressed in points 2.2 and 3.7 above. | Choose level of compliance: |
| 5.3 "giving useful formative feedback may be a challenging and subjective process, especially to less experienced staff, the ECC believes it would be beneficial to add this information in the faculty handbook." | The suggestion to add this information to a University faculty handbook will be communicated to the relevant University body. | Choose level of compliance: |
| 5. 4 "The EEC recommends that subtitles be added to all video content, to improve the student-teacher experience and reduce misunderstandings, ambiguity and other similar factors that may lower student engagement." | This recommendation is not applicable to the face-to-face mode of teaching of this program. | Choose level of compliance: |
| 5.5 "The EEC recommends developing these documents in the context of face-to-face learning and providing them to the faculty." | All University practices and processes that are necessary for faculty to carry out their duties are included in the Internal Regulations. The Internal Regulation are listed and easily accessible in the faculty portal. All faculty are instructed to familiarize themselves with the regulations. In addition, every new faculty member (full-time or part-time) has a mentor faculty (the program coordinator) who guides the faculty on all important University processes. | Choose level of compliance: |
| 5.6 "the EEC recommends developing these guides and sharing them with the courses' students would improve transparency, accountability, homogeneity and also self-determination learning" | See appendix A, the detailed information for each course which includes the items mentioned in his point. | |

6. Additional for doctoral programmes

(ALL ESG)

N/A

| Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC | Actions Taken by the Institution | For Official Use ONLY |
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7. Eligibility (Joint programme)

(ALL ESG)

N/A

| Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC | Actions Taken by the Institution | For Official Use ONLY |
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B. Conclusions and final remarks

| Conclusions and final remarks by EEC | Actions Taken by the Institution | For Official Use ONLY |
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| "the EEC concludes that some of the required standards are met fully, | Actions to be taken as per the respective recommendations made | Choose level of compliance: |
| and some of the required standards | throughout the EEC report and | |
| are met partially. The EEC has made a list of recommendations targeted | addressed thoroughly in the previous sections. | |
| to improving the required standards | previous sections. | |
| and raising the level of the | | |
| programme internationally. These recommendations are marked in | | |
| bold and highlighted throughout | | |
| this document." | | |

C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

| Name | Position | Signature |
|----------------------------------|---|-----------|
| Dr George Gregoriou | Dean of the School of Sciences and Engineering | |
| Professor Athena Stassopoulou | Head of Computer Science Department Programme coordinator | |

Date: 08/07/2024





