

Doc. 300.1.2

Date: 07/07/2025

Higher Education Institution's Response

- Higher Education Institution: University of Nicosia (UNIC)
- Town: Nicosia
- School/Faculty: School of Sciences and Engineering
- Department: Computer Science
- Programme(s) of study - Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)

In Greek:

Πληροφορική (3 χρόνια, 180 ECTS, Διδακτορικό)

In English:

Computer Science (3 years, 180 ECTS, PhD in Computer Science)

Language(s) of instruction: English



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 without any interference 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 on-site evaluation of the PhD in Computer Science on 26th of June 2025. We also appreciate the opportunity to engage in meaningful discussions with the Committee, which included meetings with faculty, PhD students, and external stakeholders.

We would like to also thank the EEC for their ***extremely positive*** evaluation where ***all 21 out of 21 quality indicators received the top rating of “Compliant”*** (amongst the choices of compliant, partially compliant, non-compliant).

Moreover, we would like to express our appreciation to the EEC for identifying the following strengths, as highlighted verbatim by the EEC in their evaluation, which underscore the robust foundation of our PhD programme and serves as a basis for further aligning our strategic actions with these commendations:

- "Robust procedures and policies are in place for doctoral studies, including clear regulations, continuous feedback mechanisms, and support for student welfare and diverse student populations".
- "Although unscientific to generalise from a small sample, the quality of the graduates seems to be very good".
- "Currently active PhD students are very satisfied with their experience of study at UNIC, including the supervisory process, with the quality of interaction with their supervisors, and with their advancement through the programme".
- "The EEC also observes that the assessment of doctoral dissertations is subject to a rigorous process, including external evaluators, written reports for both the thesis and the viva assessment".
- "PhD candidates talked to the EEC and demonstrate a good level of independence and quality of research output".
- "The university has a complete and thoroughly documented process for everything from selection criteria for doctoral candidates, through the admissions and selection process, and through to graduation".
- "The PhD students in the department are well supported in the process of writing and publishing papers — as evidenced by the publication record of the graduated, and final-year, students that the EEC have examined".
- "The Doctoral programme is robust in its structure and monitoring, and is qualitatively on a good track".
- "The students reflect positively on receiving timely grading and feedback on their work".
- "The students reflect positively on availability of education staff for face-to-face meetings".
- "The students reflect positively on possibilities to do internships with industry".

- "The EEC also finds that the Doctoral programme produces graduates with comparable qualities to elsewhere in Europe — graduates who are satisfied with their experiences as PhD students at the Department".

We appreciate the EEC's comprehensive and constructive feedback on our PhD in Computer Science programme. The Department is committed to continuous improvement and acknowledges the EEC's recognition of the programme's solid structure, rigorous monitoring mechanisms, and high quality of supervision.

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

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

Positive comments made by the EEC:

- "The quality of the graduates seems to be very good".
- "Currently active PhD students are very satisfied with their experience of study at UNIC, including the supervisory process, with the quality of interaction with their supervisors, and with their advancement through the programme".
- "The EEC also observes that the assessment of doctoral dissertations is subject to a rigorous process, including external evaluators, written reports for both the thesis and the via assessment".
- "Two PhD theses that the EEC examined are of a high quality".
- "PhD candidates the EEC talked to demonstrate a good level of independence and quality of research output".

We would like to express our appreciation to the EEC for evaluating this area as fully compliant. We have carefully considered the additional constructive comments provided and have incorporated them into our ongoing efforts to enhance the programme's structure, academic value, and student experience. These enhancements are aimed at further empowering our students to thrive in their academic and research journeys.

Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
1.1 "Refining the messaging towards BSc and MSc students regarding what the "life of a PhD student" is about with the ambition to attract UNIC undergraduates and increase the conversion rate of Bachelors-to-PhD students. The current understanding among the students seems to be that it is "write an endless stream of papers, for low pay" — whereas a better, and more accurate, messaging would be "work on a really cool topic for 3 years, without a boss/client breathing down your neck. And with really smart and cool people, while even getting paid for it". It is likely that the current understanding is due to BSc students simply never having	We appreciate the remarks made by the EEC. To combat the misconception that PhD study equates to "writing an endless stream of papers for low pay," we are actively reframing the message to reflect the reality: "working on intellectually exciting problems for 3+ years in a highly autonomous setting, surrounded by expert mentors, with funding support and academic freedom." This communication will be embedded in info sessions, flyers, and website content. These actions will be focusing on research potential visibility as follows: -Launch of "Research Days" with interactive sessions, student panels, and PhD Q&A opportunities hosted by current doctoral researchers. -Explain explicitly to students what is a PhD through in-class sessions where a PhD student will present the potential and what a PhD journey entails.	Choose level of compliance:

been proactively informed about what a PhD entails.”	-Enable students to get informed by experience by getting the COMP-492 placements in internal research groups.	
1.2 “Exposing BSc and MSc students to research earlier. For example, through: -Inviting them to the departmental “Research Days”, relevant seminar series, engage high-achieving students in presenting their theses, industry lab internship outcomes. -Offering BSc/MSc final-year-projects that are related to research projects, in which PhD students are involved and naturally can be engaged in co-supervision of the student project. -Enabling BSc students to do their “industry placement” (COMP-492) as a “research lab placement”, encouraging students to get a taste of research. Consider introducing a choice between internal research lab and external academic or industry lab internships. -Consider broader and more systematic engagement of relevant industry in branding and defining the image and essence of the PhD program.”	We acknowledge the EEC’s valuable recommendations to increase early exposure to research for BSc and MSc students. We have established structured initiatives to increase undergraduate and MSc student exposure to research. In addition to “My research in 10 minutes” session, we launch “Research Days” interactive sessions, student panels, and PhD Q&A opportunities hosted by current doctoral researchers. - “Research Days” event will include student panels and industry outcomes. - We enable the COMP-492 placements in internal research groups. Students will now be allowed to choose between internal research lab internships and external industrial/academic placements, aligning with their career goals and research interests. - High-performing BSc and MSc students will be invited to present their thesis work and outcomes from industry internships during “Research Days”. - Final-year project topics are aligned with active research projects, and PhD students co-supervise where appropriate. - We are deepening collaboration with industry to co-promote the PhD programme through joint branding, research seminars, and project-based internships.	Choose level of compliance:

1.3 “Engaging with external stakeholders and making strategic agreements on branding and defining the image and essence of the department's PhD program. - Consider broader and more systematic engagement of relevant industry. During the meeting, EEC heard concrete and enthusiastic suggestions from the department's academic and industry partners on how to make the PhD positions more attractive. - Involve industrial partners to make the industrial value of the PhD known. - Consider defining joint co-funded PhD projects, industry lab internships for PhDs, joint research events etc. - Organise regular seminars with representatives from industry, who themselves have a PhD, to illustrate the value of this degree in a multitude of different careers. - Consider making an agreement with Meta, Google Brain and other connections at top industry labs such they can commit to mentor 1 PhD per year and potentially to offer an internship as a follow up.”	We agree with the EEC's suggestion to strategically involve external stakeholders in shaping and promoting the PhD programme and have taken concrete steps towards this. We are executing a comprehensive strategy to engage industry in branding and supporting the PhD programme. This strategy focuses on three pillars as follows: strategic partnerships, visibility enhancement, and collaborative development. Towards these: - We aim to secure at least one industry-sponsored PhD student annually by 2026, with clear commitments to provide mentoring and optional internships. - Co-branded promotional materials and PhD showcases will be disseminated through both UNIC and partner channels. - Industry testimonials and career spotlights will be incorporated into information sessions and digital media. We enable a collaborative career development as follows: - We are establishing a structured programme for industry-executive seminars by PhD-holding professionals to present diverse career trajectories. - PhD students will be encouraged and supported to undertake short-term placements in partner labs. - Bi-annual PhD-Industry Symposium planned for launch in Spring 2026 (this was planned earlier this year and was technically co-sponsored by IEEE R8/Cyprus section YP), co-organized with industrial stakeholders. Initiated discussions with local partners to: - Develop co-funded PhD positions. - Offer short-term industry internships during the PhD. - Host annual PhD-Industry Networking Day.	
1.4 “Conducting market research, developing a strategy on attracting talented international	We thank the EEC for highlighting the importance of international outreach and support for early-stage PhD researchers.	Choose level of compliance:

PhDs and making an investment plan to support it, e.g., as simple as offering a possibility for the 1st year PhD students to attend a top conference or summer school even if they did not get publishable results yet. "	We have initiated international market research to understand how to better attract qualified PhD applicants from abroad. This includes: - Identifying key regions and academic profiles through consultation and data analytics. - Partnering with academic agents and research networks to expand recruitment reach. - We are planning to present the PhD programme at career fairs and national postgraduate expos. Regarding the EEC's recommendation to support early-stage PhD students in attending top conferences or summer schools regardless of publication status, we have discussed the matter with the Vice Rector for Research and Faculty. At present, funding is available for conference participation upon supervisor recommendation, and this process has been consistently supported without rejections. While there is currently no specific budget for summer school attendance without accepted publications, we fully acknowledge the importance of such early research exposure. As a result, we have initiated discussions with relevant university bodies, including Human Resources and the Executive Office, to explore ways to extend support for summer school participation by first-year PhD students. As the process involves institutional approvals and resource planning, the time ahead will be dedicated to evaluating feasibility and supporting effective implementation.	
1.5 "Solicit the academic support services for assistance and inspiration. The EEC asked, during the site visit with the administrative personnel, if they had any ideas, and spontaneously the head librarian suggested that as the library has copies of all PhD theses, perhaps she could help create better visibility for those — to make the PhD programmes more well	We are grateful to the EEC for pointing out the potential of academic support services in enhancing PhD visibility. We have already taken steps in this direction. We are actively collaborating with academic support services to improve PhD visibility and outreach: - We initiated (already talked with the University Library) a "PhD Showcase" with open access to completed dissertations, highlighted through	Choose level of compliance:

known. Similarly, the ERASMUS office has an impressive network, that perhaps can be solicited when sharing open PhD positions.”	thematic spotlights and per semester features. - We are liaising with the Library to prepare promotional summaries of theses and student interviews, which will be featured on the University’s official news and alumni platforms. - The ERASMUS Office, with its strong international academic network, has agreed to disseminate open PhD positions through its partner channels and mailing lists, significantly boosting our recruitment reach. We are also exploring collaborative outreach activities with these units, including research exhibitions, alumni stories, and EU mobility programme alignment. Finally internal training sessions for new PhD supervisors will be continuing to be offered annually by the Office of the Vice Rector for Research and Faculty (VRFR).	
1.6 “The EEC notes that elsewhere in Europe, most PhD-students undertake their PhD fresh out of their BSc/MSc. Further, in many places in Europe, a PhD is a full-time occupation and PhD students are either salaried, or they have a stipend allowing them to not seek paid work in parallel to their PhD. The advantage of targeting students fresh out of their BSs/MSc is, that they are typically younger — and, thus, also generally more adventurous, interested in and able to move for their PhD (no family ties, no mortgage, no small children, ...) ”	We appreciate the EEC’s insight regarding the profile of PhD students in Europe and acknowledge the benefits of targeting younger, full-time candidates. The current situation is that most of the PhD students who are willing to work in research projects are allocated a stipend amount and are highly paid by the respective funding agencies (Marie-Curie DNs and H2020/AAL/Eureka). Additionally, the Office of the VRFR allocates annual travel funding to support first-year PhD students’ participation in conferences and training events, fostering their integration into international research networks. That said, we recognise the value of attracting younger, full-time PhD students, as this can contribute to a more research-intensive departmental environment and support greater academic mobility and dynamism. The initiatives outlined in our response to point 1.2 aim to strengthen the visibility and appeal of our PhD programme to younger students, and are steps in this direction.	Choose level of compliance:

1.7 In view of the fact that a considerable amount of the department funding is through EU projects, and given that in other EU countries, EU projects are able to provide PhD student salaries/stipends aligned with the local national market, the EEC encourages that the Department investigates such opportunities. The advantage of offering a PhD with a "living wage" salary/stipend is, that it makes it easier for foreign students to project themselves into a new country: no dependency on family support, no requirements to fend for a student-job, etc.	We appreciate the EEC's observation and fully agree that offering PhD stipends aligned with the national living wage can significantly enhance the attractiveness of our programme, particularly for international candidates. In line with this, the Department—together with the Office of the VRFR — is actively exploring mechanisms to leverage EU-funded research projects (e.g., Horizon Europe, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, Erasmus+, and national co-financing schemes) to provide sustainable, competitive stipends for PhD students. Specifically, we are mapping internal policies and external project budget structures to ensure that newly submitted proposals include provisions for full-time PhD student roles, including living wage-level funding. Furthermore, we are engaging with our Research Office to standardize financial planning models across funded proposals, thereby institutionalizing stipend support for PhDs in line with best practices across Europe.	
1.8 "Consider funding Teaching Assistant positions for PhD students to support teaching staff in delivering their courses, and involve them in their research."	We acknowledge the EEC's suggestion on supporting PhD students through Teaching Assistant positions and have formalised a structured TA programme. We have established a structured and scalable TA programme to provide PhD students with teaching experience and financial support. TA roles include tutorial support, lab support/assistance, grading, and student mentoring. Selected PhD students receive formal pedagogical training and a stipend. This initiative also helps reduce teaching loads for faculty and enhances the undergraduate learning experience. The programme is being institutionalized with university-level support and is outlined in Chapter 12.25 of the University Regulations.	

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

Positive comments made by the EEC:

- “The EEC also observes that the assessment of doctoral dissertations is subject to a rigorous process, including external evaluators, written reports for both the thesis and the via assessment.”
- “Currently active PhD students are very satisfied with guidance and feedback from their supervisors.”
- “The assessment of doctoral dissertations is subject to a rigorous process, including external evaluators, written reports for both the thesis and the via assessment”

We would like to thank the EEC for considering this evaluation topic as fully compliant and note that we have taken into consideration and addressed the additional comments highlighted by the EEC that enable the programme to strengthen its offerings and allow the students to further excel in their studies.

Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
2.1 “The EEC recommends establishing and continuously growing a PhD-Teaching Assistant (TA) programme that can facilitate closer supervision and mentorship of student groups and individual students — as well as contribute towards financing a stipend for the PhD students.”	We thank the EEC for the constructive recommendation regarding a structured TA programme. The University already provides such a program. The description of the PhD-TA program is detailed in Chapter 12.25 of the university regulations. In brief, doctoral students who have completed the University’s pedagogical training sessions for TA can apply for a teaching assistantship that covers, among others, student mentorship, coursework grading, and lab assistance and tutorial preparation. TAs are closely supervised by the doctoral student’s advisor. TAs are important in both preparing the doctoral student for future academic duties but also for reducing faculty workload. As indicated in 1.8 we advanced into a structured and scalable TA programme as part of our strategic investment in doctoral education and faculty support as follows:	Choose level of compliance:

	- A number of PhD students per year will be offered TA roles for introductory BSc modules, with plans to expand this number based on demand and funding. - TA duties will include lab support, tutorials, assignment grading, and student consultation hours. - TAs will have structured training, and recognition (certification).	
2.2 “- The EEC recommends considering introducing the option for industrial internships during the PhD, for students who are interested in both attaining the highest level of academic training, and in an industrial career. Additionally this can further enrich their interest and skills in applied and application-inspired research, achieving higher levels of external validity and practical relevance, and project development”	We appreciate the EEC’s recommendation on offering industrial internships to PhD students. We are actively initiating ways with our industrial partners to formalise industrial internship options within the PhD curriculum. These include: - Developing a framework for PhD students to undertake industry placements that are relevant to their doctoral research, with clear guidelines for supervision, assessment, and integration with their academic milestones. - Leveraging our existing and expanding industry partnerships to identify suitable hosts for doctoral internships and to co-design projects that align with both academic and industrial objectives. - Consulting with current PhD students and industry partners to ensure that any internship programme meets the needs and expectations of all stakeholders.	Choose level of compliance:

3. Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

Positive comments made by the EEC:

- "The faculty members within the Department are active researchers in their fields."
- "They conduct application-inspired research aiming to make societal impact."
- "They contribute to Open Science, e.g., by publishing open datasets that can foster research development on societally important topics, notably in healthcare."
- "There are indicators of a very good faculty–student engagement within the Department."
- "There are indicators of a very good engagement between Alumni and the Department."
- "Faculty members are well-informed about quality assurance aspects, including individual course improvement and how to deal with potential misconduct of students."
- "Faculty members are well-informed about the student safety aspects."
- "The Department provides mentorship for new hires and informs them about expectations for promotion to higher ranks."
- "New hires may apply for, and can obtain, a UNIC seed-grant."
- "The composition of a “supervisory team” ensures that a junior or inexperienced PhD advisor will not “be left alone” in case any issues arise along the process."

We would like to express our appreciation to the EEC for evaluating this area as fully compliant. We have carefully considered the additional constructive comments provided and initiated a number of planned actions to be taken towards this goal.

Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
3.1 “The EEC strongly recommends that the Department establishes a multi-pronged strategic plan (discussed elsewhere in this report) for how to increase the number of PhD students — and, therefore, the number of faculty members who can become experienced as doctoral advisors. Not only is this to the benefit of the PhD students and the University, but it is key for the individual faculty members’ professional development, and career development. Furthermore, a critical mass of PhD students is necessary for creating a thriving research environment.”	We thank the EEC for the emphasis on strategic planning to expand the number of PhD students and supervisors. Our multi-pronged strategic plan is designed not only to increase student numbers but also to broaden the pool of faculty capable of doctoral supervision. Our internal conversion strategy includes: - Host biannual PhD Information Sessions for high-performing BSc and MSc students. - Establish a mentorship programme connecting senior PhD students with potential candidates from BSc/MSc cohorts.	Choose level of compliance:

	- Launch of "Research Days" with interactive sessions, student panels, and PhD Q&A. - Launch an international campaign targeting regions with potentially strong CS talents (e.g., Balkans, MENA region, South Asia). - Collaborate with the International Office to promote open PhD positions through Erasmus+ partners and research consortia worldwide. Further to the above, actions as discussed in response 1.3 for strengthening visibility, outreach and branding by participating in career fairs and national postgraduate expos, and by showcasing the societal impact of ongoing doctoral research—especially in key sectors such as healthcare, AI, and cybersecurity—along with the broader benefits offered by our projects and students' participations. Finally, we aim to leverage our partnerships with academic agents and research networks abroad towards this direction.	
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4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification (ESG 1.4)

Positive comments made by the EEC:

- “The requirements for admission are stated clearly in the publicly available website.”
- “The English language requirements are mentioned”.
- “The ECTS credits for the courses are explicitly stated”.
- “Well-refined student admissions processes are established”.
- “Well-documented student progress tracking is in place, leaving a clear “paper-trail” of all key milestones, meetings, etc. towards graduation”.
- “The university has name recognition”.
- “The well-tested processes for admission have been refined over many years”
- “The university rules and regulations are complete, detailed, clear, and easily accessible, and competently implemented by the Department.”

We would like to thank the EEC for considering this evaluation topic as fully compliant without including any additional comments for improvement.

Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
N/A	Click or tap here to enter text.	Choose level of compliance:

5. Learning resources and student support (ESG 1.6)

Positive comments made by the EEC:

- “The physical, human support, and student support resources are excellent.”

We would like to thank the EEC for considering this evaluation topic as fully compliant without including any additional comments for improvement.

Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
N/A	N/A	Choose level of compliance:

6. Additional for doctoral programmes (ALL ESG)

Positive comments made by the EEC:

- “The physical, human support, and student support resources are excellent.”

We would like to thank the EEC for considering this evaluation topic as fully compliant and note that we have carefully considered the additional suggestions provided by the EEC and have taken steps to address them, with the aim of further enhancing the programme’s visibility and outreach. These efforts are designed to support the continued growth and excellence of the programme.

Areas of improvement and recommendations by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
6.1 “The EEC strongly recommends that the Department establishes a multi-pronged strategic plan (discussed elsewhere in this report) for how to increase the number of PhD students — and, therefore, the number of faculty members who can become experienced as doctoral advisors. Not only is this to the benefit of the PhD students and the University, but it is key for the individual faculty members’ professional development, and career development.”	We appreciate the EEC’s reiteration of the importance of strategic planning in expanding our PhD programme. Our responses in earlier sections reflect our commitment to this. As detailed in our responses 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 2.2 and 3.1, we have initiated strategic action plans and incorporated all EEC recommendations.	Choose level of compliance:

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

Positive comments made by the EEC:

- “EEC recognises the good quality of the educational programmes offered by Department — as evidenced by both the student satisfaction, and by the documented employability of graduates from the programmes as presently delivered at UNIC”.
- “The Doctoral programme is robust in its structure and monitoring, and is qualitatively on a good track — however is behind the curve in PhD student recruitment: given the number of faculty members in the Department, they should have significantly more PhD students”.

We appreciate the EEC’s recognition of full compliance in all areas such as programme structure, student support, and resource adequacy. These acknowledgements reflect our ongoing commitment to excellence and continuous improvement.

Conclusions and final remarks by EEC	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
The Doctoral programme is robust in its structure and monitoring, and is qualitatively on a good track — however is behind the curve in PhD student recruitment: given the number of faculty members in the Department, they should have significantly more PhD students”	We thank the EEC and appreciate the comments made. As discussed in 3.1, there is a planned strategy that will be followed in order to attract more students and enhance even more the programme’s visibility and outreach.	
“Towards this end, the EEC strongly recommends that the Department establishes a multi-pronged strategic plan (discussed elsewhere in this report) to increase the number of PhD students — and, therefore, raise the number of faculty members who can become experienced as doctoral advisors. Not only is this to the benefit of the PhD students and the University, but it is key for the individual faculty members’ professional and career development. To this end, the EEC recommends the Department to conduct market research for understanding how to attract relevant international PhD students. ir workload) monitored/graded by lab assistants / TAs.”	We appreciate the EEC’s reiteration of the importance of a comprehensive strategic plan to enhance PhD student recruitment and supervisory capacity. We fully acknowledge this critical point, which aligns with our institutional priorities. As detailed in our responses to Sections 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 2.2, and 3.1, we have initiated and are implementing a multi-faceted strategy aimed at strengthening the programme’s visibility, international outreach, and research integration.	



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C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

Name	Position	Signature
Professor Dimitris Drikakis	Dean of the School of Sciences and Engineering	
Professor Athena Stassopoulou	Head of Computer Science Department	
Professor Constandinos Mavromoustakis	PhD Computer Science Program Coordinator	

Date: 07/07/2025

