

Doc. 300.1.2

Higher Education Institution's Response

Date: 21.9.2020

- **Higher Education Institution:**
University of Nicosia

- **Town:** Nicosia

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

In Greek:

Νομική (LLM, 3 Εξάμηνα, 90 ECTS)

In English:

Law (LLM, 3 Semesters, 90 ECTS)

- **Language(s) of instruction:** Greek, English
- **Programme's status:** Currently Operating



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 2019” [N. 136 (I)/2015 to N. 35(I)/2019].

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) 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 deficiencies noted under the quality indicators (criteria)*
 - *the conclusions and final remarks noted by the EEC*
- *The HEI's response must follow below the EEC's comments, which must be copied from the external evaluation report (Doc. 300.1.1).*
- *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, 1.8, 1.9)

The LLM has been considered to be fully compliant in all criteria of this section. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified.

The EEC has confirmed that the LLM programme has a clear purpose and clear objectives, as well as explicit intended learning outcomes. The Committee acknowledged that the selection of modules is well designed and facilitates the professional development of the students. The EEC has further confirmed that all information regarding the programme of study is readily accessible through the University's website. Based on the documents provided and the online site visit, the Committee expressed the opinion that the information for the effective management of the programme of study is adequately collected, monitored and analyzed, and that the University provides a clear profile of the student population, ensuring student participation and thus their satisfaction with their programs.

In the EEC's report it was furthermore confirmed that the University and the School of Law, apply adequate quality assurance controls on many levels, including the LLM programme. There are quality assurance measures for both teaching and students. The teaching is evaluated by internal and external evaluators and must achieve a certain quality, which is a measure to support responsibility in meeting a certain standard. The quality is measured and evaluated according to predefined criteria and the policy for quality assurance facilitates the progression of students. There are sufficient mechanisms in practice to ensure academic integrity and to combat fraud (Turnitin). The EEC has also acknowledged that the University of Nicosia has developed a comprehensive monitoring system that supports students in case of difficulties and helps them to maintain their performance. It involves lecturers and academic advisors and works through feedback. The provision of support to students who might face difficulties was appraised by the students the EEC has interviewed.

The EEC has further made suggestions for improving the LLM. The Committee acknowledged the flexibility that the optional status of the LLM thesis might offer to students who wish to obtain professional skills, but also encouraged the School of Law to rethink the possibility to make the LLM thesis mandatory, while at the same time shortening the LLM thesis ECTS awarded (to for instance between 12 to 18 ECTS). The Committee stated in the case that 30 ECTS is quite a large part of the programme and lowering the number of ECTS would provide room to follow additional courses.

The suggestion of the EEC is noted and fully appreciated has been an issue of internal discussion also in the past. The current University policy is that thesis is not mandatory in Master level programmes and the LLM has abided to this policy for reasons that have been explained and positively received by the EEC. The CYQAA framework for Master programmes has given the option that students who have opted to complete a thesis can finish their studies in a minimum of one year, as opposed to students who have not opted to complete a thesis who can finish their studies in a minimum of 1.5 year. We have implemented this new framework, and we consider that it provides strong incentives for students to opt to complete a thesis. The 30 ECTS allocated to the thesis include not only the actual thesis, but also the 10 ECTS otherwise allocated to a research methodology course. Hence, the actual ECTS allocated to the thesis do not exceed 20 ECTS and are close to the suggestion of the EEC.

2. Teaching, learning and student assessment (ESG 1.3)

The LLM has been considered to be fully compliant in all criteria of this section. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified.

The EEC has confirmed that the process of teaching and learning of the LLM is in compliance and that the program supports students' individual and social development. It is further noted that the LLM facilitates a student-centred learning environment and that there are appropriate procedures for dealing with students' complaints regarding the process of teaching and learning. It has been confirmed in the EEC's report that the assessment is consistent, fairly applied to all students and carried out in accordance with predefined procedures, while fully corresponding to the European Qualifications Framework. It is specifically pointed out that students are encouraged to take an active role in the learning process, since LLM courses require active student participation and presentations as an assessment, and most of the courses include general and weekly forum discussions. Beyond that, students are involved in research activities, which are incorporated into the specialized courses. The EEC has confirmed that the process of teaching and learning is flexible, considers different modes of delivery, and facilitates the achievement of planned learning outcomes, while a variety of pedagogical methods are being used (lectures, interactive dialogues, individual projects, group projects, case-study analysis, video-streamed courses, fora, final exams). The teaching methods, tools and material used in teaching are supported by the use of modern educational technologies and are regularly updated.

The EEC has also made suggestions for further improvement. The EEC recommended that the interconnection of theoretical studies and practical training should be specified in each course of the Programme (e.g. practical training or learning methods such as visits to courts and other relevant places as part of classes, moot courts, meetings with legal experts, etc.).

The suggestion of the EEC is positively received. In general, most LLM courses include teaching and assessment methods that are practice-oriented, despite the fact that there is a general reference to them. This general reference gives lecturers the flexibility as to how much to include or what is possible in the circumstances. We shall request from lecturers, where possible, to refer expressly and in detail to such activities. We will certainly continue to aim at implementing and further broadening the practice-oriented learning methods in all courses of the Programme.

The EEC further indicated that possibilities should be given for LLM students' participation in conferences (local, international, virtual etc.).

We fully endorse this recommendation. The School is regularly communicating info and details on conferences, seminars, events, etc. and students are encouraged to participate. In addition, some of these events are integrated as part of a course in case they are relevant and discussion follows in the class on the basis of such an event. Furthermore, several times we have covered participation fees in conferences for students, pursuant to a specific application.

3. Teaching Staff (ESG 1.5)

The LLM has been considered to be fully compliant in all criteria of this section. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified.

The EEC has confirmed that the teaching staff consists of highly qualified and internationally educated employees, who are capable to ensure quality and sustainability of teaching and learning. The teaching staff is regularly engaged in professional and teaching-skill training and development. The Department is further subject to quality assurance internal committees. It has been confirmed that the specializations and qualifications of faculty adequately support the delivery of the LLM, and that members of staff are research active, that the balance between teaching, research and administration appears reasonable, and that the staff is highly motivated and enthusiastic.

The EEC has also made suggestions for further improvement. It has been recommended that in case of an increase in student population, the number of full-time professors and teaching staff should be increased. The Committee also indicated that the number of visiting professors could be increased, so that international visibility of the Department is enhanced.

We fully agree with both suggestions as they form part of our departmental strategy. Full-time teaching staff is employed as needs arise. We always opt for teaching staff that is relevant to both the teaching and research needs of the University. We will furthermore pursue visiting staff collaborations as an extra element which enhances the LLM given time and cost constraints.

4. Students

(ESG 1.4, 1.6, 1.7)

The LLM has been considered to be fully compliant in all criteria of this section. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified.

The EEC has confirmed that the regulations regarding student admission are pre-defined and published online, and that the access policies, admission processes and criteria are implemented consistently and in a transparent manner. The EEC has also noted that students' progress is continuously assessed throughout the semester, utilizing various methods and techniques. Furthermore, lecturers provide comprehensive and constructive feedback to students on course tasks, activities and coursework in a structured way, so that students can better understand the assessment and relevant requirements. Students have the opportunity to address any concerns to their Lecturers or/and their Academic Advisors.

The EEC has also made recommendations and remarks for further improvement. It has been commented that, while the LLM Application does mention the KYSATS (the Cyprus Council of Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications), yet the Regulations are not accessible on line at the moment. Furthermore, the EEC recommended that procedures concerning scholarships for the LLM should be accessible and clear.

The recommendations are positively received. As far as KYSATS regulations are concerned, we note that KYSATS is an official state organ and accordingly the University has no power over it. We understand that the Regulations are available online at KYSATS webpage. With regards to scholarships, we concur with the recommendation and will ensure that our efforts are further increased in this respect to the extent possible.

5. Resources

(ESG 1.6)

The LLM has been considered to be fully compliant in all criteria of this section. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified.

The EEC has confirmed that the teaching and learning resources are adequate and that the physical resources are fit for purpose, and are ensured for changing circumstances. The students of the Programme have access to various resources and student's services as library, information center, computing facilities etc. The lecturers in general use in their courses research material and other resources, linking research activity to teaching. The university is committed to educational excellence that encompasses inclusive access to higher education and that fosters teaching and learning. It has further been noted that the monitoring of student progress can be seen as a best practice, and that learning resources are of good standard. Also, that student support is adequate to support the transfer programme.

The EEC has further recommended that an adequate level of support for mature students of the Programme needs to be ensured.

The recommendation is welcome. We note that the University currently offers full support to all students, including mature ones. However, we will oversee how to further improve our efforts in this respect as well.



6. Additional for distance learning programmes (ALL ESG)

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7. Additional for doctoral programmes (ALL ESG)

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8. Additional for joint programmes (ALL ESG)

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B. Conclusions and final remarks

We wish to thank the EEC for the professionalism they showed during the execution of their duties. The detailed discussion of all issues pertinent to the degree under evaluation, led to a fruitful discussion between the members of the EEC and the official representatives of the University and faculty members of the programme. The discussion proved to be extremely helpful due to the expertise of the members of the EEC and their willingness to share their suggestions and recommendations for further improving the programme. The demanding set of questions allowed us to elaborate on the pedagogical foundations of the programme and expand upon the content of the application form.

We have assessed and reviewed carefully the EEC report. We are pleased to note that the report is extremely positive, and we thank the EEC for their positive comments. We thank the external committee for concluding that it is very supportive of the LLM programme and did not identify and instances of non-compliance. We also thank the EEC for its clear positive evaluation and recommendation for accreditation of the Department.

We fully acknowledge that all programmes are always amenable to further improvement, and indeed we have been constantly working towards further improving our programme since it was initially accredited. Accordingly, the suggestions for further improvement offered by the EEC are taken very seriously into account. We consider the suggestions of the EEC as very helpful and we will try to incorporate them to the widest extent possible. Having said that, we acknowledge that, as the EEC has noted, the recommendations aim to the further improvement of an already fully compliant Department. We thank the committee for all the suggestions/recommendations. We address each one herein, for further improving the LLM programme.

1. Rethinking the possibility to make the LLM thesis mandatory and maybe shorten the LLM thesis ECTS awarded (e.g. between 12-18 ECTS)

Response/Action: The suggestion of the EEC is noted and fully appreciated has been an issue of internal discussion also in the past. The current University policy is that thesis is not mandatory in Master level programmes and the LLM has abided to this policy for reasons that have been explained and positively received by the EEC. The CYQAA framework for Master programmes has given the option that students who have opted to complete a thesis can finish their studies in a minimum of one year, as opposed to students who have not opted to complete a thesis who can finish their studies in a minimum of 1.5 year. We have implemented this new framework, and we consider that it provides strong incentives for students to opt to complete a thesis. The 30 ECTS allocated to the thesis include not only the actual thesis, but also the 10 ECTS otherwise allocated to a research methodology course. Hence, the actual ECTS allocated to the thesis do not exceed 20 ECTS and are close to the suggestion of the EEC.

2. Specifying the interconnection of theoretical studies and practical training in the LLM courses (practical training, practice-oriented learning methods etc.).

Response/Action: The suggestion of the EEC is positively received. In general, most LLM courses include teaching and assessment methods that are practice-oriented, despite the fact that there is a general reference to them. This general reference gives lecturers the flexibility as to how much to include or what is possible in the circumstances. We shall request from lecturers, where possible, to refer expressly and in detail to such activities. We will certainly continue to aim at implementing and further broadening the practice-oriented learning methods in all courses of the Programme.

3. Possibilities for LLM students to participate in conferences (local, international, virtual etc.)

Response/Action: We fully endorse this recommendation. The School is regularly communicating info and details on conferences, seminars, events, etc. and students are encouraged to participate. In addition, some of these events are integrated as part of a course in case they are relevant and discussion follows in the class on the basis of such an event. Furthermore, several times we have covered participation fees in conferences for students, pursuant to a specific application.

4. Increasing the number of teaching staff (and in particular full-time professors), when the number of student increases

Response/Action: We concur with the recommendation, which is also part of our departmental strategy and we will aim to implement it when the need arises.

We would like to thank the committee once more, both for the positive and fair evaluation, as well as the constructive comments and suggestions and the fruitful discussion that we had with its members during the lengthy virtual visit. We also thank the committee for the time and thoroughness it dedicated to the evaluation of the LLM and for helping us improve the LLM through the suggestions made. All recommendations of the EEC refer to further improvement. The recommendations and evaluation of the committee are seriously taken into account for the further improvement of the programme. We consider this endorsement under the conditions of external peer review as a resounding vote of confidence in the LLM and its potential for academic success. We finally acknowledge the clear positive evaluation and recommendation for accreditation of the LLM.

C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Philippos Pouyioutas	Professor, Rector	
Panayiotis Angelides	Professor, Vice Rector for Academic Affairs	
Achilles C. Emilianides	Professor, Dean	
Christina Ioannou	Associate Professor and Associate Dean	
Christos Papastylianos	Associate Professor and Head of the Department	
Stergios Mitas	Assistant Professor and LLM Programme Coordinator	

Date: 4.11.2020

