

Doc. 300.1.2

Higher Education Institution's Response

Date: 29.9.2020

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

- **Town:** Nicosia

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

In Greek:

Διεθνείς Σχέσεις και Σπουδές Ανατολικής Μεσογείου
(3 Εξάμηνα, 90 ECTS, Μάστερ)

In English:

International Relations and Eastern Mediterranean
Studies (3 Semesters, 90 ECTS, Master of Arts)

- **Language(s) of instruction:** 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)

Comments made by the EEC (copied from the External Evaluation Report)

Findings

- *This program is designed to develop theoretical and practical knowledge in the fields of International Relations and Eastern Mediterranean Studies.*
- *The programme includes conventional and specific parts and elements.*
- *The programme fits to the mainstream international MA programmes. The programme complies with the Qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area.*
- *Altogether 90 credits make up the Master's level.*
- *The Curriculum contains compulsory courses (60 credits), and elective (30 credits).*
- *MA students can choose whether they attend the university for 1 year plus writing an MA Thesis or 1.5 year to attend three more courses (30 credits) without writing a Thesis.*
- *Relatively low tuition fee compared to other private universities.*
- *The programme offers both general International Relations topics and issues in Eastern Mediterranean Studies.*
- *The programme offers a Special Topics section (10 credits) to deal with academic topics of temporarily high interest.*

Strengths

- *The department has well-trained faculty who are able to perform their teaching obligations on high level.*
- *By offering Eastern Mediterranean Studies, the Department created comparative advantage to other universities. Therefore, it is able to combine standard, general approaches with the more particular area studies approach.*
- *The possibility of Special Topics make the offer more flexible and interesting by e.g. picking a new course on cybersecurity.*

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- *It could be a good idea to give greater weight to Master's Thesis in order to make the master program more in alignment with the international standard, even if the external job market puts a pressure on the university to avoid it.*

Response/Action

The MA Program in International Relations and Eastern Mediterranean Studies (MA IR and EMS) 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 underlined the fact that the Department has well-trained faculty who are able to perform their teaching obligations on high level. Furthermore, it stresses that, by offering Eastern Mediterranean Studies, the Department created a comparative advantage to other Universities. Therefore, it is able to combine standard, general approaches with the more particular area studies approach. Furthermore, there is always the possibility to offer courses on contemporary issues accordingly, depending on global developments, to supplement the existing teaching load. This is done through the “Special Topics” course (a course included in the proposed curriculum, code MIREL-660) which makes the degree more flexible and interesting.

The EEC has also made suggestions to further improve the MA IR and EMS. It expressed the view that it would be a good idea to give greater weight to the MA Thesis in order to align the MA Program more with international standards, even if the job market environment puts pressure on the University to avoid theses. The recommendation is noted by the Department. We take into account the fact that the decision to make the MA Thesis elective is compliant with a related decision of CYQAA, announced on 25.10.2018. This decision provides two options for MA students, regarding full time study, as follows: students who choose to write a thesis may complete their studies in one year and they may start their thesis in the 1st or 2nd semester, with the extension of one summer period. They can take courses equivalent with 30 ECTS in each of the first two semesters, while the remaining 30 ECTS will be completed by the thesis. Students who choose not to write a thesis must complete their studies in at least 3 semesters, 30 ECTS per semester. Taking this decision into account, the Department decided to include an optional thesis in MA IR and EMS, equivalent with 30 ECTS, and provide the students with the option to complete their studies in one year. We believe that we can keep this configuration since it is compliant with CYQAA decisions, therefore it fulfils the related quality criteria. However, we will be advising the students towards writing a thesis even if it is not mandatory, especially in case they express their interest in continuing their studies with a PhD. This will be done in three ways: 1. through the regular announcements that we post. 2. by training the Academic Advisors so as to advise the students accordingly upon their registration to their semester courses. 3. through the regular contact that the Head of the Department, the Program Coordinator and the rest of the faculty members have with the students.

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

Comments made by the EEC (copied from the External Evaluation Report)

Findings

- *MA in IR and Eastern Mediterranean Studies can either be 1.5 year (= 3 semesters) or 1 year (= 2 semesters) plus writing the Master's Thesis (=1 semester).*
- *Both direct and distance learning are conducted. 2/3rd of students attend distance learning.*
- *The admission criteria include BA /BSc diploma, English proficiency (TOEFL or other language reliable language test), two letters of recommendation, and a personal statement of the candidate.*
- *The course accreditation is fixed (with the exception of Special Topics), like in the Bachelor programme.*

Strengths

- *Faculty are highly qualified and attentive to students.*
- *Students are highly satisfied with the assistance of their supervisors and instructors.*
- *Students received quality online teaching for several years, so the Covid pandemic did not cause much harm or disruption on teaching.*

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- *Composition of students is traditionally male-dominated because many alumni are employed by the military and public administration. A stronger equal opportunity policy is encouraged to make the gender proportion more balanced.*

Response/Action

The MA Program in IR and EMS has been considered to be fully compliant in all criteria of this section. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified.

The EEC notes that faculty are highly qualified and attentive to students. Students are highly satisfied with the assistance of their supervisors and instructors and the fact that the University has been providing quality online teaching for several years has prevented COVID-19 pandemic from causing much harm or disruption on teaching.

The EEC has also made suggestions for further improvement. Particularly, it underlines that the composition of the MA students is traditionally male-dominated. This is not surprising given that a significant percentage of the MA students are professionals in the military, which is a male-



dominated profession. Therefore, a stronger equal opportunity policy is encouraged to make the gender proportion more balanced. The recommendation is welcome and we will discuss ways to improve gender balance. The Department intends to suggest to the management of the University to adjust the scholarships policy to a gender-based model. For example, at least 5 out of 20 scholarships that will be offered in the forthcoming semesters will be granted to female candidates.

3. Teaching Staff (ESG 1.5)

Comments made by the EEC (copied from the External Evaluation Report)

Findings

- *Teaching faculty can apply for a sabbatical semester every 5 years – previously it was 7 years.*
- *Faculty being on sabbatical receive 50 % of their salaries.*
- *Teachers know about each other's courses, so they can substitute each other in case of necessity.*

Strengths

- *Committed faculty who take MA teaching seriously. Due to the specific requirements, they also offer professional courses.*
- *There are systematic training courses, and annual series of seminars in the field of diplomacy.*

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- *Different teaching loads for different positions (3+3 and 2+2 courses per academic year). The committee recommends that junior scholars regularly get a reduced teaching load in order to enhance professional development.*
- *The EEC support the present Senate consideration of full salary compensation 1 semester every 3 years or 1 full year of paid leave every 6 years.*

Response/Action

The MA Program in IR and EMS has been considered to be fully compliant in all criteria of this section. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified.

The EEC notes that the Program has committed faculty who take MA teaching seriously. It also adds that, due to the specific requirements, they also offer professional courses. Furthermore, it praises the fact that there are systematic training courses, and annual series of seminars in the field of diplomacy.

The EEC has also made suggestions for further improvement. Particularly, it recommends that junior scholars regularly get a reduced teaching load in order to enhance professional development. Furthermore, it expresses its support to the present Senate consideration of full salary compensation for sabbatical. The Department takes the EEC's suggestion into serious consideration and it will discuss ways of implementing it. Particularly, it will continue encouraging



all staff, especially junior staff, to make use of the University's research endorsement policies, while it will reinforce its efforts to support their personal development, in accordance with the University's regulations and objectives and taking seriously into account the CYQAA's new upcoming regulatory framework. Furthermore, the School of Law has decided to organize, in cooperation with the Cyprus Center for European and International Affairs, research seminars on a regular basis that will give the junior staff the opportunity to present and discuss their research findings with their senior colleagues. When it comes to the teaching load, the number of courses taught is comparable to other Universities in Cyprus and in accordance with the regulations of the University of Nicosia. The Department will discuss the possibility of extra teaching release for the junior faculty with the related administrative bodies of the University.

4. Students

(ESG 1.4, 1.6, 1.7)

Comments made by the EEC (copied from the External Evaluation Report)

Findings

- *Currently about 30-40 students are admitted to the MA programme every year.*
- *The university accepts the admission of foreign students.*

Strengths

- *Opening up for foreign students is on the way. Teaching in English makes possible to accept foreign students beyond Greece.*
- *Students can participate in the Erasmus programs, plus there are special possibilities for them to spend some months or a semester in Greece, Malta or North Macedonia.*

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- *Admissions criteria generally correspond to the international standards. An idea for improvement could be to request the submission of a “sample writing” in order to help faculty to decide about admissions. Short personal statements are usually not enough to judge the (potential) academic writing skills of the applicant.*

Response/Action

The MA Program in IR and EMS has been considered to be fully compliant in all criteria of this section. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified.

The EEC notes that the Program is opening up for foreign students and that teaching in English makes possible to accept foreign students beyond Greece. It also underlines the fact that students can participate in the Erasmus+ programs and have the opportunity to spend some months or a semester in many EU countries.

The EEC has also made recommendations for further improvement. It notes that the admissions criteria generally correspond to the international standards. An idea for improvement could be to request the submission of a “sample writing” in order to help faculty to decide about admissions. Short personal statements are usually not enough to judge the (potential) academic writing skills of the applicant. The Department concurs and it will implement this suggestion. The admissions criteria are amended as follows:

- A Bachelor’s degree (BA/BSc) in the social sciences, or any other relevant Bachelor’s degree (relevance will be assessed accordingly)

- Students satisfy the English language requirements if their first degree was taught in English. Otherwise, they would need to present an average TOEFL score of 500, GCSE “O” Level with minimum “C” or IELTS with a score of an average 5.5-6
- Two recommendation letters
- A personal statement by the prospective student expressing his/her interest in following the program and attaching samples of his/her previous written work, where applicable.

The amended admissions criteria will be announced as soon as the program is accredited and advertised.

5. Resources (ESG 1.6)

Comments made by the EEC (copied from the External Evaluation Report)

Findings

- *The University is well equipped technically, the library is available for the evenings and weekends.*
- *Special devices help online teaching and conferences (Not only Zoom and Teams but Webex as well).*
- *The IT department is resourceful and well organized to take care of students' materials.*

Strengths

- *High level of technical knowledge, preparedness, useful available devices for both on-site and online teaching.*
- *Faculty are available for students outside class and office hours.*

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- *If we understand “student support” broadly and includes alumnis students, we see room for improvement. This can include not only the alumni club, which exists, but also a more lively interaction between the alumni and the university.*
- *That might also include campaigns among alumni to raise money for new students or improving the conditions in other respect.*
- *The special composition of the student body – most of them continue their career in the military or in the public administration and many of them might work besides their studies – possibly explains this rate. From this perspective a completion rate in MA studies on 80% is acceptable. It may also explain that 40% of MA students need one more semester to complete their Master Degree.*

Response/Action

The MA Program in IR and EMS has been considered to be fully compliant in all criteria of this section. No deficiencies in the quality indicators have been identified.

The EEC notes the high level of technical knowledge and preparedness, as well as the availability of useful devices for both on-site and online teaching. It also underlines that the faculty are available for students outside class and office hours.



The EEC has also made recommendations for further improvement. It expresses the view that there should be more lively interaction between the alumni and the University. That, according to the EEC, might include campaigns among alumni to raise money for new students or improving the conditions in other respect. The Department agrees with this assessment. After all, the creation of alumni clubs is already under way, at the level of the School of Law; this includes clubs for alumni in International Relations and Public Administration (which suggest the main areas of the Department's interest). In this framework, the Department will cooperate with the School of Law in order to enhance the existing communication channels and create new ones, mainly by using online tools. It will also utilize the renovated Departmental website for this purpose.



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

Copied from the External Evaluation Report

“The committee was impressed by the programs provided by the department of Politics and Governance, University of Nicosia, and the dedication shown by staff to supporting the student learning experience. For all three programs there is a clear sense of focus and commitment. The department utilizes its small size to create tight relations between teaching staff and students at all levels. As seen from the committee the department “walk the talk” when it comes to committing itself to quality teaching and the creation of a secure, and yet challenging learning environment.

The committee is of the overall opinion that the programs come with good design and a commitment to secure quality by standard operating procedures as well as personal engagement in teaching and students. Teaching programs are moving targets in dialogue with the surrounding society and should always be open to discussions and realignments. It is from this philosophy that the committee above has noted aspects of the program to be considered in order to develop and improve the existing already well-functioning programs.”

Response/Action

We wish to thank the EEC for the professionalism they showed. The detailed discussion of all issues pertinent to the degree under evaluation, led to a fruitful exchange between the members of the EEC and the official representatives of the University and faculty members of the program. 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 the further improvement of the program. The demanding set of questions allowed us to elaborate on the pedagogical foundations of the program 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 assessment as well as constructive comments. We thank the external Committee for being very supportive of the MA IR and EMS Program, identifying 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 Programs are always amenable to further improvement, and indeed we have been constantly working towards further improving our program 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 program. We thank the Committee for all the suggestions/recommendations. We address each one herein, for further improving the MA Program in IR and EMS.

1. *“It could be a good idea to give greater weight to Master’s Thesis in order to make the master program more in alignment with the international standards, even if the external job market puts a pressure on the University to avoid it.”*

Response/Action: The recommendation is noted by the Department. We take into account the fact that the decision to make MA Thesis elective is compliant with a related decision of CYQAA, announced on 25.10.2018. This decision provides two options for MA students, regarding full time study, as follows: students who choose to write a thesis may complete their studies in one year and they may start their thesis in the 1st of 2nd semester, with the extension of one summer period. They can take courses equivalent with 30 ECTS in each of the first two semesters, while the remaining 30 ECTS will be completed by the thesis. Students who choose not to write a thesis must complete their studies in, at least, 3 semesters, 30 ECTS per semester. Taking this decision into account, the Department decided to include an optional thesis in the MA Program in IR and EMS, equivalent with 30 ECTS, and provide the students with the option to complete their studies in one year. We believe that we can keep this configuration since it is compliant with CYQAA decisions, therefore it fulfils the related quality criteria. However, we will be advising the students towards writing a thesis even if it is not mandatory, especially in case they express their interest in continuing their studies with a PhD. This will be done in three ways: 1. through the regular announcements that we post; 2. by training the Academic Advisors so as to advise the students accordingly upon their registration to their semester courses; 3. through the regular contact that the Head of the Department, the Program Coordinator and the rest of the faculty members have with the students.

2. *“A stronger equal opportunity policy is encouraged to make the gender proportion more balanced.”*

Response/Action: The recommendation is welcome and we will discuss ways to improve gender balance. The Department intends to suggest to the management of the University to adjust the scholarships policy to a gender-based model. For example, at least 5 out of 20 scholarships that will be offered in the forthcoming semesters will be granted to female candidates.

3. *“The EEC recommends that junior scholars regularly get a reduced teaching load in order to enhance professional development.”*

Response/Action: The Department takes the EEC’s suggestion into serious consideration and it will discuss ways of implementing it. Particularly, it will continue encouraging all staff, especially junior staff, to make use of the University’s research endorsement policies, while it will reinforce its efforts to support their personal development, in accordance with the University’s regulations and objectives and taking seriously into account the CYQAA’s new upcoming regulatory framework. Furthermore, the School of Law has decided to organize, in cooperation with the Cyprus Center for European and International Affairs, research seminars on a regular basis that will give the junior staff the opportunity to present and discuss their research findings with their senior colleagues. When it comes to the teaching load, the number of courses taught is comparable to other Universities in Cyprus and in accordance with the regulations of the University of Nicosia. The Department will discuss the possibility of extra teaching release for the junior faculty with the related administrative bodies of the University.

4. “[R]equest the submission of a “sample writing” in order to help faculty to decide about admissions.”

Response/Action: The Department concurs and it will implement this suggestion. The admissions criteria are amended as follows:

- A Bachelor’s degree (BA/BSc) in the social sciences, or any other relevant Bachelor’s degree (relevance will be assessed accordingly)
- Students satisfy the English language requirements if their first degree was taught in English. Otherwise, they would need to present an average TOEFL score of 500, GCSE “O” Level with minimum “C” or IELTS with a score of an average 5.5-6
- Two recommendation letters
- A personal statement by the prospective student expressing his/her interest in following the program and attaching samples of his/her previous written work, where applicable.

The amended admissions criteria will be announced as soon as the program is accredited and advertised.

5. “If we understand “student support” broadly and includes alumnis students, we see room for improvement. This can include not only the alumni club, which exists, but also a more lively interaction between the alumni and the university. That might also include campaigns among alumni to raise money for new students or improving the conditions in other respect.”

Response/Action: The Department agrees with this assessment. After all, the creation of alumni clubs is already under way, at the level of the School of Law; this includes clubs for alumni in International Relations and Public Administration. In this framework, it will cooperate with the School of Law in order to enhance the existing communication channels and create new ones, mainly by using online tools. It will also utilize the renovated Departmental website for this purpose.

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 MA Program in IR and EMS and for helping us improve the Program through the suggestions made. All recommendations of the Committee refer to further improvement, and some need discussion and potential decision at various levels as they are not applicable only to this specific Department. The recommendations and evaluation of the Committee are seriously taken into account for the further improvement of the Department. We consider this endorsement under the conditions of external peer review as a resounding vote of confidence in the MA Program in IR and EMS and its potential for academic success.

We finally acknowledge the clear positive evaluation and recommendation for accreditation of the MA Program in IR and EMS.



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CYPRUS AGENCY OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION



C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Panayiotis Angelides	Professor, Vice Rector for Academic Affairs	
Achilles C. Emilianides	Professor, Dean	
Andreas Theophanous	Professor, Head	
Christina Ioannou	Associate Professor and Associate Dean	
Michalis Kontos	Assistant Professor and Program Coordinator	

Date: 29.3.2021

