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FINAL REPORT

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY LEFKE

HORTICULTURE

(BACHELOR)

September 2023



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DECISION OF THE AQAS STANDING COMMISSION ON THE STUDY PROGRAMME

▪ “HORTICULTURE” (BACHELOR)

OFFERED BY EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY LEFKE, NORTH CYPRUS

Based on the report of the expert panel and the discussions of the AQAS Standing Commission in its 18th meeting on 21 August 2023, the AQAS Standing Commission decides:

1. The study programme “**Horticulture**” (**Bachelor**) offered by **European University Lefke, North Cyprus** is accredited according to the AQAS Criteria for Programme Accreditation (Bachelor/Master).

The accreditation is conditional.

The study programme essentially complies with the requirements defined by the criteria and thus the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in their current version. The required adjustments can be implemented within a time period of twelve months.

2. The conditions have to be fulfilled. The fulfilment of the conditions has to be documented and reported to AQAS no later than **30 September 2024**. The confirmation of the conditions might include a physical site visit within the time period of twelve months.
3. The accreditation is given for the period of **six years** and is valid until **30 September 2029**.

Conditions:

1. The curriculum must be updated and amended to fully cover the breadth of horticulture as defined in the qualification profile of the programme.
2. Student’s workload must be evaluated and used in continuous development of the programme.
3. Availability of literature resources for the topics to be included in the curriculum has to be improved to support the teaching of the required competencies at the respective academic level.

The following **recommendations** are given for further improvement of the programme:

1. The trial farm should be further developed to meet the needs of a horticulture programme even better and also become an experimental model site for local climate change adaptation and securing biodiversity of cultural landscapes in the Mediterranean.
2. Options for internships should be broadened and extended.
3. The development of soft skills should be better covered in the curriculum.
4. International exchange opportunities for students should be increased.

5. The academic portfolio of staff should be developed along the further development of the programme to fully cover the represented aspects of horticulture.
6. The department should improve the availability of up to date information on facts and elements of the curriculum in the publicly available sources like its website.

With regard to the reasons for this decision the Standing Commission refers to the attached experts' report.

EXPERTS' REPORT ON THE STUDY PROGRAMME

▪ "HORTICULTURE" (BACHELOR)

OFFERED BY EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY LEFKE, NORTH CYPRUS

Visit to the university: 9.-11. May 2023

Panel of experts:

Prof. Dr. Gül Asli Aksu	Kastamonu Univeristy, Istanbul, (Turkey) Professor for Horticulture
Prof. Dr. Wolfram Kircher	Anhalt University, (Germany), Professor for Botany
Dr. Harald Kutzenberger	Founder and Owner of TBK Office for Ecology and Landscape Architecture, Wilhering, (Austria) (representative of the labour market)
Florens Förster	student of Applied Geography at the RWTH Aachen (Germany) (student expert)
Coordinator: Ronny Heintze	AQAS, Cologne, Germany

I. Preamble

AQAS – Agency for Quality Assurance through Accreditation of Study Programmes – is an independent non-profit organisation supported by more than 90 universities, universities of applied sciences and academic associations. Since 2002, the agency has been recognised by the German Accreditation Council (GAC). It is, therefore, a notified body for the accreditation of higher education institutions and programmes in Germany.

AQAS is a full member of ENQA and also listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) which confirms that our procedures comply with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), on which all Bologna countries agreed as a basis for internal and external quality assurance.

AQAS is an institution founded by and working for higher education institutions and academic associations. The agency is devoted to quality assurance and quality development of academic studies and higher education institutions' teaching. In line with AQAS' mission statement, the official bodies in Germany and Europe (GAC and EQAR) approved that the activities of AQAS in accreditation are neither limited to specific academic disciplines or degrees nor a particular type of higher education institution.

II. Accreditation procedure

This report results from the external review of the Bachelor programme "Horticulture" offered by European University.

1. Criteria

The programme is assessed against a set of criteria for accreditation developed by AQAS: the AQAS Criteria for Programme Accreditation (Bachelor/Master). The criteria are based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) 2015. To facilitate the review each criterion features a set of indicators that can be used to demonstrate the fulfilment of the criteria. However, if single indicators are not fulfilled this does not automatically mean that a criterion is not met. The indicators need to be discussed in the context of each programme since not all indicators necessarily can be applied to every programme.

2. Approach and methodology

Initialisation

The university mandated AQAS to perform the accreditation procedure in October 2021. The university produced a Self-Evaluation Report (SER). In April 2022, the institution handed in a draft of the SER together with the relevant documentation on the programme and an appendix as well as statistical data on the programmes. The appendix included e.g.:

- an overview over statistical data of the student body (e.g. number of applications, beginners, students, graduates, student dropouts),
- the CVs of the teaching staff/supervisors,
- information on student services,
- core information on the main library,
- as well as academic regulations.

AQAS checked the SER regarding completeness, comprehensibility, and transparency. The accreditation procedure was officially initialised by a decision of the AQAS Standing Commission in August 2022 following a substantial update of the SER.

Nomination of the expert panel

The composition of the panel of experts follows the stakeholder principle. Consequently, representatives from the respective discipline, the labour market, and students are involved. Furthermore, AQAS follows the principles for the selection of experts defined by the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA). The Standing Commission nominated the aforementioned expert panel in March 2023. AQAS informed the university about the members of the expert panel and the university did not raise any concerns against the composition of the panel.

Preparation of the site visit

Prior to the site visit, the experts reviewed the SER and submitted a short preliminary statement including open questions and potential needs for additional information. AQAS forwarded these preliminary statements to the university and to all panel members in order to increase transparency in the process and the upcoming discussions during the site visit.

Site visit

After a review of the SER, a site visit to the university took place from 9.-11. May 2023. On site, the experts interviewed different stakeholders, e.g. the management of the higher education institution, the programme management, teaching and other staff, as well as students and graduates, in separate discussion rounds and consulted additional documentation as well as student work. The visit concluded by the presentation of the preliminary findings of the group of experts to the university's representatives.

Reporting

After the site visit had taken place, the expert group drafted the following report, assessing the fulfilment of the AQAS Criteria. The report included a recommendation to the AQAS Standing Commission. The report was sent to the university for comments.

Decision

The report, together with the comments of the university, forms the basis for the AQAS Standing Commission to take a decision regarding the accreditation of the programme. Based on these two documents, the AQAS Standing Commission took its decision on the accreditation in August 2023. AQAS forwarded the decision to the university. The university had the right to appeal against the decision or any of the imposed conditions.

In September, AQAS published the report and the result of the accreditation as well as the names of the panel of experts.

III. General information on the university

The European University of Lefke (EUL) was established as a state foundation university by the Cyprus Science Foundation in 1990. So far, more than 25,000 students have graduated from the University. Currently, 10,532 students from 87 countries are registered in the University's 11 faculties and vocational Schools, one Institute (Graduate School) and one English Preparatory School. These faculties and schools offer education in 104 associate/undergraduate degree programmes and 55 postgraduate/doctoral degree programmes.

EUL and its departments and programmes are accredited and recognised by institutions such as the Higher Education Council of Turkey (YÖK), the Higher Education Planning, Evaluation, Accreditation and Coordination Council of North Cyprus (YODAK) as well as other specialised agencies.

As the highest decision-making organ, the Board of Trustees of the Cyprus Science Foundation appoints the University Rector and delegates its executive powers to the Rector. Faculty Deans and Directors of Institutes and Schools of Higher Education are nominated by the Rector and approved by the Board.

The university's vision is to be globally recognised in science and technology and contribute to social values. It aims to provide a multicultural environment and become an autonomous university open to change and development in science and technology. Students are expected to become innovative and professionally responsible individuals who can think critically, contribute to economic, social, and cultural development of the country, and accelerate scientific and technological innovations.

Faculty of Agricultural Sciences and Technologies/ Department of Horticulture programme

The department of Horticulture, which is the only programme in the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences and Technologies, was established in 1996 – 1997. The administrative structure of the faculty as well as the programme is outlined in the SER. According to the SER, the location of the programme facilitates the implementation of all kinds of horticulture. Aims of the programme are to train students to become agricultural engineers who support sustainable horticulture. Graduate profiles are identified as researchers, scientists, landscape professionals, horticulture educators, greenhouse managers, orchard or vineyard managers, crop protection specialists, nursery managers, and international consultants.

General aims of the programme are to:

- provide students with the theoretical, practical, and interdisciplinary training necessary for academic and/or career advancements in horticulture,
- graduate individuals who are able to keep up with the latest developments and aware of the problems of the era,
- provide students with necessary skills to be able to work as part of a team or alone, and additional skills to take part in national and international projects,
- provide students with skills to critically think, write, and speak,
- provide students with an appreciation of and respect for social, moral, and ethical values to the community.

Among 44 clubs and 35 societies affiliated to the Students' Dean Office of EUL in several areas such as health, sports, nature, science and so on, the Nature Club relates quite well to the Department of Horticulture and gains support from lecturers of the department in organising events for students, according to the SER.

IV. Assessment of the study programme

1. Quality of the curriculum

The intended learning outcomes of the programme are defined and available in published form. They reflect both academic and labour-market requirements and are up-to-date with relation to the relevant field. The design of the programme supports achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

The academic level of graduates corresponds to the requirements of the appropriate level of the European Qualifications Framework.

The curriculum's design is readily available and transparently formulated.

[ESG 1.2]

Description

The curriculum contains a total of 139 credits, which is equivalent to 240 ECTS. The duration of the programme is 8 semesters or four years. In an academic year at EUL, there are two semesters, namely "Fall" and "Spring" semester. Every semester runs for at least 14 weeks. In addition, the programme also offers a Summer School in a duration of 7 weeks, during which some courses can be re-offered for those who failed or have not yet taken the courses or want to improve their GPA.

The study programme determines its intended programme outcomes as:

1. Have the basic scientific foundation necessary for the cultivation of horticultural crops mainly vegetables (including summer and winter vegetables, both in greenhouse and open field) and fruits (all kind, including viticulture) and be able to select the most economical techniques in site-specific manner.
2. Have the fundamental knowledge about using computer and internet technologies (IT) for reaching reliable, scientific, and practical information in the field of horticulture.
3. Demonstrate a fundamental understanding of the biotic and abiotic environmental factors (climate, soil, water, biodiversity, etc.) affecting plant growth and development and develop strategies to manage them in a sustainable way.
4. Have knowledge both in theory and in practice about most common pests, diseases and weeds of horticultural crops and learn sustainable methods of management.
5. Have theoretical and practical knowledge about laboratory practices and safe use of agricultural tools, together with the basic principles of plant propagation, plant nutrition, irrigation and pruning required for healthy crop cultivation.
6. Have the ability and knowledge to apply organic horticulture and good agricultural practices in farms by following occupational health and environmental protection measures.
7. Have basic information about plant genetics, breeding, biotechnology, and postharvest handling of horticultural crops.
8. Have ability and knowledge to conduct studies, interpret and evaluate data, define problems, and suggest solutions based on proof for several problems occurring in crop farms and horticultural industries.
9. Have knowledge both in theory and in practice to develop and apply projects considering social responsibilities and develop professional skills with the awareness of the necessity of lifelong learning in the field of horticulture and to follow the developments in science and technology
10. Have the basic scientific foundation necessary for research, analyse and identify career opportunities in the field of horticulture as well as horticulture related disciplines.

As stated in the SER, the programme learning outcomes which focus on student-centred learning and teaching methods have been compiled based on the knowledge of lecturers, course teachers, relevant stakeholders,

and experienced experts. Also, each course has its own learning outcomes that contribute to at least one programme outcome.

The programme has made use of the European Qualification Framework in designing the curriculum. The curriculum consists of 48 courses in total, 42 courses of them are compulsory, 4 courses are elective, and 2 courses are free electives. Courses with the code “AGRI” are specialised only for students of the programme, while there are 11 common courses shared with other departments such as Introduction to computers, English, Chemistry, Economy, Physics, Turkish, History, etc. In addition to courses, students are required to conduct a Practical Internship (summer training session) at a company with a duration of 40 days to find out and discuss the problems and challenges within the company.

According to the SER, the departmental committees control the quality of all course outlines as well as the course files prepared at the end of each semester. These course files include course outline, letter grades, course report, samples of exams, assignments, quizzes, projects relating to the courses and attendance. They will be updated in accordance with what has been discussed in the departmental meetings.

Experts' evaluation

Overall, the panel of experts finds a well-developed programme that underwent some changes in the past with regards to its title and orientation. Theoretical knowledge is well combined with practical elements to apply knowledge and develop the necessary skills in the field. Within a well-developed teaching of high quality the curriculum at this time provides solid skills and competencies, however, does not yet fully implement what the title of horticulture requires. To the positive surprise of the panel of experts the discussions with the department where exceptionally constructive and there seems to be a high level of readiness for further development.

From an expert's point of view the curriculum currently does not fully reflect the field of horticulture. The EUL advertises an “European” vision. Furthermore, the Self-Evaluation Report quotes: “Horticulture graduates are in demand as: Researchers and scientists, Landscape professionals, Horticulture educators, Greenhouse managers, Orchard or vineyard managers, Crop protection specialists, Nursery managers and international consultants”. While the expert panel generally agrees to these aims and intentions, the curriculum does not yet reflect these goals. To cover all these fields and to be prepared for a wide spectrum of horticultural tasks in a contemporary European context, different elements and competencies will have to be added to the qualification profile and incorporated in the curriculum and syllabi (**Finding 1**). In particular the following areas and competencies will have to be addressed:

- Legal bases of horticultural management: to know about legal regulations in nature protection (i.e. trade of endangered species), use of pesticides, leading employees etc. is a crucial precondition for managing a nursery. In a “European University” a rough comparison of the most important relevant legal regulations in European countries should be presented.
- Business management: an envisaged leading staff member or even director of a nursery is expected to provide a fundamental understanding of economy and how to manage a horticultural enterprise. Also the relevant mechanisms and interconnections in the international trade should be covered.
- Ornamental plants and cut flowers: beside the cultivation of vegetables and fruits, herbaceous and woody ornamental plants play a major role Europe-wide. An insight into the most important groups of indoor- and outdoor ornamentals, their identification characters, propagation and cultivation should be included in a Horticulture programme. A special emphasis should be to mediate knowledge about how to grow native plants.
- Seed production: Seed production for herbaceous and woody non-food species, especially for establishing meadows as well as woodland plantings in the landscape should be part of a modern horticulture programme. Potentially the course “AGRI422 seed technology” already covers elements of this, in which case the syllabus would not reflect this very well.

- Basics of landscape construction – there are lectures in lawn construction offered as a special seminar, but also at least an overview about “Urban Horticulture” themes such as basics of planting design, green buildings, xeriscaping or wetland plantings should be included.
- Ecological landscape restoration: this is a contemporary trend in Europe and beyond. It covers i.e. stone settings, permanent hedges with indigenous shrubs and trees to promote interaction with possibly harmful arthropods and to attract wildlife in general etc. Especially the problem of noxious neophytes and how to manage these should be discussed with the students.
- Soft skills: they cover i.e. how to present lectures and scientific results, how to communicate in a public or private enterprise, how to organize human resources etc. These are crucial skills with regard to the expressed qualification goals and needs of the market and consequently these skills require practical training and application which must become more visible in the curriculum.
- Consider the increase of practical experiences: according to a questionnaire, this is the desire of many students. The programme “Horticulture” includes already practical education in the university’s training farm for 3 hours per week. Additional courses in block teaching could help to mediate complex processes such as grafting and budding, harvesting technology, trimming of fruit trees etc. also applied field trials could be implemented in this way.

The trial farm of EUL comprises a wide range of fruit plantations, which allow students to gain practical experiences and to participate applied trials in cultivation techniques. This facility offers a great potential for further development beyond production but also demonstrates and puts in practice further elements of horticulture by containing permanent structures such as windbreak plantings with site adapted indigenous trees and shrubs, dry stone settings or meadow stripes to promote wildlife. The interaction between hazardous arthropods and beneficial organisms can be investigated and included into the teaching. The panel also learned during the site visit that Lefke has a Nature Club, which would potentially offer opportunities for a cooperation to promote such activities. At this time the trial farm is a highly relevant element for the skill development of students and important part of the teaching that should be further developed to meet the needs of a horticulture programme even better (**Finding 2**).

On a very positive note, the panel of experts recognized during the interviews that the relevance of the trial farm in the teaching process is actually higher than what the descriptions of the courses / the curriculum imply. Clearly the next update of course descriptions should mitigate this shortcoming as it does undersell the programme in a way that the applied side is less visible in the course description. A comparable but less pressing situation can be found with regards to Research and Development and P&D. During the interviews with the sector representatives the panel of experts learned about collaborations in these areas and the opportunities currently offered to students. However, these elements were not adequately reflected in information such as curriculum, course content and scope.

An interesting observation that was discussed in detail during the site visit is the correlation between programme learning outcomes (PLO) and course learning outcomes (CLO) and its link to the holistic structure of the curriculum. When the relation of PLO with the CLO were evaluated, it was seen that most courses are associated with PLO’s at a moderate level. The average of the relationship between the PLOs and the CLO’s is around 3.3. In the interviews with the representatives of the sector, it was understood that there were attempts to provide internship opportunities and to carry out joint studies in terms of both R&D and P&D related to the sector. When the survey evaluations are examined, considering the expectation of personnel with practical experience in the sector, it is important that the courses meet with PLO 5,8 and 9 in particular. However, the average correlations of these PLOs with CLO’s (PO5:3.93, PO8:2.7, and PO9:3.18) were found to be particularly low. The panel of experts is confident that with an update of the curriculum and respectively the course descriptions the department will manage to increase the links between both levels particularly as this aspect was already part of the self-evaluation of the department and thus not a surprise in the discussion.

All elements of the curriculum are documented and when combining the various sources the provide all relevant information. Consequently, information is complete while the panel of experts encourages the department to consider developing a holistic approach to presenting its information reducing the number of documents to provide a full idea of the curriculum, including PLOs, Course descriptions, matrixes, etc. explaining the link

from PLO to CLO etc. This will clearly also facilitate and understanding also for an interested outside reader / potential student.

Six of the 48 courses in the curriculum are electives. These elective courses starting in the fifth semester are well defined while the panel of experts did not succeed in identifying the criteria for the distinction between free electives and elective courses. Creating an elective course pool that offers a variety of elective courses with coverage of different expansions related to the professions of students in categories such as in-field, non-field, social, and/or technical will make the definitions of elective courses more stable and it will support to differentiate the elective courses from the compulsory. Again, based on the discussions with the department, the panel of experts is confident that the required curricular adjustments will also enable an appropriate development and clearer differentiation here.

The relevance of practical work has been discussed at length during the site visit and the panel of experts learned that there are many more practical elements, particularly through the integration of the trial farm in the teaching process. For example, Vegetable Production I-II, Basic of Fruit Production, Field Crops, Horticultural Techniques, Irrigation Techniques, Viticulture, Greenhouse Productions are defined among the theoretical courses in the curriculum, although they were found to be able to cover practical applications. This was already discussed to be an aspect of updating documentation. Another aspect however is the encouragement to enriching the “Practical Internship” application both in terms of duration and content, increasing the incentives for providing internship opportunities to students in a broader area of applications than currently the case, even considering options outside of Northern Cyprus, e.g. in Turkey (**Finding 3**).

Despite the not to be underestimated shortcomings with regard to the full reflection of the field of horticulture in the programme the programme as is stands represents a solid programme at the Bachelor's level, which also meets the requirements of the qualification framework. The reviewed student work and samples are fit to support this conclusion. It is obvious that the programme can soon cover the entire spectrum of horticulture through curricular adjustments.

Conclusion

The criterion is partially fulfilled.

2. Procedures for quality assurance

The programme is subject to the higher education institution's policy and associated procedures for quality assurance, including procedures for the design, approval, monitoring, and revision of the programmes.

A quality-oriented culture, focusing on continuous quality enhancement, is in place. This includes regular feedback mechanisms involving both internal and external stakeholders.

The strategy, policies, and procedures have a formal status and are made available in published form to all those concerned. They also include roles for students and other stakeholders.

Data is collected from relevant sources and stakeholders, analysed, and used for the effective management and continuous enhancement of the programme.

[ESG 1.1, 1.7 & 1.9]

Description

According to the SER, the Quality Assurance and Curriculum Committee is responsible for planning the general structure of study programmes, which is then approved by the University Senate. Regarding academic changes, directors or deans of the corresponding schools or faculties present them to the Senate, who can act upon the educational matters of all programmes and regulations of the academic community. Then, the Senate appoints a committee, the so-called the Quality Assurance Board, to work on the proposed changes and make recommendations accordingly. The Senate approves the final study which will be sent to the Student

Affairs Office for finalising the process. Another body involved in the quality assurance (QA) procedure is the Department Quality Committee formed by 5 departmental members and led by the Head of Department. Controlling the quality of all course outlines is one of the duties of the Department Quality Committees.

It is stated in the SER that all programmes at EUL are subject to semi-annual internal quality assessment procedures, in which Rectorate, schools, faculties, and departments have a shared responsibility. The SER mentions the participation of students and other stakeholders in the QA process and states that results and measures from the QA process as well as modifications on curricula, lecture contents, programme/course learning outcomes will be shared with all parties involved in the process.

The university asserts that social media platforms such as Facebook are an instrument to stay connected with graduates to receive feedback from them and to collect information on their last jobs.

According to the SER, surveys conducted include programme evaluations and course evaluations with evaluations of student workload. Progression and completion rates are demonstrated through the success and failure rates of each course. Additionally, surveys inquire about the satisfaction of graduates, the effectiveness of teachers and learning resources. Data on dropout rates of students as well as graduates working or continuing with the Master's degree in the horticulture sector is indicated in the SER.

Experts' evaluation

The panel of experts recognizes manifold approaches and efforts of the university regarding the evaluation of student success, services, facilities, and student satisfaction. The documentation of the student survey provides a good insight into the reality of the student experience, in which crucial aspects of the programme are queried. On-site resources, learning outcomes, and the competencies taught within the programme are evaluated at the appropriate point. Aspects related to the studies, such as participation in events and other factors that determine the satisfaction and success of the studies, are also surveyed. These numerous activities and elements are appropriately detailed and very positive. The extent to which they are systematically put together on an institutional level does not shine overwhelmingly clear, while the implemented methods are effective on the programme level.

One aspect clearly stands out in this overall positive assessment, specifically the evaluation of the students' workload. It could not become clear if and how this is subject to evaluation to determine whether it corresponds to the ECTS or whether certain courses are outliers (both upwards and downwards). The existing means of evaluating the programme are unfortunately insufficient with regard to the workload (**Finding 4**).

The panel of experts observed a very constructive relationship between students and teaching staff, hence in the direct conversation between the students and the lecturers it is clearly recognizable that appropriate measures are taken if there is a need for change or adjustment. In direct exchange, both with the students and with the lecturers, the panel has noticed that the teachers are very interested in the personal success of the students. The wishes of the students are also very positively addressed. Through the exchange with the groups involved (alumni and representatives of the job market), the curriculum is continuously updated adequately. Through feedback from the relevant groups, changes are identified, and appropriate adjustments are made.

As the panel learned the responsible persons are also always keen to incorporate the latest findings from their own research as well as from scientific discourse. Academic integrity is ensured by the good cooperation of the staff, who mostly have good experience in publishing. The teaching staff is very concerned about ensuring that students are able to gain the required knowledge fully and with appropriate relevance. This approach is also incorporated to its appropriate extent in the final theses. Statistical data such as length of study, pass rate, grades, and percentage of exams passed are taken into consideration by the appropriate people and used to further develop the programme. Problems that were found have been identified and are being addressed by appropriate staff supervision.

Conclusion

The criterion is partially fulfilled.

3. Learning, teaching and assessment of students

The delivery of material encourages students to take an active role in the learning process.

Students are assessed using accessible criteria, regulations, and procedures, which are made readily available to all participants and which are applied consistently.

Assessment procedures are designed to measure the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

[ESG 1.3]

Description

As stated in the SER, the study programme combines and applies different learning and teaching methods such as lectures, field practices, classroom and laboratory exercises, assignments, group works, workshops, and seminars. Online teaching via Microsoft Teams was a compulsory method during the COVID-19 pandemic and is still being used for hybrid and online courses during the Fall semester of 2021/2022. After each lesson, the recorded video is uploaded on the Moodle page where course information and materials are stored. Students who could not attend the lesson or had limited access to the internet can still then follow the lessons.

The evaluation tools and assessment instruments include final exams, midterm exams, presentations, projects, assignments, teamwork papers, quizzes (without prior announcement). Information on mid-term and final examinations are provided in the beginning of the academic year and can be conducted either face-to-face or online. Final examinations do not require performance of midterm examinations as a precondition. However, students must attend at least 70% of the compulsory courses to be eligible for final exams. Grading and publication of the results of the final examination must be done within five working days following the examination date. Schedules of both midterm and final exams are available on the university website, Moodle platform, Teams channel and on the notice boards around the offices of faculties and schools, and the Faculty Secretariat.

Lecturers use a grading system from A to F with accompanying score/explanation. In case a student believes their grade is not correct, they must appeal their mark with a petition within seven days. Two types of “compensation” for exams are make-up exams and re-sit exams. Make-up exams are for students who missed their exams due to illness or any other reasons, while re-sit exams are for students who failed the exams or want to improve the result.

Regarding practical internship conducted outside the university or in the research and implementation farm of EUL (approx. 300 da of land devoted to horticultural production), the summer training committee asks students to write reports as well as do a presentation. Likewise, students can conduct their graduation project outside EUL or in the research and implementation farm with the guidance of the project advisor. Report and presentation of the final project are required for evaluation. The jury consisting of the instructors from the department checks the work, report and presentation of the student and sees if it meets the standards of Horticulture graduate and awards the grades accordingly, as stated in the SER.

Experts' evaluation

The teaching in the programme is very well tailored to the actually quite diverse student body. The students at the university come from 89 countries, of which about 10% from Northern Cyprus and between 50% and 60%

from Turkey. 20% to 30% come from other countries. the number of international students has increased significantly in the last five years.

The teaching farm of the EUL is both in size and quality a profound practice area for fruit and vegetable production under sub-tropical conditions. There is a good balance of both keeping the local heritage of fruit types and selecting suitable types for market conditions. The integration of students over at least two years to the field practice is considered important to get familiar with market needs. The external practice is possible on different levels. On the local level there are – connected to the country size – limited opportunities in horticultural and agricultural companies, but these are well connected and used. Students report about field practice abroad both in home-countries and other states such as African and Middle East countries. Hence the facilities enable the use of practice-oriented learning methods that enable skill development in line with the respective intended learning outcomes. Room for future improvement can be identified in the teaching of soft skills. Corresponding offers and possibilities are incorporated into the courses by the lecturers themselves. However, the panel was unable to identify a general and overarching offer specializing in these competencies. Therefore, the need to promote students' skills in this area is not clearly recognizable to the panel of experts (**Finding 5**).

The assessment regulations are defined and known to the students. The assessments and results are well documented and generally comprehensible. It is noted that the main years of documentation are 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 and had to be performed during pandemic conditions. The course assessment types are sound and the documentation is sufficient.

The site visit confirmed that there is a strong personal and confidence-based relation between instructors and students within the horticulture programme, which helps to fulfil expected results. Individual solutions have been reported to guarantee an equal access for students in case of illness or personal needs. Also, there is an international student representation body on campus, which students can approach to in case of problems.

Overall it can be confirmed that teaching forms and assessment are aligned to the learning outcomes and that students are informed well ahead about respective requirements and assessments. Interpersonal dialogue is an important element in the communication approach of the department.

Conclusion

The criterion is fulfilled.

4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

Consistently applied, pre-defined, and published regulations are in place which cover student admission, progression, recognition, and certification.

[ESG 1.4]

Description

Admission

According to the SER, the processes and management of admissions at EUL is mainly carried out by the university's Registrar's Office alongside the faculties and the International Affairs Office. Generally, for the admission to the first cycle of higher education studies, potential candidates must hold a high-school graduation diploma or equivalent. The university requires that all students have to prove their English language ability by participating in an English Language Proficiency Test or provide an international accepted English proficiency certificate (an IELTS score of 5.5 or more or a TOEFL score of 537/203/75). Students who cannot provide such scores and do not pass the test have to improve their English skills at the university's English

preparation school. Successful candidates will receive a “Conditional Acceptance Letter” first before they receive the official “Acceptance Letter”.

An international student with a minimum average diploma grade of 'C' is admitted to the programme. International students who possess results of GCE/IGCSE/GCFE 'O' Levels examinations (or its equivalents) are also admitted provided they have a minimum grade of 'C' or above in 5 different subjects, of which one must include Mathematics.

The candidates from TRNC are admitted to the programmes according to their performance in the entrance examinations conducted and administered by the European University of Lefke. TRNC students who possess results of UK-Based GCE/IGCSE/GCFE 'O' Levels examinations (or its equivalents) are also admitted provided they have a minimum grade of 'C' or above in 5 different subjects, of which one must include Mathematics.

Candidates from the Turkish Republic can be admitted to the related programmes depending on their scores in the central Turkish University Entrance Examination (YKS) which is conducted by the Office of Student Selection and Placements (OSYM). Those students who are successful in the exam and have selected the related programmes in the European University of Lefke in their preference list are placed into those programmes.

Progression

According to the SER, the Department of Horticulture monitors student progression in different ways such as evaluation using surveys and following up the attendance of students in lectures using standard attendance forms. In addition, student progression can be reflected through the ratio and number of failed examinations. The OIBS system is a platform built by the university that gives lecturers the ability to trace back and follow up the progression of each student, as stated in the SER.

Recognition

The courses taken at other higher education institutions and other universities can be recognised in the Department of Horticulture with the condition that their contents and credits match or exceed courses of the programme. The courses can be matched as one to many, many to one, or one to one. Each department at EUL has a committee to evaluate and accept the transfer applications and to give exemptions in accordance with the laws of the department and the university. Letter “T” in the course names in the students’ transcript stands for the transfer courses from other universities.

Certification

Students receive a diploma at the end of the term when they complete the study programme. Diplomas are issued and signed by the Dean of the faculty and the Rector of the university. Besides, students are also given a diploma supplement including a transcript and ECTS information.

Experts’ evaluation

The selection and enrolment processes for the department are generally carried out within the framework of the policies applied by the university. Aiming at high education quality in an international framework, the university implements its own strategies to offer opportunities to students from abroad. In this context, appropriate policies are in place. Based on the document review and interviews with the students it can be concluded that the admission requirements are fit for purpose and their application is consistent. Since the University is not included in the ERASMUS+ program, the importance of the effective use of protocols and other programs such as Mevlana and Farabi is increasing. The panel of experts highly encourages the department to increase its participation in such initiatives. Although the department attaches great importance to internships in Turkey and invitations of guest speakers-trainers from Turkey at events, the intensity of these relations should be

increased, if possible, also with the involvement of other countries. More effective approaches need to be put into effect, especially in providing students with international relations and opportunities (**Finding 6**). Bilateral cooperation agreements with other countries should be increased. This will put the need to enhance existing recognition mechanisms more in front, while at this time existing mechanisms are appropriate and fit for purpose.

The monitoring of progression strongly benefits from a close relationship between teaching staff and students while also results for the past two years could be reviewed and indicate a thorough documentation. Certification at the end of the programme meets expectations and is appropriate.

Conclusion

The criterion is fulfilled.

5. Teaching staff

The composition (quantity, qualifications, professional and international experience, etc.) of the staff is appropriate for the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

Staff involved with teaching is qualified and competent to do so.

Transparent procedures are in place for the recruitment and development of staff.

[ESG 1.5]

Description

According to the list of teaching staff at the Department of Horticulture provided in the SER, there are 5 fulltime lecturers in the Horticulture programme (1 professor, 1 associate professor, and 3 assistant professors) and 13 fulltime lecturers coming from other schools and faculties such as School of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Faculty of Health Sciences, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, and the Foreign Languages programme. Details on qualifications of the five lecturers of the Horticulture programme are given in the SER.

The standard teaching load of fulltime professors, associate professors, assistant professors, and instructors is 15 hours per week. The teaching workload can be reduced when the lecturers are involved in research projects. The teaching staff holding executive position such as Dean, Director, Vice Dean, and Head of the department can have a reduction of teaching load by 3 credit-hours. The teaching workload is determined in advance before the start of an academic semester.

Regarding the staff recruitment process, the university announces the need for the teaching staff through the university web page. Anyone can apply for a position by sending his/her application and CV to the Human Resources. Based on the vacancies, the applications are evaluated in different levels of the university: the rectorate, the faculty, and the department. If there are eligible applicants for a certain position, the applicant is interviewed based on their CV. The department members must have enough teaching experience to conduct teaching to university students.

The concept of staff and career development focuses on research and teaching expectations of lecturers and the department. Faculty members can cooperate in research programmes with other universities or do a post-doc at another university. The university asserts in the SER that extra funding for conducting research is granted for the teaching staff through BAP Projects (Scientific Research Projects Grant), publication in SCI-Indexed/SSCI-Indexed or Scopus-Indexed Journal and participation in conferences.

Experts' evaluation

The members of the teaching staff of the department obviously have a very positive and personal relationship to the students. Beside their lectures, they include the students also in practical works in the university's trial plantations, which speaks for a positive approach of teaching staff towards didactics. The review of CV's also indicates that the staff is qualified for the current curriculum and appropriate in numbers.

Broadening the academic perspective both content wise as well as concerning the scope will be inevitable with the required curricular changes to fully cover the field of horticulture. Hence, a periodical staff exchange with international universities should be enhanced to promote the teaching quality and to keep it on a contemporary level. This might also include an encouragement towards enhancing didactical skills in higher education.

Very soon, the scientific focus of the teaching staff should be extended to legal sciences, business management, ornamental plants and cut flowers, seed production, basics of landscape construction and ecological landscape restoration (**Findings 1 & 7**).

The experts also find no indication to doubt transparency of hiring procedures and the fair and rigor application of existing policies.

Conclusion

The criterion is fulfilled.

6. Learning resources and student support

Appropriate facilities and resources are available for learning and teaching activities.

Guidance and support is available for students which includes advice on achieving a successful completion of their studies.

[ESG 1.6]

DescriptionLearning resources

Tuition fees at EUL vary in study programmes and detailed information can be found on the university website. Financial support for students can be in the form of scholarships based on students' academic performance and other criteria. The International Office receives students' application for scholarships as well as informs students about the availability and the requirements of scholarships. Three scholarship grants at EUL are Scholarships for students who have siblings studying at EUL, Academic Performance Award, and Sports and Culture Scholarships.

At EUL, students can study in the Arts and Sciences (AS) Building which has 48 classrooms and four computer laboratories. The Central Lecture Hall (CL) has 9 classrooms. The library of EUL has an area of 2500 m² with approximately 65 computers for students' use. There are about 48,500 printed publications and books and about 161,000 digital books and sources. The library also has group study rooms, seminar rooms for 50 people, computer labs and quiet study spaces. To identify plagiarism, the EUL library uses the online software packages: Turnitin and iThenticate.

Student support

When students are enrolled in the study programme, there is an advisor supporting them by giving advice and information related to the programme during the registration week. Students also receive course outlines and syllabi in printed forms or digitally on the platform Moodle, and a university email address to contact their advisors. The university Registrar's Office provides a student portal service through which students can see the curriculum, transcripts, weekly schedules, advisor's name, and registration process.

The Social and Cultural Activities Centre offers orientation days to introduce educational opportunities, the campus, and its facilities. Introduction to students is also conducted in the form of excursions and introductory events with the participation of the faculty and programme members and fellow students.

The Career Centre gives students advice on careers when their graduation is coming close. The Counselling and Guidance Centre assists students to deal with any problems they are experiencing and struggling in the light of the principle of confidentiality, neutrality, respect for peoples' rights and volunteering. The centre offers both individual and group counselling service.

Experts' evaluation

As the experts could confirm during discussion in the site visit students are provided with comprehensive documentation regarding the courses/modules, which includes the respective learning outcomes, methods of learning as well as the teaching, assessment and examination forms as well as the workload. The courses are coordinated in such a way that there are no overlaps and the studies can take place without any organizational obstacles. The expert panel can confirm that from an organizational point of view it can be assured that there is a problem-free completion of the study.

The resources that the panel of experts visited and assessed on-site were all-embracing and appropriate for a successful outcome. Appropriate funding, laboratories and equipment are comprehensively available and an appropriate infrastructure for the study programme is given. The facilities and workshops ensure comprehensive study and appropriate success. The facilities generally match the sizes of cohorts and provide students with a comprehensive surrounding for their academic success. The library is equipped with literature and space to an appropriate degree, and the university pursues offering the appropriate materials in the digital way. However – the above mentioned subjects, which should be included into the curriculum (**see Finding 1**) such as legal sciences, business management, ornamental plants and cutflowers, seed production, basics of landscape construction, ecological landscape restoration, soft skills) must be adequately represented in the library too (**Finding 8**).

An important facility available to the programme is the teaching farm. Currently it is well embedded in the teaching process of the current curriculum. As explained above at this time the curriculum does not represent the required spectrum of a horticulture programme and thus will have to be further developed. Within this process the panel of experts believes that the teaching farm offers a great opportunity as it can also become an experimental model site for local climate change adaptation and securing biodiversity of cultural landscapes in the Mediterranean (**see Finding 2**). A crucial role should be given to permanent linear structures integrating soil protection, creating micro-climate, preserving regional shrub and tree-species, providing nectar habitats for insects, and places for birds and reptiles. These structures can be built by students and help them to learn techniques of soil protection, habitat restoration, planning and maintenance of environmental plantations, habitat greening. In this field an existing cooperation with the EUL Nature Club is useful and could even be extended.

The teaching staff is available to support students to a large extent and the panel learned that the students always find an open ear. Indeed the panel of experts were truly impressed and enthusiastic about the work that the teaching staff does to support the students. Especially for new students and incomings, the university offers a number of services to support the students so that they arrive appropriately and receive

comprehensive support. This good support continues during the study while respecting the autonomy of the learner. The panel recognized the particular situation and context in North Cyprus which creates additional boundaries for incoming and outgoing students as relevant and well established student support mechanisms and programmes such as ERASMUS are not available to them. The students are supported to a very large extent in finding an appropriate internship for their studies and beyond. Due to the many different nationalities that study at EUL, a diversity of different needs of students needs to be covered. During the discussions the lecturers explained very well how they also tailor the support offers on an individual level to the diverse needs of students. The expert panel very positively recognizes the student support implemented by the department as a strength of the programme. Scholarships are available for students to a comprehensive extent if they achieve and maintain good grades. Within this scholarship, students are given extensive monetary support so that they can concentrate fully on their studies.

Conclusion

The criterion is fulfilled.

7. Information

Impartial and objective, up-to-date information regarding the programme and its qualifications is published regularly. This published information is appropriate for and available to relevant stakeholders.

[ESG 1.8]

Description

According to the SER, two systems informing students about their academic status and any information about courses are OIBS and Moodle. Information of the programme and its curriculum is also accessible on the EUL website. Course files are explained to be available to school/faculty instructors and administrative staff and stored at the archive of the Rectorate.

Experts' evaluation

During the discussions on site it became clear to the experts that there is a close connection between the department of EUL and local stake holders e.g. from the agricultural chamber, other universities, related governmental departments, and companies. Consequently, there is a good level of information available in these groups through exchange on the interpersonal level.

Regarding the information of internal stakeholders during pandemic conditions internal information activities have been reduced as lots of exchange relies on personal contacts while social media etc. use was increased so the panel of experts believes that the department managed well.

From the expert's point of view there is potential and opportunity for deepening information and exchange within the existing Nature Club of EUL in the Centre of Social and Cultural Activities

Different events like the *Natural beauties in orange, tangerine and flower gardens* of Yesilirmak and Bademliköy offer to visit unspoiled nature grounds and orange groves in the historical area of the Lefke Miner Statue.

The department, like the EUL features ambitious activities to recruit students from a wide region, and different channels are used including school visits to promote studying in the department. At the same time the access to international exchange is limited to regional programs like MEVLANA, there is no access to EU programs such as ERASMUS. The panel of experts recognizes that publicly available information is mainly tailored to

the style of public relations and recruitment while potential needs of recognition bodies or potential partners looking for up to date and matter of fact information on curriculum or learning outcomes are not prioritized. The department should consider providing more clearly structured information for these audiences in the future **(Finding 9)**.

Conclusion

The criterion is fulfilled.

Recommendation of the panel of experts

The panel of experts recommends accrediting the study programme “horticulture” offered by European University Lefke with conditions.

Commendation:

The panel of experts is very impressed about the already realized quality of the study program “Horticulture” at the EUL. There is an extremely high level of infrastructure and very experienced and highly motivated teaching staff. Research trials are run to provide a practical education with a sufficient scientific depth. The panel appreciates these conditions while noting the need for some extensions, as listed below.

Findings:

1. The curriculum needs to be updated and amended to fully cover the breadth of horticulture as defined in the qualification profile of the programme.
2. The trial farm should be further developed to meet the needs of a horticulture programme even better and also become an experimental model site for local climate change adaptation and securing biodiversity of cultural landscapes in the Mediterranean.
3. Options for internships should be broadened and extended.
4. Student’s workload must be evaluated and the documented used in continuous development of the programme.
5. The development of soft skills should be better assured in the curriculum.
6. International exchange opportunities for students should be increased.
7. The academic portfolio of staff should be developed along the further development of the programme to fully cover the represented aspects of horticulture.
8. Availability of literature resources for the topics to be included in the curriculum should be improved to support the teaching of the required competencies at the respective academic level.
9. The department should improve the availability of up to date information on facts and elements of the curriculum in the publicly available sources like its website.