Policy objectives and relevant legislation provide for a quality assurance system for higher education in Cyprus within which educational institutions will be driven to enhance quality and establish an internal quality culture. Quality assurance is considered as a key issue for the Bologna Process and the EU Modernisation Agenda for Higher Education. It is also considered important towards the fulfilment of the Government aim to establish Cyprus as a regional education centre for Higher Education.

**Responsible Bodies**

Internal evaluation at the higher education level is regulated in the form of self-evaluation which every institution is required to carry out according to relevant legislation.

External evaluation takes different forms according to the type and level of each institution. The following bodies or authorities are responsible for external quality assurance in higher education in Cyprus:

- **The Ministry of Education and Culture**[^1] is responsible for the enforcement of relevant legislation and the evaluation and control of non-university level private institutions of higher education through its Higher and Tertiary Education Department. In the case of a few non-university level public institutions that come under the remit of other ministries, the corresponding ministries are responsible for their external evaluation.

- **The Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education**[^2] (DI.P.A.E.) has been established in November 2015, by Law (N.136(I)/2015[^3]) as the competent authority for quality assurance and accreditation in Higher Education in the Republic of Cyprus, replacing the Council of Educational Evaluation and Accreditation (CEEA), the Advisory Committee on Higher Education (ACTE) and the Evaluation Committee for Private Universities (ECPU) and assuming their responsibilities.

The Agency is responsible for ensuring the quality of Higher Education in Cyprus and supporting, through the procedures provided by the relevant legislation, the continuous improvement and upgrading of higher education institutions and their programmes. According to the founding Law, the Agency has, amongst others, the following competencies:

- Institutional, departmental and programmatic evaluation and accreditation of higher education;
- Quality assurance in higher education on the basis of the European Standards;
- Evaluation and accreditation of cross-border forms of education, offered by local institutions in member states or third countries;
- Assessment of the conditions for the provision of cross-border education from foreign institutions in Cyprus;
- Assessment of inter-institutional cooperation of higher education;
- The provision of information of quality assurance in higher education.
The **Cyprus Council for the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications** [4] (Κυπριακό Συμβούλιο Αναγνώρισης Τίτλων Σπουδών - KYSATS) is a seven-member independent body responsible for the recognition of qualifications awarded by recognised institutions of higher education, either in Cyprus or abroad. KYSATS was established by provisions of **Law N.68(I)/1996** [3] on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications. It is appointed by the Council of Ministers upon a recommendation by the Minister of Education and Culture. KYSATS is a member of the ENIC / NARIC network.

The **Centre for Educational Research and Evaluation** [5] (Κέντρο Εκπαιδευτικής Έρευνας και Αξιολόγησης – CERE) was set up as an independent unit within the Ministry of Education and Culture, in 2008, with the aim of conducting research and evaluation at all levels of the education system.

**Approaches and methods for Quality Assurance**

**Evaluation of academic staff**

No formal system of evaluation for academic staff at the university level is provided in the higher education legislation. However, students are often required to make informal appraisals of the teaching staff.

Academic staff at non-university level public institutions are evaluated every year, according to the Civil Service Regulations based on **Law N.1/1990** [6] and its amendments. This evaluation requires the teacher to complete a form outlining his/her main duties and any additional work he/she may have undertaken during the year. This form is evaluated by a three-member committee, usually consisting of the teacher’s direct superior and two other members of a higher rank than the teacher, who decide on the grades to be assigned. The teacher is notified of the results and has the right to appeal to the committee. The results of these evaluations have no impact on the teachers’ salaries, but they are taken into consideration in the case of an application for promotion.

**External evaluation – public universities**

Public universities, as academically autonomous entities, are not liable to supervision. External evaluation is not regulated for the University of Cyprus or the Technological University of Cyprus. However, the Open University **Law N.234(I)/2002** [7], provides for external evaluation of the institution to be carried out by experts.

Although external evaluation is not required for the University of Cyprus, the Council and the Senate of the university have approved a general external evaluation of the institution to be carried out by the European University Association (EUA) every four to five years, with a follow-up assessment two years after the general evaluation. The first general evaluation took place in 2001. In addition, evaluations of specific departments are carried out, which are programmed to take place two years before the general evaluation. The first evaluation of departments was carried out in 2001.

As part of the evaluation procedure, a ‘self-evaluation’ report, the structure of which was designed by the Quality Assurance Office of the University, is sent to the EUA with detailed information on the university’s work and operation. Then a three-day site visit takes place and the relevant evaluation committee is expected to submit its report in two months' time from the date of the visit. The findings are discussed at the Senate and University Council level, where measures for improvements may be decided.

In addition, the Administration Services of the University of Cyprus have been evaluated by the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM). In 2008, the Administration Services was
awarded the "Committed to Excellence" recognition followed in 2009 by the "Recognised for Excellence – 3 stars" for the University Library.

Similarly, the Technological University of Cyprus participates in the U-Multirank evaluation and ranking system.

**External evaluation - private universities and non-university institutions**

It is regulated that private universities will be evaluated by the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education (DI.P.A.E.) every five years after their establishment. As provided in the relevant Law, (N. 136(I)/2015), their evaluation will be based on the European Standards. Starting 2016 DI.P.A.E. has started evaluating non-university level institutions.

**External evaluation - non-university level**

At the non-university level of education, public educational institutions are accountable to the respective Ministries, which are responsible for ensuring that quality standards are retained.

Private non-university level institutions are inspected by the officers of the Department of Tertiary Education of the Ministry of Education and Culture. Law N.67(I)/1996 [8] and its amendments cover the inspection regime for private institutions. As provided, the authorised officers of the Ministry of Education and Culture may enter the institution and the classrooms in order to inspect and ascertain the following:

- Adherence to the conditions of establishment and operation
- The suitability of the staff employed
- Observation of the schedules of classes and curriculum
- The teaching work performed
- Any deficiencies and the measures taken by those in charge to remedy them, thereby ensuring the efficient operation of the institution
- Observation of the internal regulations
- The suitability of the premises
- Compliance with the provisions of Law N.(67(I)/1996 and its amendments.

Such inspections will be carried out at least twice a year and the officer responsible for the inspection draws up a report to be submitted to the Minister of Education and Culture. If there are negative comments in the report, the Minister communicates these comments to the owner and director of the institution and requires action to be taken.

As concerns the programmes of study of the non-university level private institutions, they are liable to accreditation by the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education (DI.P.A.E.). As part of the procedure of accreditation [9], the authorities of the institution have to complete and submit to DI.PAE an application form [10] with detailed predetermined criteria which cover every aspect of the institution's operation. The results of the evaluation are first communicated to the institution's authorities and to the Minister of Education and Culture and then, they are published on the Agency's website. The evaluation is based on the European Standards, as provided by
the DIPAE founding Law, and the interested institutions are consulted to be informed for these standards.

**Internal evaluation - institutions**

Higher education institutions, both public and private, at the university or the non-university level, are required by relevant laws to submit a yearly report on their activities at the end of each academic year. Public universities submit their reports to the Council of Ministers. In addition, the Technological University of Cyprus has developed its own system of 'internal evaluation'.

The Open University Law provides for the setting up of an Internal Evaluation Committee (Επιτροπή Εσωτερικής Αξιολόγησης) by decision of the Senate.

Similarly, the Private Universities Law provides for the establishment and operation of an Internal Evaluation Committee (Επιτροπή Εσωτερικής Αξιολόγησης), which evaluates the standard of the academic work offered in all departments and submits suggestions for improvement.