

**Factors influencing international  
students' decisions in choosing a  
Cyprus Higher Education Institution:  
Implications for recruitment and marketing.**

A research project submitted to Middlesex  
University in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Professional Studies

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April 2011

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project work as well as the knowledge and experience I gained would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of a number of people whose contribution was invaluable. First of all I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my consultants Dr Felix Maringe of the University of Southampton and Dr Andis Panayiotou as well as my programme advisor Dr Niki Menelaou of Middlesex University, whose encouragement, supervision, valuable help, constructive feedback and guidance greatly impacted the completion of this research work.

I would also like to thank all Americanos College staff members who participated in this research, for giving me some of their valuable time and sharing their knowledge and understanding of issues related to this research work. I am also grateful to all the people at Americanos College and in other higher education institutions who commented on my work.

I must also thank all Americanos College international students who participated in this research. Their enthusiasm and honesty was much appreciated. Without their cooperation this research would not have been possible. I wish them all the best.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to my parents, Kyriacos and Anthi, for their support and belief in my ability to reach the end of this long journey. Without their endless love, I would never have embarked upon this journey.

Finally, but most important, I am eternally indebted to my beloved and wonderful wife Eftychia and beautiful daughter Anthea for their love, encouragement and above all their understanding especially during those weekends when I spent more time in the office than at home with them. I would like to thank them for forgiving me for not fully playing my roles as a husband and father. All I can say is that it would take another doctorate thesis to express my deep love for them.

## ABSTRACT

This research project was the first of its kind to be carried out for any of Cyprus's Higher Educational Institution (HEI). Its purpose was to determine and study the factors influencing international students' decisions in choosing a Cyprus HEI, namely Americanos College (AC). It therefore establishes and contributes to the understanding of the factors that 'pull' students to Cyprus and its HEIs. Based on the findings, the primary research aim was to suggest changes to the current recruitment and marketing policies and practices of AC, in order to increase AC's international student population.

In meeting the research objectives, this study employed the exploratory and intrinsic case study research method. The study involved the gathering of a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques (DCTs) and this methodological triangulation enhanced the validity and reliability of this study. More specifically, it entailed an extensive literature review on students' choice and decision-making in higher education, current trends in the international educational scene as well as in the higher education marketing. Furthermore, in the absence of any local empirical research (except for a few relevant questions of the study), this project reviewed the international empirical research in-depth on relevant aspects, such as study abroad, HEI choice and decision-making. Moreover, this research employed a survey questionnaire on a sample of 509 AC international students and five in-depth interviews of AC's admissions staff members. In addition, it entailed observations by the researcher of the admissions department setting in order to further support the data collected from the other three DCTs.

The key findings of this research suggest that the first reason international students choose Cyprus's HEIs is the relatively low tuition fees (TF) charged as compared to other more well-known destinations. Another reason for their choice is the easy admissions and immigration procedures. In addition, the findings clearly show that the HEIs' agents are by far the most influential persons in the decision-making process of international students prior to their coming to Cyprus. Furthermore this suggests that the role of current students and alumni in the recruitment of students is very important and this is directly linked with a strong word of mouth (WOM) effect.

Finally, the research findings helped in developing more effective international student recruitment and marketing practices. The practical and straight-forward recommendations will undoubtedly change AC's recruitment and marketing practices, accommodating among other things, the students' views on a number of important issues. This in practice means that AC can now adopt a more targeted approach in recruiting international students.

## GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

AC	Americanos College
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Council
AUCC	Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada
CEEA	Council of Educational Evaluation-Accreditation
CMEC	Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture
CS	Case Study
CUT	Cyprus University of Technology
DCT	Data Collection Technique
DHTE	Department of Higher and Tertiary Education
EAIE	European Association for International Education
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
EEA	European Economic Area
EU	European Union
GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Association
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OUC	Open University of Cyprus
PITE	Private Institutions of Tertiary Education
SM	Staff Member
SPSS	Statistical Product and Service Solutions
TF	Tuition Fees
UNESCO	United Nation's Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UCY	University of Cyprus
WOM	Word of mouth
WTO	World Trade Organisation
WWW	World Wide Web



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 'Push' and 'pull' factors influencing international students' flow across borders

Globalisation has impacted higher education (HE) to a great extent and is now becoming a major trend which continues to grow. Worldwide, 84 million students attend 20,000 HEIs and 66 million adults and more than 50% of all employed people participate in some form of continuing education (Glakas, 2003). Bassett (2009) underlines that “with demand to education increasing worldwide, trade in the supply of education services seems destined for continued growth” (p. 62). Global demand for HE was forecast to reach 160 million students in 2025. Altbach (2002) estimated that more than 1.6 million students study outside of their home country. But why do international students choose to study away from their home country in the first place? What are the reasons which drive international students to study abroad?

This movement of students around the globe may be explained by a combination of 'push' and 'pull' factors (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002). These factors affect the demand for HE. The 'push' factors are present in the students' home country and 'force' students to pursue international education. The 'pull' factors, on the other hand, are present in the host country and attract students towards studying in that specific country. A number of studies investigate patterns and motivations of international students' migration to Western countries (Maringe and Carter, 2007) some of which are analysed in the next Chapter. None, however, exists on the reasons international students choose Cyprus for their studies. Among other things, this research project will examine the 'push' and 'pull' factors of international students who study in a Cyprus's HEI. This project will also try to investigate the institutional 'pull' factors and their significance to the overall students' decision-making process. This research is of greater importance now, given the focus of Cyprus's HEIs to recruit from abroad.

## 1.2 Cyprus's HEIs turning to recruitment of international students

Competition among Cypriot private HEIs for the recruitment of new students is fierce. Currently, there are twenty-eight (28) such institutions in a small country like Cyprus with a local student market scarcely big enough to satisfy them. Not only do these private HEIs have to cope with the intense competition but they also have to face the fact that Cypriot students have a preference for studying abroad. According to statistics by the Department of Higher and Tertiary Education (DHTE) of the Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture (CMEC) ([www.moec.gov.cy/daae/statistics.html](http://www.moec.gov.cy/daae/statistics.html)) for the years 1996 to 2003, more than half of the high school graduating students chose not to study in Cyprus and this trend is expected to continue.

The demand from Cypriot students for HE has risen significantly. According to data by the Cyprus Department of Statistical Service for the year 2006–2007 (Table IX ), 82% of all high school graduates progress to HE, 37% in Cyprus and 45% abroad. The main HE destination abroad for Cypriot high school graduates for the academic year 2006-2007 was Greece (63%) followed by the UK (27%) and the USA (3%) (Table 90). The strong cultural and historical links that Cyprus bears with Greece, in addition to the fact that Greek public HEIs offer education free of charge, ensures that Greece will continue to attract a significant number of Cypriot high school graduates.

Cyprus's accession into the European Union (EU) in 2004 meant that Cypriot students, who up to 2004 were paying UK universities (second preferred destination) the 'overseas' rate of TF, were from then onwards eligible for the 'home' one which is applicable to all EU citizens. This, in effect, resulted in a significant drop in the TF from approximately GBP 8,000 to GBP 3,000 and at the same time an increase in the number of students who could now afford to study in the UK and who might otherwise have studied in Cyprus. According to the 'Students in Higher Education Institutions 2006/07' publication of the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) of the UK, there were 2,295 Cypriots studying in the UK for the academic year 1994/95 and 4,210 for 2003/04. The corresponding figure for the academic year 2006/07 was 8,710, an increase of 380% from 1994/95 and 207% from 2003/04, the year that Cyprus entered the EU. Moreover, the drop in the TF of UK universities attracted students who wanted to study in the USA to finally choose UK for their studies. Thus, there has been a steady

decrease in the number of students studying in the USA, from 20% in the academic year 1993/94 to 2.7% in 2006/07.

The establishment of two new public universities in Cyprus, the Open University of Cyprus (OUC) in 2006 and the Cyprus University of Technology (CUT) in 2007, in addition to the already well-established University of Cyprus (UCY), offers students who want to study in Cyprus more choices within public education. These two new public universities are expected to attract a considerable number of students who might otherwise have turned to private HEIs in Cyprus. The range of courses that these two universities offer, cover some courses which were not offered by the University of Cyprus but were being offered by private HEIs. Therefore, some students will prefer to follow these courses in the two public universities rather than in the private HEIs and this will affect the recruitment of these private institutions negatively. Furthermore, one of the reforms that CMEC is implementing as part of its Bologna requirements is to increase the student intake of public universities and this will put even more pressure on to private HEIs to recruit from abroad. (Bologna Process, National Reports, 2004-2005, 2005-2007 and 2007-2009).

All the aforementioned facts have resulted in private HEIs not being satisfied with the small size of the Cypriot student market and the insufficient number of available potential students. Therefore, there is a great need for international recruitment which is crucial to the wellbeing, if not survival, of most of these private institutes, colleges and universities. Most HEIs all over the world have been 'forced' and were transformed to highly internationalised entities to survive in this competitive global environment we are living in. For most HEIs in Cyprus, this transformation took place in the early nineties and is now at its peak. The competition in Cyprus has been intensified by the introduction of the first three private universities in 2007. However, globally, the environment is much more competitive and Cyprus's HEIs should fight very hard to survive and succeed.

### 1.3 Cyprus's HEIs competing with foreign ones

Equally important to local competition is competition with foreign HEIs. Cyprus's HE managed to enter the international educational arena as another option in international HE after years of hard work, good promotion and marketing, as well as aggressive recruitment. This accomplishment is envied even by countries bigger in size and with a better and well-established reputation in education (e.g. Greece and Italy) which are struggling to attract good numbers (according to the size of the country and/or their population and/or the number of students in their HEIs) of international students.

Maringe (2006) argues that: "Higher education environments have become increasingly competitive and institutions have to compete for students in the recruitment markets" (p. 466). Cyprus's HEIs are now competing with institutions much bigger in size and with better status, based in countries with long-standing reputation in education. For many years now, the UK and the USA have been the leaders in international recruitment (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003) and this is still true. Moreover, during some periods the increased places offered to international students by the leading HE countries and the ease in visa granting makes recruiting tougher for other smaller countries. A good example of this is the case of the UK in 2008-2009 (Slack and Clark, 2009). However, other English speaking countries e.g. Canada and Australia have come to the scene and are also focusing on recruiting international students (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka's, 2006). Therefore, competition for Cyprus's HEIs is much more intense than before.

Moreover, persuading students to study in Cyprus is not an easy task as the majority of the international students and their parents do not know much about the small country of Cyprus. Their ignorance about the country makes them very reluctant to choose to study in any of its HEIs. Yet, many international students do choose HEIs in Cyprus to continue their education due to various factors which will be analysed in this research. Currently, Cyprus attracts students from more than 50 countries. According to the Statistical Service of Cyprus, 5,961 international students were studying in Cyprus for the academic year 2006/07 which represented 26.81% of the total number of students in Cyprus.

Although HEIs in countries like the UK, USA, Canada, Australia and Ireland have a clear advantage over their Cypriot counterparts, Cyprus manages to attract a small share

of the international market which is proportionally higher (in relation to the total number of students studying in Cyprus) from the corresponding percentage of other well-known destinations. According to HESA statistics for the academic year 2006/07, non-UK students accounted for 19% of all students awarded a HE qualification while for the same period the percentage of non-USA citizens studying in the USA was 4% ([http://www.internationalstudent.com/study\\_usa/](http://www.internationalstudent.com/study_usa/)). Cyprus continues to attract a good number of international students and is slowly building a good reputation as an educational destination. However, in addition to the quality of education, it offers some other factors which help to attract international students. These are as follows:

- English is the second language in Cyprus and it is therefore widely spoken;
- Cyprus is a member of the EU;
- Cyprus is a popular tourist destination due to its nice weather and beautiful beaches and it offers hospitality and catering students the opportunity for paid practical training in the tourist industry;
- It has a strong and healthy economy, and students can work in well-paid jobs;
- It has a very safe, friendly and easy-going environment;

#### **1.4 Americanos College**

AC is one of the twenty-eight private HEIs based in Nicosia, Cyprus. The College was founded in 1975 and is one of the oldest academic institutions in Cyprus. AC currently employs 18 administrators and 40 faculty members. It offers a Masters degree, 4-year Bachelor degrees, 3-year Higher Diplomas, 2-year Diplomas and 1-year Certificate in the areas shown in Table 1.1. AC takes advantage of Cyprus's good reputation as an educational destination in addition to the many benefits outlined above. The College has been working hard to attract students from all over the world and raise its international market share.

The College and the programmes of study it offers are registered with the CMEC. Most of these programmes, including three Bachelor degrees, are accredited by the Council of Educational Evaluation-Accreditation (CEEAA).



Programmes of Study	Masters	Bachelor	Higher Diploma	Diploma	Certificate
Business Administration	■	■		■	
International Business		■		■	
Human Resource Management		■		■	
Marketing		■		■	
Management Information Systems		■		■	
Computer Science		■		■	
Hotel Management		■		■	
Culinary Arts			■	■	
Travel and Tourism Management		■		■	
Secretarial Studies				■	■

**Table 1.1: AC Programmes of Study**  
(Source: AC Bulletin 2006-2008)

AC enjoys a very good reputation both in Cyprus and especially abroad. It has been one of the leaders in international recruitment for some years now. As a result, AC's student population has been increasing at a fast pace.

Semester	No. of Students
Fall Semester 2009	1193
Fall Semester 2008	1306
Fall Semester 2007	805
Fall Semester 2006	600
Fall Semester 2005	497
Fall Semester 2004	346

**Table 1.2: Registered students at AC**

Currently, AC has approximately 1200 students registered in various programmes of study, mainly from third-world and developing countries. It has a multinational student population representing more than 30 countries.

AC faces intense competition from the private HEIs, twenty-five Private Institutions of Tertiary Education (PTEI) and three recently established private universities. In

addition, there is uncertainty over the future of the higher educational system in Cyprus for the following four main reasons:

- A. The Cypriot government is trying to pass a law that will allow international students to apply and register only in accredited programmes of study;
- B. Cyprus is committed (as a result of becoming a member of the EU) to becoming a Schengen country member. The issuing of Schengen visas, will mean tougher visa entry requirements for all international students, especially from third-world and developing countries;
- C. There is intense competition from HEIs based in the Northern part of Cyprus occupied by Turkish troops. The establishment of 7 universities together with aggressive promotion to attract students from the same target markets proves to be damaging the growth of international recruitment for Cyprus's HEIs;
- D. The international market for Cyprus is very price sensitive and small HEIs which do not offer accredited courses attract many international students because they can afford to charge lower fees.

Although AC recruits a good number of new international students and the total number of registered student increases, there is a need to take into account the above negative points, as well as the factors influencing students' decisions in choosing a Cyprus's HEI. Can AC continue attracting big numbers of international students as has been the case for the last few years? Should the College change its marketing and recruitment practices in order to increase the new intake of international students?

### **1.5 Researcher's background and position at AC**

I started my career immediately after completing my studies in the UK. I successfully obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Finance and Economics from the University of East Anglia, Norwich and Masters of Science degree in Finance from Imperial College, London. As a shareholder of the College, I wanted to have a first hand experience by working in as many departments as possible. The first position I held was that of Head of the Marketing Department. I had worked in this position for more than a year before I became Head of the Promotion and Development Department of the College. This was a newly created position that was very much needed at the College at

that time. A big part of my new role still had to do with the promotion and marketing of the College but at the same time it offered me the opportunity to contribute to the development of the College in many ways, both locally and internationally. What is more, my new position entailed taking charge of the promotion and recruitment in China.

In July 2001, in addition to my College post, I took the directorship of TCS (Training Consulting Services) Educational Consultants, a consulting firm recruiting students mainly for British Universities. This position, which I have been holding until today, helps me with my current College duties as it gives me the opportunity to experience the agent's perspective of the recruitment process and the way British Universities deal with the recruitment and marketing in Cyprus.

I remained at the Promotion and Development post of the College until 2005 when I became Director of the Admissions Department, a position which I have been holding until today. Being the Director of Admissions, a key post in a tuition-dependent private HEI entails many duties and responsibilities. My primary responsibility is the creation and implementation of the annual recruitment plan. Furthermore, I promote the College in Cyprus and abroad and recruit sufficient numbers of quality students.

Throughout my career, I have had the chance to meet many HE stakeholders (Ministers of Education and Culture, Members of the Parliament, etc.) and have meetings with them on various issues. I have gained a very good understanding of the relevant laws and regulations governing HE and how these stakeholders affect policy decision-making. Another major aspect of my work, which has contributed a lot to my learning, is my extensive travelling to different countries all over the world. This has offered me invaluable experiences which I have found to be very exciting and rewarding. I strongly believe that travelling for almost ten years to so many countries has given me experiences which I could not have gained in Cyprus. Above all, I have learnt to adapt to different environments, cultures and religions. Generally, the experience of my extensive travelling has provided me with a solid background to successfully become an international student recruiter and subsequently run the admissions office of the College.

The knowledge and experience I have gained over the last 12 years is directly associated with marketing in education and recruitment. Managing the College through the aforementioned posts involves learning from my own practice and from the practices of others both in Cyprus and abroad. In my career so far I have faced complex problems that needed urgent and viable solutions. Managing the College means that I have had to become more skilful in my problem solving and decision-making abilities. My reflective practice has facilitated both my own personal improvement and that of the College.

### **1.6 Research aim, objectives, target audience and positioning statement**

There are two definitions of research which match to a great extent the aims of the research to be undertaken. Howard and Sharp (1983) define research as “seeking through methodical processes to add to one’s own body of knowledge and, hopefully, to that of others, by the discovery of non-trivial facts and insights” (p. 6). Drew (1980) similarly argues that “research is conducted to solve problems and to expand knowledge” (p. 4). Further down he defines research as “a systematic way of asking questions, a systematic method of enquiry” (p. 8). I have a strong desire to bring change to the College and to expand my knowledge of the subject of my work. I believe that both of these reasons for research will contribute a lot to my personal development and will thus improve the quality of my work and the work of others.

Over the years, academic institutions have become more aggressive in their marketing campaigns both domestically and internationally. Throughout these years, we have noticed the slow emergence of education marketing as more and more HEIs are realising how important it is. International education marketing should enhance consumer satisfaction taking into consideration the needs and beliefs of the students.

The aim of this project is to determine and study the factors influencing international students’ decisions with regard to studies in a Cyprus’s HEI. Based on the findings, the ultimate research aim will be to suggest changes to the current recruitment and marketing practices of AC, so as to increase the College’s international student population. In order to meet the above research aims it is necessary to accomplish the following eight research objectives:

1. Identify from the relevant literature current trends in the international HE setting affecting HEIs and transforming the education world as we know it today;
2. Identify from other relevant empirical studies the factors influencing international students' decisions with specific reference to the factors influencing their mobility around the globe;
3. Identify the factors and the people influencing AC international students' choices;
4. Identify the current students and alumni's role in recruitment and marketing;
5. Determine how the behaviour/conduct by key members of the recruitment staff affects recruitment;
6. Identify the strengths and weaknesses of AC;
7. Critically analyse the current marketing and recruitment policy and existing practices of AC and suggest changes which will increase the international students intake;
8. Determine supporting procedures or practices which might help in the recruitment of students.

An important argument in the literature on HE marketing is that the basic marketing laws which apply to the business sector are also present and used in the educational sector, e.g. the 4Ps (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003), with HEIs positioning themselves within the market and creating a clear image to the public. The need to generate additional revenue has forced many academic institutions to adopt a well-established marketing approach which should be geared towards the customer (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003). The author is a strong advocate of the view that HEIs need good marketing the same as in all the other businesses in the service sector. Moreover, he considers that students in any HEI are the customers and therefore their needs should always be taken into consideration. This research is very much about the needs of AC's customers and the way they choose a HEI.

This research project is aimed at different groups of people who have an interest in it for different reasons. The target audience of my study and their interest will be the following:

- AC shareholders who would be interested in finding out whether the College management can change its recruitment and marketing practices, which have been the same for years, in order to increase the student intake;
- AC staff who would be interested in finding why students choose AC for their studies and concentrate on better promoting these factors. Moreover, AC staff members would be interested in improving, if needed, some of the current practices as shown by this research, which might be currently out-of-date, thus making their jobs harder;
- Heads of admissions departments, education marketers and HE recruiters and Policy makers (Ministry of Education and Culture, Migration Department) would be interested in the first ever research of its kind in Cyprus which will shed some light into the reasons international students study at Cyprus's HEIs. The factors influencing students' choices could be used by the policy-makers of their departments in making Cyprus even more attractive to international students.

### Positioning Statement

The author, one of the Directors of AC, which is a tuition-dependent HEI in Cyprus, will examine the choices international students make in choosing Cyprus and AC for their studies. With the right critical analysis, he will suggest supporting procedures or practices which will increase the international students intake. This will thus directly benefit the author's organisation.

This analysis will yield practical recommendations which will be both easily understandable and easily put into action. The author will illustrate how research findings can be applied to policy-making procedures and practice by bridging the gap between research and policy, practice or personal decisions.

The findings of this project will be of interest to the target audience mentioned above. Upon completion of this research project, the target audience will receive a copy of the executive summary report which is included in Appendix 9. This report will include a summary of the main findings of this research. It is considered useful to send this report as it would be practically impossible for them to read the whole project. However, the project would be available to anyone who wishes to study it in depth.

## 1.7 Significance of the research

Foreign students are being sought by so many universities around the world that make the marketing strategy more important year after year. Hence, the appropriate recruitment practice should take into consideration environmental and external factors as well as the students' needs and their capacity to meet those needs. Tuition-dependent private HEIs are expected to recruit higher number of new students to secure their growth financially. If institutions of HE cannot meet the demands of today's competitive market successfully, the problems facing independent colleges and universities will only continue to grow (Dehne, 1999).

Petruzzellis and Romanazzi (2010) declare that “understanding choice and decision making of students helps in better qualifying the institutional positioning strategy through a clear identification of the ‘purchase’ behaviour” (p. 142). This project is the first of its kind in Cyprus (with the exception of a previous research study, which had a different aim, but it included a few questions relevant to my research, that are analysed in Chapter 2). It intends to analyse the factors which influence choice and decision-making of international students in choosing a Cyprus's educational institution. AC can only generate additional revenue if it carefully assesses the factors that influence the mobility of international students around the world with specific reference to Cyprus. Assessing these factors could help develop more effective international student recruitment and marketing strategies and techniques that could increase the students intake at AC. The number of international students recruited plays a vital role in the success or failure of colleges with a big percentage of international students, like AC. Moe (1997) suggests that in order for institutions to survive and thrive under such conditions, each institution must have a strategic plan for recruitment. This requires institutions to assess marketing activities, target markets, recruitment procedures, social support and financial characteristics that might attract international students. This research will try to suggest practical ways to attract more international students.

Although the research concerns the international students of AC, many of the factors analysed and the methodology used are applicable to other academic institutions in Cyprus, and to a lesser extent, abroad. Also, other institutions may benefit from the

findings of the study by identifying, comparing and evaluating their strengths and weaknesses in their recruitment and marketing actions.

### **1.8 Organisation of the project**

This research project is divided into five Chapters. Chapter 1 is an introduction to this project. Chapter 2 provides a review of the relevant literature in order to give the theoretical foundation for this research study. Moreover, Chapter 2 provides the answers to the first two research objectives. Chapter 3 analyses the methodology used in this research giving an explanation about the research approach and about the DCTs used. Chapter 4 presents the analysis of the data, as well as the research findings for the rest of the research objectives. Chapter 5 briefly summarises the main findings and presents the conclusions and recommendations derived from this research.



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

This literature review provides the theoretical foundation for this research study. It is divided into four parts. The background and context of tertiary and HE in Cyprus (2.2), the evolution and use of marketing in HE (2.3), current trends in the international HE setting affecting HEIs (2.4) and lastly the policy and research context on students' choice and decision-making in HE (2.5).

In the first part, the author introduces and examines the background setting and context of Cyprus's HE and the measures decided and undertaken towards meeting the goals of the Bologna process. Since AC is part of the Cyprus's HE setting, the author includes a description of some AC important facts which are relevant for this research. The analysis of the AC setting in this section is added as it is considered important in answering to the research objective 7 and 8. In the second part, the author briefly highlights the evolution and use of marketing in HE. In the following part the author answers to the first research objective. Specifically, the author examines issues which are very important to today's international HE market and which affect HEIs, that is, globalisation, internationalisation, marketisation and Europeanisation. Lastly, but not least important, in this literature review, the author analyses the policy and research context on students' choice and decision-making in HE. This section covers the students' HEI choice and decision-making processes, as well as the overseas study choices for international students. Importantly, this fourth section includes the critical review of similar research studies undertaken on local and international students on a local and international perspective and meets the second research objective. Section 3.3.1 justifies how the literature review helped the author carry out this research project and why these readings were chosen to be included in this project.

## 2.2 Cyprus's Tertiary and HE setting

The Cypriot economy is characterised by a high degree of private initiative and entrepreneurship, especially after the Turkish invasion of 1974. This applies to the education sector as well. The first establishment of private colleges took place as early as the 1960s whereas the first public university admitted its first students in 1992. In between those three decades Cyprus's HE underwent many developments. Undoubtedly, one of the most important developments was the establishment of the Department of Higher and Tertiary Education (DHTE) of the CMEC in 1984. From there on, the department's efforts were to bring HE to a level comparable to that of other European countries, and following Cyprus's entry into the EU, to take measures to align the Cyprus's educational policy to that of the EU. The department's major measures, which aimed at the expansion of Cyprus's HE were:

1. To prepare the law that would govern the establishment and operation of public and private tertiary education institutions;
2. To establish public universities and help in their involvement with the social and economic life in Cyprus;
3. To create a suitable institutional framework for the operation of private institutions of tertiary education (PITE);
4. To establish the CEEA;
5. To further upgrade the private tertiary education by preparing the law, approved in 2005, which regulates the establishment and operation of Private Universities.

Higher and tertiary education in Cyprus is offered to local and international students by public and private tertiary and HE institutions at university and non-university level. Currently, there are three public universities, three private universities (which began their operation after a decision by the Council of Ministers on 12 September 2007), seven public institutions of tertiary education (which function under different Ministries of the Republic of Cyprus) and twenty-five PITE. The private and public universities offer undergraduate and post-graduate programmes of study. With the exception of the Higher Technical Institute and the School of Nursing which are now integrated into the Cyprus University of Technology, and the Mediterranean Institute of Management, which offers a postgraduate Diploma, all the other public institutions of tertiary

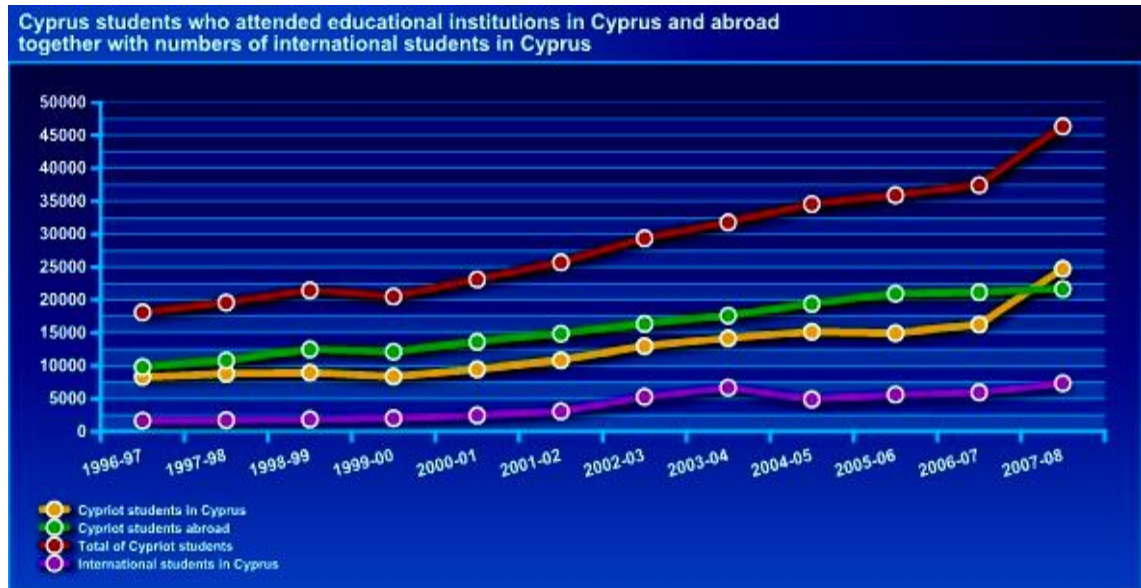
education offer vocational courses with a duration of one to three years. None of these institutions offer a Bachelor degree.

PITE offer both academic and/or vocational programmes of study at undergraduate and postgraduate level which lead to a 1-year Certificate, a 2-year Diploma, a 3-year Higher Diploma, a 4-year Bachelor degree and a 1-2-year Masters degree. All PITE, including AC, are registered with the CMEC. The DHTE is the department of the CMEC responsible, among other things, for the smooth operation of all PITE. The DHTE ensures that all PITE follow the Law enacted in 1996 (replacing the corresponding one enacted in 1987) which governs PITE, namely ‘Law for Institutions of Tertiary Education of 1996 - 2004 – Unified Laws to Regulate the Establishment, Control and Operation of Institutions of Tertiary Education’. However, registration with the CMEC, as well as complying with the above law, does not automatically imply recognition (accreditation) of the PITE programmes of study.

The educational evaluation-accreditation of various programmes of studies is undertaken by the Cyprus Council for Educational Evaluation-Accreditation (CCEEA) and constitutes an important quality assurance factor. The CCEEA is responsible for evaluating and monitoring the quality of the programmes of study offered by the PITE, ensuring that these have met certain predetermined minimum criteria or standards. PITE that want to have their programmes of study recognised, need submit an application to the CCEEA. All PITE that succeed in their application must operate under the regulations enacted in 1996, namely ‘The Private Institutions of Tertiary Education (Criteria and Standards of Educational Evaluation – Accreditation of Programmes of Study) Regulations of 1996 – Law for Institutions of Tertiary Education (Regulations, 1996). The evaluation procedure which started in 1996 gave incentives to the PITE to improve their infrastructure which contributed to the increase in the number of both Cypriot and international students choosing accredited courses offered by some PITE. For the academic year 2008-2009 only ten of these PITE, including AC, offered accredited Bachelor or Masters degrees.

### 2.2.1 The growth of HE in Cyprus

Cyprus's accession to the EU brought forward new challenges for the Cyprus's HE. Moreover, all governments in the last 15 years are promoting the idea of establishing Cyprus as a regional, educational and research centre. McRoy and Gibbs (2003) argue that the demand for HE in Cyprus has risen considerably over the last 20 years. In 1991/92, 58% or 14.343 of the secondary school leavers continued in post-secondary education in Cyprus and abroad whereas in 2006/07 it rose to 82% or 37.454, the 4<sup>th</sup> highest percentage among EU countries (Cyprus Statistical Service, 2007). Out of the 82%, 37% chose to study in Cyprus, a major rise from the 22% of 2003/04. This is partly due to the educational evaluation-accreditation process which gave the opportunity to students to study in accredited programmes of study in Cyprus, which are equivalent to the foreign accredited ones. Additionally, this is due to the increase in the number of public and private universities operating in Cyprus. However, for the same year, the percentage of secondary school leavers who continued their studies abroad also increased to 45% out of the above 82%.



**Figure 2.1: Number of Cypriot students in Cyprus and abroad and International students in Cyprus**

(Source: Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture website)

Cyprus is by far in the first place within the EU regarding students who study in other EU, EEA or other EU candidate countries with an extraordinary 56.5% of the total school-leavers. The reason for this is A. Cyprus's accession into the EU made studies in

the UK, the most preferred educational destination country after Greece, much cheaper (see section 1.2) and B. the increase in the number of places offered in the non-fee paying Greek public universities.

Up until today the private HE attracts more students than the public HE. According to the Cyprus Statistical Service (2007), 32% (7.152) of the 22.227 students (Cypriot and international) who study in Cyprus attend public HEI. However, this is expected to rise as the three public universities will be able to accommodate more students in the years to come. It is interesting to note that international students prefer or choose private HEI and not public. The majority of them (5.446 or 91%) study in private HEIs.

Year	Public HEI		Private HEI		Total		
	Cypriot	International	Cypriot	International	Cypriot	International	Total
1992-1993	1744	111	3218	1190	4962	1301	6263
1995-1996	3602	206	3761	1305	7363	1511	8874
2000-2001	4109	237	5353	2235	9462	2472	11934
2001-2002	4894	275	5975	2783	10869	3058	13927
2002-2003	5500	319	7490	4963	12990	5282	18272
2003-2004	5845	335	8325	6344	14170	6679	20849
2004-2005	6121	349	9056	4552	15177	4901	20078
2005-2006	6456	419	8501	5211	14957	5630	20587
2006-2007	6637	515	9629	5446	16566	5961	22227

**Table 2.2: Number of Cypriot and International students in Cyprus**  
(Source: Cyprus Statistical Service, 2007)

Although we see a significant rise (26%) in the number of international students in the year prior to Cyprus's entry into the EU (2003-2004), we can also observe a similar fall during the next academic year. This is attributed to a stricter visa and immigration regulations which hinders the recruitment of international students for all HEIs. The top ten main countries by number of students registered in Cyprus's HEIs are:

Country	% on the total	Undergraduate		Postgraduate		Total		
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Total
Bangladesh	20.97	1100	24	18	0	1118	24	1142
China	16.25	511	316	22	36	533	352	885
India	14.98	726	26	64	0	790	26	816
Pakistan	7.86	415	2	9	2	424	4	428
Sri-Lanka	7.58	345	68	0	0	345	68	413
Russia	4.94	75	165	16	13	91	178	269
Nepal	4.33	184	30	21	1	205	31	236
Iran	1.87	54	41	1	7	55	48	102
Cameroon	1.89	62	21	10	9	72	30	103
Greece	1.76	40	51	4	1	44	52	96

**Table 2.3: Top-10 nationalities by number of students registered in private HEIs for the year 2006-2007**

(Source: Cyprus Statistical Service, 2007)

International students studying at private HEIs come from many countries around the world. Most institutions have been very active in promoting Cyprus's education and their institutions in the international market and have managed to attract students from many parts of the world. The percentage of international students in contrast to local students (36%) and to the total number of students (27%) is proportionally higher than that of most major countries which recruit from the international scene including the UK (HESA, 2008), USA (Open Doors 2008) and others. This can be justified firstly by the fact that Cyprus is a small country and the number of high-school graduates is limited, secondly by the fact that traditionally, more than half of them prefer to study abroad and finally by the very dynamic promotion of Cypriot HEIs abroad, which manage to get a proportionally higher percentage of international students than other countries.

Country	Undergraduate and Postgraduate students		Total number of students in 2006-2007	% International to local students	% International to total students
	Local nationals	International			
Cyprus	16.566	5.961	22227	35.98	26.82
UK	2.011.345	351.470	2.362.815	17.47	14.87
USA	17.089.016	582.984	17.672.000	3.41	3.30

**Table 2.4: Comparison of percentages of international to local students for 2006-2007**

### **2.2.2 The impact of the Bologna process on Cyprus's HE**

Cyprus is committed to the Bologna process since signing it in 2001. The process is implemented by the DHTE through the formulation of the appropriate legal framework and consultations with HEIs and all stakeholders of HE in Cyprus. Since 2001, Cyprus has submitted three biennial reports on Bologna reforms in 2005, 2007 and 2009 (Bologna Process, National Reports, 2004-2005 and 2005-2007 and 2007-2009). The main reforms of implementing the Bologna process are described below:

1. The establishment of two new public universities (OUC, CUT) and the introduction of new programmes of study. The aim of this is to offer additional places on all three main cycles (Bachelor, Masters, Doctorate) and attract more students in Cyprus;
2. The development of more programmes of study offered by the UCY on all three cycles which aims at increasing the student intake. Existing programmes should also increase their student capacity;
3. The development of the legislation for the operation of the first private universities and the establishment of the first three in 2007. These universities were granted licence to offer programmes of the first two cycles. For the time being, only the state universities are licensed to offer programmes of the third cycle (doctoral studies). Although the private universities have requested the approval to offer such programmes and they are very keen to do so, till now they have not been given the permission to do so. However, DHTE expects that these programmes will be approved in due course, when their research infrastructure is more adequately developed;
4. The development of a draft legislative decree to establish a Cyprus Quality Assurance Accreditation Agency for HE based on the Bergen standards and guidelines. The establishment of such an agency stipulates the obligatory issuing of a Diploma Supplement to all graduating students of HEIs. This will enhance the use of the Diploma Supplement in the labour market. The UCY the CTU and the private universities have already started issuing the Diploma Supplement;
5. The establishment by the Cypriot government of the Foundation for the Management of the European Lifelong Learning Programmes (Cabinet Decision of 17/1/2007). The Foundation is the official body through which the management of educational

- programmes and the goals and policies of the EU in the fields of education and training are promoted in Cyprus;
6. The implementation of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) which helps the students' mobility and the recognition of the qualifications earned. The UOC and a number of private HEIs have already adopted the ECTS;
  7. The Cabinet's decision of the 9/7/2008 approved the proposal for the appointment of a National Committee with the task of developing a National Qualifications Framework for Cyprus.

Following the conference in Bergen in 2005, its recommendations for the development of national strategies for the social dimension were adopted by the Ministerial Meeting in London in May 2007. The aim of this plan was to identify trends and best practices in the countries participating in the Bologna process. For Cyprus, the main target is to build local capacity (both public and private) for HE in order to satisfy the demand for university studies in Cyprus. This will thus lead to widening the access to and participation in HE.

### **2.2.3 AC setting**

The reforms which are being implemented due to the Bologna process have both positive and negative effects for AC. The increase in the number of places offered to students by public HEIs (see section 1.2) as well as the introduction of the law and the establishment of the first three private universities (see section 2.2) is translated to fewer available students for the colleges in Cyprus offering accredited programmes of study (Diplomas and Bachelors) like the case of AC and even fewer for the colleges offering non-accredited programmes.

Although it has not always been the case, currently AC is mainly oriented towards recruiting international students. This turn was the result of many years of unsuccessful attempts to recruit quality Cypriot students. However, due to the good quality of education (which can be measured by the number of accredited programmes of study), excellent facilities (restaurant, cafeteria, gym center, classrooms with audio-visual facilities, etc.) and personal attention to the College's students, AC enjoys a very good reputation abroad and to a lesser degree in Cyprus.



On average, approximately 73% of the students recruited for AC use the services of its agents and/or representatives worldwide. Table 2.5 shows both the number of applicants and of registered students who come through agents, are transferred from other Cyprus's HEIs or apply directly to AC. It is clear that the big majority of AC's students use the services of its agents and that is why AC pays special attention to maintaining the good service as well as the relationship with them.

<b>Number of</b>	<b>Fall 2009</b>	<b>Summer 2009</b>	<b>Spring 2009</b>	<b>Fall 2008</b>	<b>Summer 2008</b>	<b>Spring 2008</b>
<b>Direct Applications</b>	28 (7.1%)	27 (4.1%)	18 (2.7%)	46 (6%)	59 (13.7%)	37 (7.3%)
<b>Transfer Applications</b>	65 (16.5%)	2 (0.3%)	26 (3.9%)	79 (10.3%)	-	15 (2.9%)
<b>Applications from agents abroad</b>	270 (68.4%)	580 (88.7%)	550 (83.2%)	572 (74.5%)	342 (79.5%)	398 (78.7%)
<b>Applications from agents in Cyprus</b>	11 (2.8%)	45 (6.9%)	46 (7%)	42 (5.5%)	27 (6.3%)	47 (9.3%)
<b>Total Applications</b>	395	654	661	768	430	506
<b>Number of registered</b>						
<b>Direct students</b>	12 (7.2%)	4 (3%)	1 (0.6%)	12 (2.8%)	16 (7.7%)	11 (5.6%)
<b>Transfer students</b>	49 (29.5%)	2 (1.5%)	26 (15.4%)	80 (18.4%)	-	15 (7.7%)
<b>Students recr. by agents abroad</b>	96 (57.8%)	113 (86.3%)	117 (69.2%)	292 (67.1%)	177 (85.1%)	138 (70.8%)
<b>Students recr. by agents in Cyprus</b>	5 (3%)	11 (8.4%)	14 (8.3%)	27 (6.2%)	13 (6.3%)	22 (11.3%)
<b>Total students</b>	166	131	169	435	208	195

**Table 2.5: Statistics on AC students (Direct/Transferred/Total)  
(in brackets the percentage of the total rounded to one decimal place)**

Moreover, the College has in the past tried and is continuing until today other methods to recruit students. These include attending educational fairs and exhibitions, giving presentations to foreign schools, colleges and universities, signing transfer agreements with some other HEIs, running advertising campaigns in various countries to attract students directly to the College, etc. None of this has paid off until now and the results of Table 2.5 are disappointing in this respect.

A positive note is the data presented in Table 2.6 which show that on average, approximately 7% of new students are recruited by students studying at AC or other HEIs in Cyprus. Usually current students acting as agents recruit their friends and relatives at AC, something that is analysed in Chapter 4.

<b>Number of</b>	<b>Fall 2009</b>	<b>Summer 2009</b>	<b>Spring 2009</b>	<b>Fall 2008</b>	<b>Summer 2008</b>	<b>Spring 2008</b>
<b>ST-AC Applications</b>	7 (1.8%)	19 (2.9%)	29 (4.3%)	25 (3.3%)	13 (3%)	39 (7.7%)
<b>ST-OT Applications</b>	4 (1%)	26 (4%)	17 (2.5%)	19 (2.5%)	11 (2.5%)	8 (1.5%)
<b>Total Applications</b>	395	654	661	768	430	506
<b>Number of registered</b>						
<b>ST-AC students</b>	3 (1.8%)	2 (1.5%)	7 (4.1%)	10 (2.3%)	4 (1.9%)	16 (8.2%)
<b>ST-OT students</b>	2 (1.2%)	9 (6.9%)	7 (4.1%)	17 (3.91%)	9 (4.3%)	6 (3%)
<b>Total students</b>	166	131	169	435	208	195

**Table 2.6: Statistics on the number of students recruited by current students of AC (ST-AC) and current students of other colleges (ST-OT) (in brackets the percentage of the total rounded to 1 decimal place)**

### 2.3 Evolution and use of HE Marketing

The use of marketing in HE is a long standing debate. Marketing theory has been influenced by many different disciplines (Arndt, 1982). On the other hand, marketing has also contributed, in a reciprocal way, to the development of other academic areas within management studies (Hunt and Lambe, 2000). At the same time, there is substantial literature which focuses on the transfer of the practices and concepts of marketing from other sectors to HE (Gibbs, 2002). An important argument over the literature on HE marketing is that the basic marketing laws should apply to the educational sector with HEIs positioning themselves in the market and creating a clear image to the public. Generally, education is considered by many as a marketable service in the same way as any other service. This issue poses concerns over the transformation of education as a marketable service. The author is a supporter of the view that education is a marketable service, especially nowadays when competition among HEIs is so intense. Therefore, with the right policies, marketing can help HEIs in better promoting their advantages to its students.

However, others still argue that universities should not be considered as normal businesses and therefore marketing cannot be applied in the same way as in any other service. As Harbour (2006) argues: “the increasing influence of market forces is transforming higher education” (p. 2). Sceptics of the competitive nature of HE argue that this market is different from the markets found outside the public sector, mainly due to their high level of regulation derived from the government funding and curriculum policies. Therefore, various authors use the term ‘quasi-market’ which indicates that the educational market differs from the other free markets both in terms of the demand and the supply of this market (Oplatka *et al.*, 2002).

Marketing in education has evolved to a great extent over this long history of the debate. According to Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003), the universities have evolved by recognising the importance of marketing in this sector. However, research undertaken in the early stages of recognising this importance did not specifically address the issues of planning and implementing specific marketing strategies with the aim of recruiting international students. Nowadays, attracting students is of course the focus for marketing application, but marketing is now achieving greater importance in attracting

financial resources, enhancing the institution's image and public awareness (Kotler and Fox, 1995). In addition, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) point out that “demand for education, particularly higher education, has traditionally been driven by expectations of its ability to raise the economic and social status of the graduate” (p. 82). Moreover, Gibbs (2008) argues that marketing fulfils customer satisfaction “by changing the issue of the uncertainty of the future to one meta-economic narrative where the discounted extra return on income from a degree provides the main customer incentive to buy” (p. 270).

The most widely acceptable definition is that of Kotler and Fox (1995) who define educational marketing as:

The analysis, planning, implementation, and control of carefully formulated programs designed to bring about voluntary exchanges of values with target markets to achieve institutional objectives. Marketing involves designing the institution's offerings to meet the target markets' needs and desires, and using effective pricing, communication, and distribution to inform, motivate, and service these markets (p. 6).

Davies and Ellison (1997) also define marketing as “the means by which the school actively communicates and promotes its purpose, values and products to the pupils, parents, staff and wider community” (p. 3). Both definitions avoid using the word customer to describe prospective students. However, today many HE marketers use this word along with others like sales, promotion, recruitment, etc. in the same way and frequency as in any other commercial business. A logical question to be asked is: ‘Are students customers?’ And if yes how did the HE ‘industry’ allow not only the use of these terms but the use of marketing in general?

According to Kotler and Fox (1995) “making a direct comparison between a university and a business would have been shocking a few decades ago” (p. 4). They continue by arguing that throughout the last decades, educational institutions eventually have recognised that they had marketing problems. Therefore, the educators of many institutions have often been forced to take a hard look at marketing to see what it might offer to keep their institutions viable, relevant and financially sound. The author agrees with the realisation that marketing can help in keeping a tuition-dependent institution financially sound and viable. However, in order for HEIs to engage in marketing they need firstly to decide on who their customer and the end-product is. For example Kotler

and Fox (1985) state that students were the ‘product’ of HEIs and employers the ‘customers’. Although it was not easily acceptable in the early discussions that students were simply the customers of HEIs, the author agrees with the early view of Kinnell (1985) that the students are the customers of HEIs and the academic courses the products. Kinnell continues that marketing is an appropriate tool in managing international student recruitment policies and practices. This is exactly the main research aim of this study. Develop more clearly defined recruitment practices to attract more international students based on their views on a number of questions.

The connection of the ultimate aim of this research (which is to suggest changes in the current recruitment and marketing practices of AC in order to increase its international students intake) with literature is best expressed by the view of Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003). They argue that the need to generate additional revenue has forced many academic institutions to adopt a well-established marketing approach which should be geared towards the customer. According to Kinnell (1989) international services marketing has been poorly represented in the marketing literature. Interest in marketing within HE has largely resulted from concerns over the recruitment numbers. Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka’s (2006) extensive review of the literature on HE concludes that: “In the context of increasing competition for home-based and overseas students, higher educational institutions now recognise that they need to market themselves in a climate of international competition” (p. 316).

Although marketing in education is a long-standing debate, yet, according to Maringe (2005), HE marketing is still in its infancy in many parts of the world. Surprisingly, according to Cutlip (1970, cited in Kotler and Fox, 1995) American colleges and universities, both public and private, turned to advertising, publicity and student recruitment activities in the middle of the last century. Moreover, in the *Journal of Higher Education*, Krachenberg (1972, cited in Kirp, 2004) wrote a shocking article with the title: ‘Bringing the concept of Marketing to Higher Education’. Among other things, he argued that “no matter what it is called, who does it, or where in the institution it is being done, universities are engaging in marketing” (p. 370).

The HE world is changing rapidly and HE marketing is trying to cope with this. The debate initiated around the neo-liberal themes of privatisation, deregulation and

denationalisation inevitably made its way into the heart of HE (Gupta, 2008). The educational world as we know it today is constantly being influenced and shaped by three processes, namely Europeanisation, internationalisation and globalisation. Lub (2002) claims that:

Europeanisation, internationalisation and globalisation are three processes playing an important role in present society. All three are widely debated in many academic disciplines, as well as outside the academic arena. Especially the debate on globalisation is spread widely and gets a lot of attention in the media... The three processes play an important role in current discussions on higher education... Responding to the processes of Europeanisation, internationalisation and globalisation may, however, pose a new challenge for higher education (p. 1).

These three processes are also making the need for clearly defined marketing and recruitment practices even greater than before. Therefore, they are analysed in the following sections in order to give a clearer picture of HE today but more importantly its future pathway.

## **2.4 Current trends in the international HE setting affecting HEIs**

The first research objective was to examine the relevant literature and identify current trends in the international HE setting affecting HEIs and transforming the educational world as we know it today. These current trends were added to this research because they were considered related to the international recruitment and marketing in a number of ways, some of which are explained in this section. More specifically, in answering this research objective, four such processes were identified and analysed in the sections that follow, namely Marketisation and Government Intervention, Globalisation, Internationalisation and Europeanisation.

### **2.4.1 Marketisation and Government Intervention**

Over the last decade, the institutional framework within which most universities operate has been transformed to a great extent. One reason for this major change is the deregulation of the HE sector by many national governments, as well as the adoption of new market-based policies designed to make universities more efficient and effective (Dill, 2003). These policies satisfy the needs of the customers and try to achieve a competitive advantage over their competitors. According to Oplatka and Hemsley-Brown (2007), marketisation or market orientation in education is:

A set of beliefs that puts customers' interest first, but at the same time raises the school's awareness of the need to obtain information about competitors and establish cross-departmental activities to satisfy customers' needs, in order to gain a competitive edge in the turbulent, competitive environment (p. 293).

The introduction of marketisation policies in education resulted in a change of balance between the state and the market. As Jongbloed (2003) points out, these marketisation policies and market-type mechanisms have been introduced in countries previously characterised by a high degree of government control. The government control was tighter in 'less-democratic' countries but more lenient in free, democratic and well-developed market economies. Steier (2003) underlines that:

In many regions, one legacy of national independence was a state monopoly on tertiary education – a situation that lasted for the better part of three decades. Today, this prevailing ‘culture’ of privilege’ at public expense is increasingly under pressure to change. The sources of the pressure include the spread of economic liberalism, growing political pluralism and a rising public demand for tertiary education... (p. 159).

Steier (2003) describes the key dimensions of the rise of market forces in tertiary education for a particular group of countries. He analyses the pressure to change HE in many developing and transitional countries by introducing marketisation policies, diminishing direct government involvement and allowing the emergence of private HEIs. Lu and Zhang (2008) on the other hand, analysed some well-developed HE systems like the ones of the UK, USA, Germany and Australia and advocate that:

Since the 1980s, a series of reforms that aimed to reconstruct the relationships among the government, the university, and the student (consumer) have been initiated in the systems of higher education. In varying degrees, these systems of higher education were affected by market forces. Given this, the relationship between the state and higher education has also been changed significantly (p. 45).

The work of Lu and Zhang (2008) reaches the conclusion that the competitive environment and the restriction in authoritarian governments as a result of globalisation, force the governments to change their role and social policies. Governments in many countries slowly give up their role as the only reliable guarantor of social benefits and start using various forms of governance to coordinate social activities. Lu and Zhang (2008) witness that even in well-developed HE systems the governments are changing their role, giving more market freedom in HE. However, Lu and Zhang (2008) miss out mentioning the influence that the supporters of markets had on marketisation and diminishing government control. Oplatka *et al.* (2002) on the other hand add that this change is partly due to the supporters of markets and choice in HE who manage to influence to a high degree the restructuring of the HE systems of many western countries.

In analysing HE marketing with specific reference to the southern African education, Maringe and Foskett (2002) reach the conclusion that developing HE environments are replicating the forces and strategies that have driven marketisation in developed HE systems some two decades before. These strategies have their roots in the marketing concept for businesses. As stated earlier, both well-developed and developing HE



systems from different countries are engaged in some sort of marketisation. According to Maringe and Foskett (2002) the difference is that these two ‘worlds’ are “at different stages of marketisation and their levels of sophistication and understanding....vary from one institution to another and also from country to country” (p. 47). However, the different stage of marketisation each country is in can not be stated with a high degree of certainty because of the different educational systems nor can this change be measured on a common scale.

Changes and particularly diminishing government intervention are taking place in many developing as well as developed countries. Parkin and King (1992) believe that throughout history, government involvement and intervention arises from two aspects of economic life: market failure; and redistribution of income and wealth. In the case of HE, the market’s outcome in many circumstances is not at its optimal. In these cases we have a market failure. “Market failure is the inability of an unregulated market to achieve, in all circumstances, allocative efficiency” (Parkin and King, 1992, p. 457). According to the founder of economic science, Adam Smith, if there is no government involvement then the market is free and the ‘invisible hand’ will guarantee the best possible social outcome. In Adam Smith’s work, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), all economic behaviour, including HE, can be understood as the rational pursuit of self-interest which is in the interest of the society as a whole. However, “there may be circumstances in which the invisible hand does not work well – economists would say that the society is not experiencing an efficient allocation of resources” (Jongbloed, 2003, p. 111). Therefore, government intervention attempts to ‘correct’ these market failures sometimes successfully and other times unsuccessfully.

There are four reasons for government intervention to avoid market failures. According to Begg *et al.* (1991) these are: externalities; information-related problems; monopoly and market power; and income redistribution and the merit good argument. Jongbloed (2003) analyses these four reasons for government intervention with specific reference to HE:

- Externalities exist when the production or consumption of a good affects in one way or the other customers, or the society in general, who are not involved in buying and selling it. Clearly, HE in any country affects the well-being of the

society. However, private investment in HE is lower than what it would have been if the interest of the society as a whole was taken into account. Thus, government intervention should take the form of sufficient investment and offer subsidies for university research, new universities and campuses, etc.

- Information-related problems exist when sellers (HEIs) and buyers (students) are not well informed about the consequences of their actions. For example, in the student loans market “students will not be well enough informed about their capacities and their ability to successfully complete a degree programme. Partly as a result, banks regard student loans as being very risky, especially because they cannot determine a suitable collateral for the loans” (p. 112). Therefore, the government may intervene by trying to make all the relevant information available to all interested parties.
- Monopoly and market power of a small number of HEIs may cause a government to intervene. This small number of HEIs makes the market less competitive and may lead to higher TF, as well as limit the number of choices for the students. This, in turn, may lead to fewer students attending these institutions.
- Finally, income redistribution and the merit good argument give the opportunity to more students to receive HE. The basic idea behind this is to tax some and give financial support to other students in specific socio-economic groups. This financial support may take the form of grants and scholarships for talented students. “Merit goods are goods that society thinks people should consume or receive, no matter what their incomes are. Merit goods typically include health, education, shelter and food” (Begg *et al.*, 1991, p. 54).

Steier (2003) claims that even in transitional economies, where universities are traditionally strong, the process of modernising tertiary education has been slowed down because of diminished fiscal resources and competing claims from other sectors.

Although public funding remains the main source of support for tertiary education in OECD countries, it is being channelled in new ways and supplemented increasingly by non-public resources. Of the eight OECD countries for which data are available, private expenditures for tertiary education have grown faster than public expenditures in seven (France is the exception). In Canada, Italy, the Netherlands and Switzerland, public expenditures have actually decreased in real terms (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), 2001). (Steier, 2003, p. 158-159).

For many years, governments have intervened to a great extent in HE because of the reasons discussed above. Most governments have paid the greater share of educational costs by issuing a large number of rules and regulations. However, there is still disappointment with respect to these rules and regulations as the expectations of many, especially students and parents have not been met. A very good example of this is the case of the Greek HE where government intervention and public distress still remain high.

In recent years we have witnessed the introduction of marketisation policies and market-type mechanisms in many countries all over the world. Maringe (2005) emphasises that: “Expansion, increasing variety of institutions, growing heterogeneity of HE products and increasing competition among this growing industry have been the key drivers of HE marketisation across the world” (p. 565). Marketisation aims at offering students more choices and liberalising markets in order to improve the quality and variety of the HEIs ‘products’. While it is true that marketisation offers students more choices, this does not always improve the quality. There are many cases where, because students for one reason or the other do not have all the information available, they choose a lower ‘quality’ programme over a better one. Moreover, it is important that ‘packaging’ plays an important role in presenting the ‘product’ although the quality of the more attractive programme of study might be worse.

Furthermore, marketisation aims at encouraging providers to take better care of their students and to pay more attention to teaching and research (Jongbloed, 2003). Marketisation affects all aspects of the ‘product’ from academic research to teaching and learning and it is seen by many as a disciplinary mechanism. The use of market or economic policies in education will eventually improve teaching, learning and research and will allow market forces to guide the ‘customers’. However, marketisation also means that HEIs are more ‘exposed’ to their customers who can penalise them for not improving their product or fail to adjust to market forces e.g. introduction of new programmes of studies which are needed by students and the industry.

In addition, market-type mechanisms promote economic efficiency which according to Dill (2003) is most commonly and easily understood as ‘value for money’. The introduction of ‘value for money’ in HE can be found in earlier studies as well. Gibbs

(2001) argues about the UK HEIs that “the global marketisation of higher education is idealised in the UK by the drive for performance efficiency (value for money) and the embracing of e-commerce” (p. 85). According to Jongbloed (2003), “by emphasising competition and introducing performance-related reward schemes, marketisation policies are aimed at increasing efficiency” (p.113). This efficiency will make “institutions and students more aware of the consequences of their decisions in terms of costs” (p. 113). While this argument is true in general, marketisation in the researcher’s view does not always create efficiency but may have the opposite effects. Jongbloed (2003) rightly adds that marketisation policies consist of policies to increase competition among education providers. This in turn means that providers will try to meet the student needs and students need to make their own cost and benefit analysis. Both, the competition among providers and the student analysis will not always be in favour of efficiency.

Adding to the effects of marketisation, Maringe and Gibbs (2009) emphasise that:

The introduction of top-up fees and income contingent loans (ICL) has tightened the screws on the marketisation of higher education in England. The result of all this is likely to be full-blown competition for students, research funding, resources and university teachers, and may result in an increasing tendency towards forming mergers between institutions in much the same way as happens in business especially during times of financial austerity (p. 33).

However, this increasing marketisation has also led to concerns about the full effects of the growing ‘marketisation’. Dill (2003) advocates that: “An important question often left unanswered in the intense academic debate about markets in higher education is what effect market competition will have on the public interest?” (p. 137). In competitive environments customer choice is very important in ensuring efficiency. The customer decides which product to buy based on reliable and freely available information. Customer choice is the main focus of this research which is analysed in section 2.4. The changes that this research will suggest in the recruitment and marketing practices of AC are aimed at adding AC to the many choices students can have and eventually choose AC as their final choice for studies.

The government encouragement of these market forces to enhance the quality of HE is based on one very important assumption: that students are, or will become, informed

consumers making rational choices of courses and HEIs (Baldwin and James, 2000). The author, however, believes that this assumption is not always right for most students. This is due to the big load of information available for them, which is sometimes confusing and sometimes misleading, and additionally to the small effort that some students put in making a rational choice. Moreover, as Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006) postulate, despite the extensive literature on marketisation of HE and consumer behaviour, evidence of informed students making rational choices is a relatively uncharted territory.

Jongbloed (2003) stresses the need to eliminate various barriers and regulations in order to succeed in having a free market with equilibrium in demand and supply. Onderwijsraad (2001, cited in Jongbloed, 2003) lists eight basic conditions that need to be fulfilled to reach a free market:

‘Four freedoms’ for providers	‘Four freedoms’ for consumers
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Freedom of entry</li> <li>2. Freedom to specify the product</li> <li>3. Freedom to use available resources</li> <li>4. Freedom to determine prices</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Freedom to choose a provider</li> <li>6. Freedom to choose a product</li> <li>7. Adequate information on prices and quality</li> <li>8. Direct and cost-covering prices paid</li> </ol>

**Table 2.7: Eight conditions for the educational free market**  
(Source: Jongbloed, 2003)

These eight conditions define marketisation as the freedoms for providers and consumers. If these freedoms are present then both providers and consumers can make rational decisions. However, one point which is not stressed or analysed enough in his article is the actual way students make choices. It is mentioned that students do not act as rational consumers and even if they have all the ‘four freedoms’ for consumers they would still not make a rational choice.

Steier (2003) states that although the influence of market forces on HE is often beneficial, it can have adverse consequences if there is uncontrolled competition without adequate regulation. On similar grounds as Begg *et al.* (1991), Steier (2003)

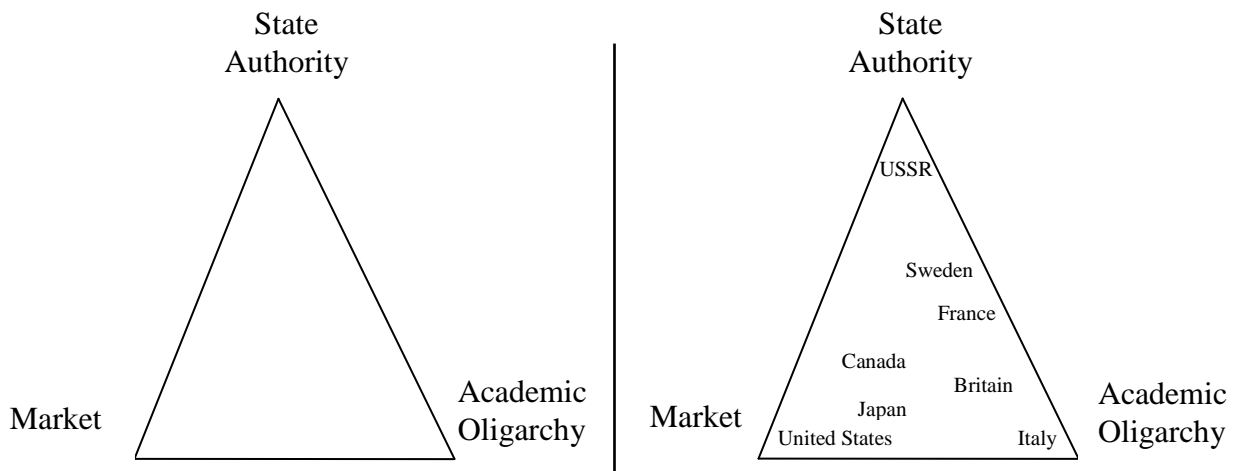
continues by claiming that although governments cannot continue offering the same fiscal resources to keep the same high quality tertiary education, they have at least three reasons for supporting this sector:

- Investments in HE generate external benefits vital for economic and social development. The benefits to the society as a whole exceed the private benefits of individuals.
- Capital markets are characterised by imperfections and information irregularities and constrain the ability of individuals to borrow adequately for education. This results in academically qualified, but economically disadvantaged groups not having the same participation in HE as others.
- HE is crucial in supporting basic and secondary education while at the same time strengthening the economic externalities associated with those levels of education.

Marketisation policies try to assess the appropriate type and degree of government intervention. However, Jongbloed (2003) admits that despite marketisation policies, in reality there is no true market for HE in many countries because governments prevent it from forming. However, the author believes that there are a few countries (e.g. USA) which have ‘allowed’ the formation of a HE market. Steier (2003) on the other hand advocates that nowadays, the traditional model of state intervention and control should be replaced with a new one: governments try to change the educational environment by guiding HEIs in a non-controlling flexible approach. This approach can be achieved in three complementary ways: “by establishing a coherent policy framework, by creating an enabling regulatory environment and by offering appropriate financial incentives” (p. 169).

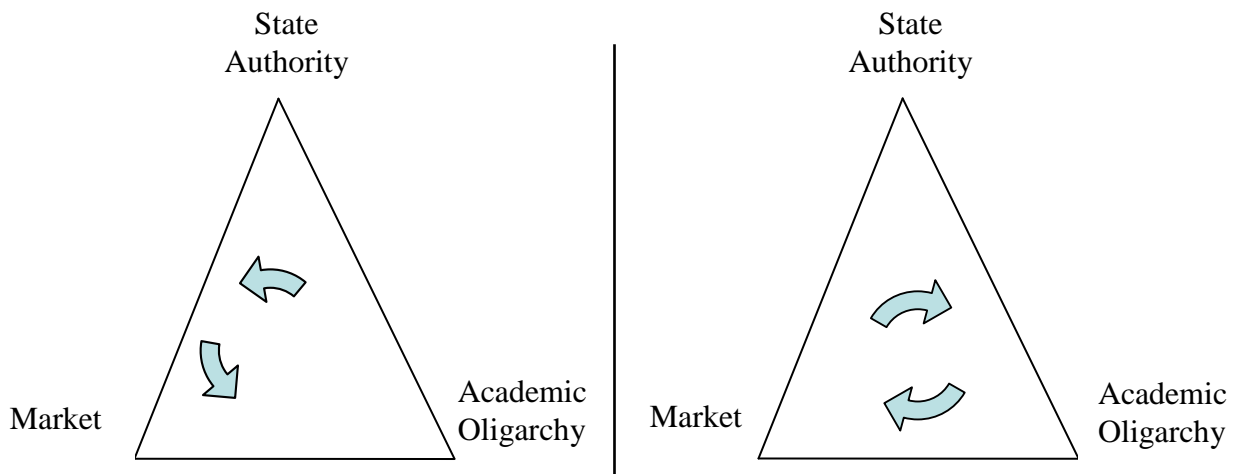
Jongbloed (2003) argues that “observations of deregulation and liberalisation, might perhaps be better interpreted as a tendency for governments to draw upon a new paradigm of governance” (p. 110). This new paradigm may be illustrated by referring to Clark’s (1983) famous ‘triangle of coordination’ in HE. In Clark’s original model, the market has two dimensions, national and international. The forces of these dimensions which are the academic oligarchy, state authority and the market and the society as the third group of actors interact with each other to give shape and direction to academic

work in national systems of HE. The ‘triangle of coordination’, with each of the three stakeholders placed in each apex, provides the framework for analysis of the HE coordination. Clark’s original work went one step further. He separated HE in different countries according to the three ‘triangle’ variable values.



**Figure 2.8: (Left) Clark’s original model of HE coordination (Right) Examples of different countries’ HE systems**  
 (Source: Jongbloed, 2003)

According to Clark’s work, at the three apexes are the USSR, the United States and Italy. The United States HE, and to a great extent Japan and Canada, are more market driven and oriented than the European ones. Some European HE systems are closer to the state authority while Britain and Italy are closer to academic oligarchy. According to Clark, the ex-USSR was dominated by the state authority.



**Figure 2.9: (Left) Transformation from state control to state supervision e.g. a HE system where the state is giving its place to market forces (Right) The new paradigm of national government, with the government being the initiator and sustainer of a dynamic and knowledge-based market economy**  
 (Source: Jongbloed, 2003)

According to Jongbloed (2003), this triangle has frequently been used to describe changes in the national HE system, a move, for example, from state control (top arrow) to state supervision (bottom arrow) as shown in Figure 2.8 (left side). In this figure the state gives away its place to market forces to coordinate demand and supply.

The new paradigm, according to Jongbloed (2003), can be seen in the right-hand side of Figure 2.9. Here, the government is the initiator and sustainer of a dynamic and knowledge-based market economy in which the role of all stakeholders is frequently re-evaluated. This figure according to Jongbloed (2003), “attempts to show that the role of the state, as well as that of the other agents in the system (providers/academe, students/business), is constantly subject to re-evaluation” (p. 132). Within this new paradigm, the government may intervene in some cases to force the market to promote competitiveness whereas in other cases, act as facilitator and work closely with the academics and the students.

The debate for marketisation is likely to continue for much longer. As HEIs become more customer-focused as a result of the intense international competition, there would be more voices against the introduction of market forces because of its negative influence on the quality of the offered education. As students are being treated as customers and HE as a business, not taking into account the values of education, there would be more voices against it mostly by educationalists and academics who are more focused on the product rather than the promotion of it. Some of these academics are still resisting marketisation and argue that market forces have no place in the educational field. As Smyth and Hattam (2000) conclude in their research article against the grain of the market:

It seems to be the case in the marketised university that the pressure is on for those of us in universities to hustle knowledge as a commodity, with the result that our voice is treated as yet another commodity. The challenge, as we have tried to show in this article, is to compete in the market while simultaneously researching against it (p. 171).

For the time being, the market forces are much stronger than the voices resisting this change. The increase in the market forces makes the need to study the HEIs’ ‘customers’ even greater than before. This is the main force which initiated the need for



this research. Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006) emphasises on the power of the market forces and globalisation that “the elements of globalization in higher education (HE) are widespread and multifaceted and the HE market is now well established as a global phenomenon” (p. 316). It is also important to emphasise that according to Mok (2001), this new educational governance model of the market has also been supported by certain ‘supernational’ organisations such as the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Furthermore, De Vita and Case (2003) advocate that the marketisation discourse that dominated HE for the last couple of decades is largely responsible for the rise in internationalisation.

## 2.4.2 Globalisation and HE

Although the expected flow of this project would probably command analysing internationalisation, it was decided to first look at globalisation for the following simple reason which is highlighted by Knight (2003a):

It is impossible to look at internationalization without considering the realities of the environment in which we are operating. Globalization is probably the most pervasive and powerful feature of the changing environment (p. 3).

Adding to the importance of globalisation, also called liberalisation of the international HE market (Vught, 2004), is the view by Scott (1998) who rightly emphasises that “not all universities are (particularly) international, but all are subject to the same processes of globalisation” (p. 122). Knight (2003a) argues that there is frequent confusion regarding the relationship between internationalisation and globalisation. Before analysing globalisation, the author briefly addresses and answers the following crucial question: is internationalisation the same or similar to globalisation?

Many scholars including Maringe and Gibbs (2009), Knight (2008), Wende (2007), de Wit (2006), Altbach (2004) and others, argue that internationalisation of HE is one of the ways a country and its HEIs respond to the forces of globalisation. Internationalisation of HE is also seen as an agent of globalisation (Knight, 2003a). While internationalisation can be seen as a process which can, at least partly, be shaped and influenced by HEIs themselves, globalisation is seen as an external macro socio-economic process which cannot be influenced at the level of HEIs (Vught, 2004). Abdullahi *et al.* (2007) state that in general, globalisation is more associated with competition and internationalisation with cooperation. Moreover, “globalisation cannot be regarded simply as a higher form of internationalisation” (Marginson and Wende, 2007, p. 12). Scott (1998) takes this view one step further by stressing that: “Instead of their relationship being seen as linear or cumulative, it may be dialectical. In a sense the new globalization may be the rival of the old internationalization” (p. 124). Where internationalisation implies adapting to incorporate foreign markets, globalisation implies adopting a globally integrated strategy (Edwards and Edwards, 2001).

Very often, internationalisation and globalisation are used interchangeably (Maringe and Gibbs 2009, Knight 2008, Huang 2007, OECD 2004, Yang 2003). Yang (2002) adds that these two terms are used interchangeably in academic circles as well as in the real world. However, it is unclear where one starts and the other stops (Yang, 2003). Nevertheless, these two terms, although closely related, have different meanings, objectives and effects. Considerable efforts have been made during this past decade (Knight & de Wit, 1997) to maintain the focus on the ‘internationalisation of education’ instead of the ‘globalisation in education’. This approach has had mixed results, but some success has been achieved in ensuring that these two terms are not seen as synonyms and are not used interchangeably (Knight, 2008). Furthermore, as Yang (2003) underlines, there is another debate as for some people “globalisation can be understood simply as the global diffusion of western modernity, that is, westernisation” (Yang, 2003, p. 271). However, most scholars argue that globalisation has a different meaning than westernisation and internationalisation, and should not be considered the same. The literature analysed above clearly shows that these two processes have different meanings. However, many people around the world are still confused and use these two terms interchangeably. That is why there have been efforts to clearly define each of these two terms. Some progress has been made but there is still much to be done before people realise that these two terms are not the same.

Globalisation is a comprehensive process. However, Kellner (1998, cited in Yang, 2003) points out that this term lacks precise definition. There have been many attempts to develop a universal definition which would be widely acceptable. Consequently, globalisation has led to various conceptualisations of the term. Altbach (2002) advocates that in general terms, globalisation refers to developments in HE that have cross-national implications. The same author defines globalisation as: “the broad, largely inevitable economic, technological, political, cultural, and scientific trends that directly affect higher education” (Altbach, 2005, p. 64). The key to this definition is the word ‘inevitable’ and this is one argument that is used by the sceptics, arguing that this process is against the freedom to decide on the effects of globalisation.

One year later, Altbach and Knight (2006) defined globalisation as “the economic, political, and societal forces pushing 21<sup>st</sup> century higher education towards greater international involvement” (p. 27). Yang (2002) describes globalisation, in its broadest

form, as social processes that transcend national boundaries. “It is fundamentally an economic process of integration that transcends national borders and ultimately affects the flow of knowledge, people, values and ideas” (Yang 2000, cited in Yang, 2002, p. 82). According to Knight and de Wit (1997), globalisation affects each country in a different way based on the country’s history, traditions, culture and priorities.

Globalisation poses new challenges for HE policy. These challenges come at a time when governments are no longer the only providers of HE and the academic community no longer monopolises decision-making in education (Ifedili and Ojogwu, 2007). Many HE scholars argue that nation-states are losing their grip on HEIs and on the governance of national HE in general. Some nation-states are even doing this intentionally, following the irreversible effects globalisation has had on HE. While we all witness the declining role of the nation-state and the increasing power of globalisation, no one can state with certainty the degree of this negative correlation. What is more, globalisation, together with decentralisation, privatisation and liberalisation, adopted by a number of nation-states, affect educational policies even more. All these processes have had a significant impact on the emergence of the ‘competition state’ (Vlk, 2006). Governments, of course, are still very powerful and are still involved in this transfer of power. Although they realise that their role is diminishing, they still try to control the speed as well as the capacity of it. They also try to decide on the recipient of this power as well as their future partner (e.g. regulatory bodies, private and/or public HEIs, etc.) in this shared responsibility. This is particularly true in Cyprus where the government wants to have a tight control on the transferring of the power.

Globalisation clearly affects many aspects of our lives. However, it is forcing a new look at what effect worldwide changes in political and economic systems are having on the educational systems (Ballantine and Spade, 2007). Altbach (2004) states that “it is argued that all of the contemporary pressures on higher education, from the pressures of massification to the growth of the private sector are the results of globalization” (p. 3). These strong statements show the power of globalisation as well as the importance it should be given to this term. Globalisation trends are clearly entering the HE field (Vught, 2004) and are affecting it to a great extent. According to Ruby (2005), it affects “curriculum, faculty recruitment, student recruitment, sources of food for the dining halls and of funds for the endowment, and the value of investments” (p. 233). However,

the biggest change is that in this global era, HE has become a tradable commodity based on the discourse of global competition. Many university leaders have recognised this reality which, for most of them, is mostly a result of globalisation. They believe that to survive in the fast changing HE market they need to become customer-focused. Even the majority of state funded European HEIs from nation states which still play a role in HE, will have to address these globalisation trends in the era of global competition (Vught, 2004). As can be seen from the above, the importance of globalisation supports the aim of this research of better designing marketing and recruitment practices in order to become more customer-focused to survive in the global competition.

The concept of globalisation is becoming more and more important in debates and articles about its influence on the global HE market, which as Yang (2003) advocates, has principally economic as well as commercial motivations. Although HE is becoming a commodity like most others, HEIs do not have to become passive victims of globalisation. According to Ruby (2005) universities are both creators as well as disseminators of knowledge and they shape globalisation as much as they are shaped by it. This is reinforced by the deregulation and the increase of institutional autonomy which enables HEIs to become more responsive to their environment and its international challenges (Vught, 2004). Although as Ruby (2005) states, shaping globalisation might be true for bigger HEIs, this is not the case for small HEIs who are being shaped by globalisation without being able to do much about it. The situation with these HEIs would be even worse if there is no institutional autonomy, giving them little freedom to adjust to these changes.

#### **2.4.2.1 The effects of globalisation**

Most definitions refer to the influence of globalisation in the society. However, this term is not always understood in an unbiased way and no definition deals with the nature of its influence. The debate between the supporters and the opposition, namely globalists (or hyperglobalists) and sceptics, still goes on. Everyday people, who are not aware of all aspects of globalisation, associate it with demonstrations against it during meetings of the world's global leaders (e.g. in Seattle and Genoa). The globalists clearly have a different view. Authors who are in favour of globalisation usually come from the 'western' world which, according to the opposition, is mostly benefited from its effects.

They consider globalisation to be a real and historical development (Lub, 2002), an unprecedented progressive drive (Mok, 2000) which has a positive impact on HE. It is a product of multiple forces which includes economic, political and technological imperatives (Vlk, 2006). Mok (2000) states that globalisation supporters argue that the economic liberalisation brings denationalisation and a borderless economy. Supporters of globalisation highlight the fact that it does not question the matter of national sovereignty but refer to an increasing global interconnection. In general, globalisation entails freer and quicker interchanges and movements of capital, goods, services, people, technologies, information and ideas.

On the other hand, in general terms, sceptics regard globalisation as a new coloniser, intensively spreading its views on developing countries in the mistaken belief that it actually helps people (Yang, 2003). Additionally, globalisation transcends national identities and carries the potential to be actively hostile to nation-states (Scott, 1998). Other sceptics associate globalisation with worldwide inequality and the McDonaldisation of the university (Altbach, 2004). Moreover, Mok (2000) advocates the following about the social and economic aspect of globalisation:

For sceptics, globalization is merely a myth. Unlike the globalists, the sceptics believe that national governments are still main architects and players of internationalization. They even argue that the power and authority of nation-states are enhanced because they stipulate more centralized regulation over cross-border economic activities (p. 639).

Moreover, Altbach (2005) states that globalisation adversely affects many developing countries and smaller academic systems. Although, it offers new opportunities (mainly through the internet and other technological advances) for students and scholars to study and work anywhere in the world, it reinforces many existing inequalities and creates some new barriers. Bigger and more powerful universities dominate the production and distribution of knowledge over weaker universities with fewer resources. Altbach's (2005) view is especially true if one examines the case of China where a number of foreign universities with more resources than the local ones have opened up various branches. These HEIs are successful in recruiting Chinese students who prefer and can afford to study in a western university. This is just one example of an inevitable inequality which is a result of globalisation.

In addition, western academics (westerners) “tend to be arrogantly uncritical of the assumption underlying their teaching and unreflective of their fitness for teaching across cultures” (Yang 2003, p. 282). Furthermore, the most developed and wealthier countries support their HEIs by offering a full array of resources through their academic centres e.g. the British Council (UK), the Fulbright Commission (USA), DAAD-German Academic Exchange Service (Germany) and Campus France (France). These countries host not only the dominant universities and research facilities but also the big multinational corporations which are powerful and important to the global knowledge system (Gary Rhodes). Evans (1995) agrees that globalised education leads to diversity of choices. In spite of this, it discourages local initiatives which value local culture and promote national beliefs, skills and knowledge.

Another critical argument against globalisation which is often addressed in the literature is its negative impact on traditional academic values (Vught, 2004). Critics argue that these values are endangered because of the expansion of profit-making activities in HE and the growth of marketisation forces. Hence, HE might be seen as another business industry, sharing the same characteristics as the corporate world and losing the more traditional educational ones like pursuit of scholarship, need for research, etc. The author does not share these concerns and considers that a HEI is a normal business which needs to survive financially, especially given the spread of the globalisation forces which are unavoidable.

Altbach (2004) states that we are now in a new era of power and influence, characterised by the dominance of the commercial gain. The Cold War period characterised by tensions because of politics and ideologies has given its place to the period of profit-making and market driven policies. In this era, a few leading universities can be seen as the new informational neo-colonists. Regardless of the many negative views presented above, globalisation cannot be completely avoided as an evil thing. Despite the fact that the globalists and the sceptics have different opinions about globalisation, “they all recognize the growing impacts of globalization on political, economic, social and cultural developments” (p. 639).

Altbach (2004) reminds us that throughout history, certain universities have become moribund and irrelevant because they shut themselves off from economic and societal trends.

European universities, for example, ignored both the Renaissance and the Industrial Revolution and ceased to be relevant. Indeed the French Revolution swept away the universities entirely, while von Humboldt had to reinvent the German university model in 1809 in order to save the institutions (Ben-David and Zloczower, 1962) (p. 4).

Additionally, according to Altbach (2005), globalisation does not lack precedents for HE. Universities have always maintained a balance between national realities and international trends. The difference between the past and the present is that nowadays these international trends have intensified and universities need to adapt fast to these changes if they want to remain competitive in the international student arena. The universities that do not follow the current trends might once again become irrelevant. This was another reason why the current trends in HE were added as the first research objective, showing the author's sensitivity to HE environmental changes in addition to becoming more customer-focused.

#### **2.4.2.2 Globalisation and GATS**

Many scholars see globalisation as inevitable and unstoppable and this is not far from the reality according to the author. Especially during the last two decades, education is considered a commodity or service to be traded commercially across borders (Knight, 2008) just like bananas or airplanes (Maringe and Gibbs, 2009). Regarding trading in education, Robertson (2007) points out that:

As competition over a share of the global education services market has stepped up, key actors (governments, institutions and transaction firms) within the developed economies have intensified their interest in the way in which the domestic and international regulatory systems of the inter-state world impede the creation of a global trading system (p. 7).

In the last several years, various trade agreements identify education provision as a new trade sector. The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) which was negotiated in the Uruguay Round is just one of them, and the call for requests and offers came into effect in 1995 (Knight, 2008). GATS is administered by the World Trade



Organisation (WTO) which at the beginning of 2008 comprised 151 member countries. The WTO (which is the only global international organisation dealing with the rules of trade between nations), realising that education is a lucrative globally-traded commodity, came up with GATS. Generally, GATS aims at liberalising trade in services. More specifically, in education, GATS is trying to free international education by removing many of the existing restrictions, so it eventually becomes a normal internationally tradable commodity while creating a globally-regulated education market.

GATS reinforces this view by considering HE services to be organised at a competitive and commercial base, implying an obligation to allow free market access at an international scale (Council for Trade in Services Secretariat - WTO, 1998). As HEIs move towards deregulation, responding to the effects of globalisation, more and more of them compete “for the educational dollar of students (or “clients”)” (Yang, 2003, p. 276). GATS’s framework on free and cross-border trade in educational services presses for increasing competition, creating tensions in areas like the recognition of degrees and quality assurance (Vught, 2004). Moreover, GATS is trying to ensure increased transparency of trade regulations. However, according to Maringe and Gibbs (2009), many of the restrictions that GATS is trying to remove, are designed to ensure the quality of education and maintain the national control of each country. Marginson and Wende (2007) emphasise that GATS:

...is seen as a driver of change and national benefit by governments that have an interest in educational trade or see the GATS agenda as potentially helpful in implementing reforms along new public management lines (p. 10).

On the other hand, critics of GATS advocate that it “is nothing less than a tool of privatization, globalization, “commodification”, and other assorted ills” (Sauve, 2002, p. 12). Moreover, Bassett (2009) admits that not all HE providers are excited about the access to free trade in HE. Others wonder why the public services of education and health are now incorporated into the mandate of the WTO’s GATS and worry about the long-term effects on their governments and policymakers of the commoditisation of education. (Robertson, 2006). OECD (2004) executive summary states that:

The mere possibility that certain types of education might fall within the scope of trade regulations and agreements has fuelled a heated debate on the nature of education, especially in OECD countries where it is mainly provided as a public service on a non-profit basis (p. 13).

Some others argue that not only is this model of development favourable to the Anglo-Saxon interests but that it has the potential to undermine education as a human right (Robertson, 2006). The author clarifies that this is especially true if one considers that the ‘official’ language of the academic world is English. Therefore, it is correctly argued by Robertson (2006) that the Anglo-Saxon universities have a clear advantage. The idea that HE is a commodity no different than milk may offend the scholars who believe commoditisation does not fit in to the true mission of the university. Some even worry that business and profit motivations will move universities away from their core responsibilities (Ruby, 2005). However, the author believes that with a more detailed assessment of GATS, one can see that it is nowhere nearly as powerful as its critics suggest.

Marginson and Wende (2007) add to this view that after more than ten years of WTO, it seems that the transformative potential of WTO/GATS within national systems has often been exaggerated and Bassett (2009) points out that its effectiveness is still to be determined. First, GATS is mostly concerned with commercial non-border HE activity whereas actually most cross-border activity is mainly non-commercial. Secondly, the governments still have the power to choose the degree to which they integrate with the WTO/GATS regarding foreign competitors. In many countries, the entry of foreign competitors/institutions is taking place without reference to WTO/GATS. A research study by Vlk (2006) reveals that there is little evidence to support the view that governments are losing control over their HE sector as a result of GATS. However, Bassett (2009) advocates that although GATS is not yet operational as international law, “it serves as a lightning rod for the large storm brewing around trade in higher education services” (p. 53).

#### **2.4.2.3 The future of Globalisation**

Wende (2007) states that we do not need to be good at predicting the future to understand that globalisation is not and cannot just be a project on free trade and economic growth. It is definitely something more complicated than that. Like most other things, globalisation is a two sided coin. Globalists argue that it can lead to

development and sceptics, on the other hand, warn that it can lead to underdevelopment. However, most scholars, including the author, agree that globalisation in HE is inevitable and therefore it should be studied by all people who are responsible for designing their international recruitment strategy. Ultimately, globalisation in HE is based on the market-driven fundamentals of globalisation. Thus, it creates more challenges than opportunities (Yang 2003) and that is why it is examined as part of this research study.

HE has always been international in nature. Nevertheless, today, theorists take for granted that economic and social changes, nationally and internationally, affect education, to a greater degree than before. Having said that, the spread of the technology, the internet, the increasing ease of communication and the flow of students and staff across borders accelerates this process (Altbach, 2005). The whole academic world needs to learn to live with and work in this new globalised reality. As Altbach (2004) rightly argues, no academic system can exist by itself in the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Additionally, Yang (2003) emphasises the fact that the impact of globalisation is partly influenced by people's responses, based on local conditions and contexts. That is why everybody within the HE world needs to study, understand and influence globalisation in the right direction. "The globalisation process encounters a response that reflects each culture's unique forms of adaptation to change. Alternative responses to the globalisation of higher education must be built up on the educational character of universities" (p. 285). These responses are a fundamental part of the internationalisation of HE which is the topic of the next section of this Chapter.

### 2.4.3 Internationalisation of HE

Knight (2003a) advocates that “internationalization is changing the world of higher education and globalization is changing the process of internationalization” (p. 1). In this section the author will investigate if and how internationalisation influences the world of HE. Internationalisation has been used for centuries in politics, trade and culture. However, internationalisation in education has become a global phenomenon in the last three decades. Historically, because of their very nature of producing universally valid knowledge, HEIs have been considered as international organisations (Kerr, 1990). Yang (2002) emphasises that “universities are by nature of their commitment to advancing human knowledge, international institutions” (p. 85). According to Abdullahi *et al.* (2007), after the Second World War, the international mobility of researchers and students has increased substantially. Nowadays, many institutions, trying to cope with globalisation, have made internationalisation one of their top priorities. As Hammond (2009) states, “American universities have strongly endorsed the concept of internationalization, and the education of “global citizens” has become a standard goal for many institutions” (p. 88). Therefore, understanding, conceptualising and analysing this term has become imperative in any HE study and that is why it was examined as part of answering to the first research objective.

The significance of internationalisation is far-reaching, influencing all aspects of education. Maringe and Gibbs (2009) emphasise that internationalisation is not an event or isolated activities which serve the university processes. Rather, it is a group of strategically intended activities. It is a means to adding an international dimension to the teaching and learning, research and service of the university. Altbach (2002) argues that: “Internationalization is a major trend in higher education. It is also a worldwide phenomenon. And it is widely misunderstood” (p. 6). Moreover, Knight (2003b) states that internationalisation has been the subject of much discourse. For example, as Elkin *et al.* (2008) state, one HEI may have a campus abroad while another recruit big numbers of international students. Both may declare themselves as internationalised although they clearly do two different things. Despite the confusion in the term, it has been used for many years and has become popular in the education field since the early 1980s. As Knight (2003b) suggests, prior to this term, education stakeholders have mostly been using the term ‘international education’.

There are many definitions for this very important term. One general definition which covers a broad range of activities is given by the European Association for International Education (EAIE) (1992) as “... internationalisation [as] being the whole range of processes by which higher education becomes less national and more internationally oriented”. In the course of a comparative study, Knight and de Wit (1997) propose the following working definition which according to Maringe and Gibbs (2009) is one of the most widely used ones: “Internationalisation of higher education is the process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution” (p. 8). Wende (1997) moves away from the above institutional-based definition and proposes the following broader definition: “any systematic effort aimed at making higher education responsive to the requirements and challenges related to the globalization of societies, economy and labour markets” (p. 18).

Two years after defining internationalisation, de Wit (1999) analyses his definition from three important angles and points out that: Firstly, internationalisation is a process, secondly, that internationalisation is a response to globalisation but should not be confused with the globalisation process itself and thirdly that internationalisation includes both international and local intercultural elements. So both de Wit (1999) and Wende (1997) linked internationalisation with globalisation in their definitions. Another definition which focuses mainly on the external environment is proposed by Altbach (2002) as “the specific policies and initiatives of countries and individual academic institutions or systems to deal with global trends” (p. 6). Knight (2003b) realises the need for a new definition that would take into consideration its application to many different countries, cultures and education systems and ensure that the meaning of the word reflects current changes and challenges. She therefore proposes that: “Internationalisation at the national, sector, and institutional levels is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education” (p. 6). This definition is intentionally neutral (Knight, 2008) and does not conflict with the previous one by Knight and de Wit (1997). On the contrary according to Knight (2003b), these two are complementary to each other.

On the other hand, there is a view by Wende (1998) who advocates that internationalisation seems to be strongly related to the aim of improving the quality of HE by responding to globalisation forces. Moreover, she argues that the quality perspective can be found in many policy documents including the publications of the OECD, articles in the Maastricht Treaty (1992) which provide the basis for Community action and others. However, it is not clear nor is there clear evidence to suggest that there is a correlation between internationalisation and the quality of HE. Moreover, Tsuruta (2006a) adds to the view of Wende (1998) that new guidelines for quality provision in cross-border HE are prepared by United Nations' Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). Based on this perspective, Maringe and Gibbs (2009) state that:

Internationalization is seen not just as a focus or aim, but as a key resource and strategy for developing higher education in line with international educational, social, economic and cultural developments and a resource for responding to global imperatives and developments (p. 83).

Wende (1998) stresses that “it is at the individual, the project, the institutional and even the system level that this international co-operation and exchange is expected to contribute to the quality of processes and outcomes” (p. 20).

#### **2.4.3.1 Approaches to Internationalisation**

By approaches to internationalisation we refer to actions of various leading persons in HEIs to promote and implement programmes aimed at internationalisation (Qiang, 2003). Approaches reflect the values, priorities and actions that are employed towards implementing internationalisation (Knight, 2003a). A review of the literature reveals that four different approaches can be used by HEIs to achieve internationalisation. These approaches reflect an open systems understanding i.e. reflect the idea that HEIs exist in a dynamic international environment and they need to adapt successfully to developments if they want to survive (Kondakci *et al.*, 2006). Knight (1999) presents a typology of the following four prevailing approaches: The activity approach, the competency approach, the ethos approach and the process approach.

The activity approach describes internationalisation in terms of categories or types of activities. These include academic and extracurricular activities. It “promotes activities

such as curriculum, student/faculty exchange, technical assistance, and international students” (Qiang, 2003 p. 250). This approach is the most widely used in the description of internationalisation and only focuses on the nature of the activities.

The competency approach emphasises on the development of new skills, attitudes, values and knowledge in students, faculty and staff. At the centre of this approach is the human aspect of HEIs and not the academic activities or organisational matters. Qiang (2003) emphasises that this approach helps “to develop competencies in the personnel of the higher education institution so that they become more internationally knowledgeable and interculturally skilled” (p. 250).

The ethos approach creates and supports an ethos or culture that values and supports international development. Some scholars argue that the ethos approach is too narrow and use the term rationale approach that includes the ethos approach, while others use the ethos approach by itself. Finally, the process approach “stresses integration or infusion of an international/intercultural dimension into teaching, research and service through a combination of a wide range of activities, policies and procedures” (Qiang, 2003, p. 251).

#### **2.4.3.2 Rationales for Internationalisation**

Many authors agree that internationalisation is one of the top items in the agenda of many HEIs. So why is this the case and what motivates HEIs in internationalising their education? Just as there is no agreement on a common definition of internationalisation, Yang (2002) argues that the assessment of the rationale for this term is also problematic. De Wit (1999) adds a new dimension to this assessment by claiming that when analysing rationales, we have to take into account the diversity of the stakeholder groups in HE: government, private and educational sector. Furthermore, within the last group we have to differentiate between three subsectors: the institutional level, the academics and their departments and the students.

Although the economic rationale of internationalisation is the most commonly highlighted in literature (Kondakci *et al.*, 2006) there are other rationales which are equally important. Knight (1999), de Wit (1998), Abdullahi *et al.* (2007) and others,

identify four different rationales which are the most well known today. These are: political rationales, economic rationales, academic rationales and cultural and social rationales. Nowadays, political and economic reasons, which according to de Wit (1999) make their presence stronger, force HEIs to run through the internationalisation process. The academic and social/cultural rationales were dominant in European medieval times and in the Arab university world but have no longer the same significance. De Wit (1998) emphasises on the importance of “the wandering scholar looking for knowledge and an understanding of other cultures” (p. 2). Except for these four rationales, Maringe and Gibbs (2009) identify a fifth one, the ‘promoting world peace rationale’.

Political rationales are often driven by national governments of well-developed countries who want political, cultural, economic and academic dominance (de Wit, 1999). They initially came to the front by the rise in colonial expansion. As Maringe and Gibbs (2009) argue, different reasons “strengthen the belief that Western models of higher education are superior to those of the rest of the world” (p. 90). Many developed countries are trying to exploit this belief even today. On the other hand, Knight (1997) rightly advocates that with the decline of empires together with the establishment of independence in former colonies, the political influence as a result of the influence in HE declined. Nevertheless, many nations and their universities are still trying to escape from the colonial sphere of influence (de Wit, 1998). In recent years politicians and academics have started seeing internationalisation as a beneficial and valuable tool for economic and political policies (Yang, 2002). Kameoka (1996) advocates that governments are increasingly looking at HE in helping them achieve their wider policy objectives, from broad foreign policy interests to more specific concerns of domestic economy.

In post second world war and especially during the cold war between the USA and the former Soviet Union both superpowers funded HE programmes to countries belonging to their sphere of influence mainly because of political reasons. These programmes were presented as a stimulus of peace and mutual understanding. However, de Wit (1998) asks “Who’s peace is it and who’s understanding of the world?” (p. 3). Additionally, he gives examples which make it clear that the political rationale very rarely accomplishes the results intended by the donor and/or the receiver.



After the end of the cold war the importance of political rationales gave their place to economic rationales. “Economic rationales were and still are the driving force behind European programmes for cooperation and exchange in research, technology and education...” (de Wit, 1999, p. 3). Yang (2002) agrees that economic growth is cited by many authors as the dominant rationale. The only exception to this according to de Wit (1998) is southern Europe (e.g. Greece) where the traditional academic, cultural and political rationales are still stronger. The researcher agrees with this statement although there are now some early signs that even in these countries internationalisation is forcing universities to change e.g. some public universities in Greece have introduced some postgraduate courses taught in the English language in order to attract foreign students.

Maringe and Gibbs (2009) state that the economic rationale has two dimensions: the national and the institutional. At the national level, it is in the interest of all countries to increase prosperity for their nationals and better prepare them for international opportunities. This can be achieved by increasing the international competencies of HE students and, as a result, increase their employability. Moreover, the economic development in the Western world together with the high rise in labour costs has forced countries to look for internationally skilled workers and intellectual people to work in their countries. Universities are seen by their governments as the beginning of the chain that will lead to the skilled labour required for working internationally. This will in turn create greater economic prosperity.

At the institutional level, various agreements and treaties on international economic cooperation are placing increasing demands on universities. According to Altbach (1999):

the current wave of internationalism... is motivated by profits...The goals are to meet market demand and to create a market niche for an “educational product.” Those providing the product, mainly academic institutions and other educational providers in English-speaking countries, are to a considerable extent motivated by a need to export in order to make up budget shortfalls at home (p. 4).

De Wit (1999) summarises the economic rationales into three categories: more international labour force is needed because of the requirements of the developed nations; joint international Research and Development programmes to compete in new

technology; and HE as an international marketing and selling commodity. The last category is emphasised by Enders (2002), who claims that the economic rationale motivates institutions to generate more income from international activities. This can be seen more clearly in the strategies to recruit international students. The need to generate more income through recruiting international students is the main focus of this research on AC international students. This economic rationale for internationalisation is what drives the need for this research. However, Yang (2002) warns about the danger of overshadowing the genuine values of internationalisation with the above mentioned financial motivations. In addition, economic rationales encourage institutions to form international research and development alliances to compete internationally in new technology (de Wit, 1998).

The academic rationale for internationalisation is all about meeting the changes needed in educating students in HEIs from an international perspective while ensuring that the international academic standards are achieved. According to Tunney and White (2008) the academic rationale supports many different aspects of internationalisation. One of these aspects and the most important according to a 2006 survey by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) on students studying in Canada (over 90 percent of respondents identified this) is to prepare graduates who are internationally knowledgeable. Knight (1999) emphasises on the quality aspect of the academic rationale; a need to meet international standards of quality in teaching research, and service. An example of this is the Association of MBAs which accredits MBAs all over the world when they meet certain criteria. This ensures the same minimum level of quality and is being used by all member schools as a proof of their high quality studies. Maringe and Gibbs (2009) sum up this rationale by saying that “developing an international curriculum is increasingly seen as a quality mark of university education provision” (p. 92).

Cultural and social rationales focus on the individual’s development to improve the quality of their lives. As Maringe and Gibbs (2009) argue, in today’s cultural diverse classrooms, students’ cultures, languages, social beliefs, customs, etc. blend together. This results in the development of greater knowledge, respect and cultural awareness of other cultures and beliefs which according to Knight (1999) is considered by many academics one of the most important rationales for internationalising the teaching and

learning experience of students. Although academic and social/cultural rationales do not carry the same weight as the economic/political ones, rationales which are related to intercultural understanding and national identity still have their significance. Knight (2004) claims that in view of the cultural clashes within and between countries, the cultural/social rationales may be more important these days.

The promoting world peace rationale is linked with the economic growth and development of nations in peace. This rationale according to Maringe and Gibbs (2009) was born after the end of the Cold War, when most countries involved in it wanted rapid economic development, peace and international security. Universities were the leaders in development of peace programmes. Aigner *et al.* (1992, cited in Maringe and Gibbs, 2009) claims that proof of this rationale is the fact that universities are developing curricula programmes and institutes specialised on peace studies.

Qiang (2003) states that:

In reality, national policies for internationalisation will in many cases be based on a mixture of various rationales. Therefore, the national policy in different countries and the possible changes over the past and those foreseen in the near future will be characterized along the various dimensions... (p. 256).

In examining the establishment and implementation of national policies for internationalisation and the degree of influence of internationalisation on HEIs and the system in general, the interplay of various international and national forces and actors should be considered. According to Qiang (2003), Clark's triangle can serve as a conceptual basis if placed in an international context.

#### **2.4.3.3 Strategies for Internationalisation**

Different strategies are used by HEIs in order to succeed in internationalising themselves. Knight (2008) advocates that strategies and a strategic approach are the most important elements of the success and sustainability of internationalisation at the institutional level. Elkin *et al.* (2008) on the other hand, state that:

strategic planning tries to “create” more desirable future results by influencing the outside world or adapting current programs and actions so they have more favourable outcomes in the outside world... it is an attempt to match the resources and activities of an organisation to the environment in which it operates (p. 243).

A number of different strategies are presented by a number of authors. Qiang (2003) summarises all the elements which are used for internationalisation as identified by different scholars throughout the years. However, he separates them in two categories: the academic activities or programme strategies (e.g. student and staff exchanges and curriculum internationalisation) Table 2.10, and the organisational factors (e.g. policy statements and annual planning and review system) Table 2.11. Both categories of elements are needed “to enhance and sustain the international dimensions of university functions, namely programme strategy and organizational strategies” (Tsuruta, 2006b p. 18).

Academic Programme	Student exchange programmes
	Foreign language study
	Internationalised curricula
	Area or thematic studies
	Work/study abroad
	International students
	Teaching/learning process
	Joint and double degree programmes
	Cross-cultural training
	Faculty/staff mobility programme
	Visiting lecturers and scholars
Link between academic programmes and research, training and development assistance	
Research and Scholarly Collaboration	Area and theme centres
	Joint research projects
	International conferences and seminars
	Published articles and papers
	International research agreements
	Researcher and graduate student exchange programmes
	International research partners in academic and other sectors
Link between research, curriculum and teaching	
Extra-curricular activities	Student clubs and associations
	International and intercultural campus events
	Liaison with community-based cultural groups
	Peer groups and programmes
	Alumni development programmes
Social, cultural and academic support system	
External Relations and Services (Domestic & Offshore)	Community-based partnership and projects with non-government groups or private sector companies
	International development assistance projects
	Customised/contract training programmes offshore
	Link between development projects and training activities with teaching and research
	Community service and intercultural project work
	Offshore teaching sites and distance education
	Participation in international networks
Offshore alumni chapters	

**Table 2.10: Summary of Academic/Programme Elements of Internationalisation**  
(Source: Qiang, 2003)

Governance	Expressed commitment by senior lecturers
	Active involvement of faculty and staff
	Articulated rationale and goals for internationalisation
	Recognition of international dimension in mission statements and other policy docum.
Operations	Integrated into institution-wide and departmental planning, budgeting and quality review systems
	Appropriate organisational structures
	Communication systems (formal & informal) for liaison and coordination
	Balance between centralised and decentralised promotion and management of internationalisation
	Adequate financial support and resource allocation systems
Support Services	Support from institution-wide services units, i.e. student housing, registrariat, counselling, fundraising, etc.

**Table 2.11: Summary of Organisational Elements of Internationalisation**  
(Source: Qiang, 2003)

These elements and strategies help in the internationalisation of HEIs. Hale and Tijmstra (1992) on the other hand, have more specifically identified the following eight steps which HEIs should take in order to pursue an internationalisation strategy:

1. Internationalising courses;
2. Adding international courses;
3. Adding foreign language course components;
4. Offering work or study assignments in overseas countries;
5. Exchanging faculty (staff) and/or students;
6. Setting up joint degree programmes;
7. Setting up collaborative programmes with overseas institutions; and
8. Undertaking joint research and consultancy programmes with overseas colleagues.

However, the degree of influence of each one of them towards internationalisation, the current performance, as well as the desired level of the above eight points are not very easy to define. Moreover, it is important to note that recruiting international students is not included in these eight steps for internationalisation as other authors suggest.

According to Elkin *et al.* (2005) a research was carried out by the University of Otago in New Zealand on the factors which define internationalisation, as well as the scale of each one of them. The research pre-defined 13 common activities which were developed intuitively through discussion with key persons involved in the internationalisation at the University of Otago. Elkin *et al.* (2008) state that there is an agreement among these key persons that these 13 activities/strategies constitute internationalisation. Around 17 HEIs (out of 70 invited) took part in this research to find out how well their universities carried out internationalisation. The current and ideal scores for each one of the 13 strategies are given below:

Common Activities and Strategies	Average of ideal perform.	Average of current perform.	Difference between ideal and current perform.	Invest. preference index	Rank order for invest.
Internationally focused programme of study	9.1	6.0	3.1	28.21	<b>1</b>
International institutional links	9.0	7.1	1.9	17.10	<b>6</b>
Student exchange programmes	9.0	7.3	1.7	15.30	<b>8</b>
International research collaboration	8.7	6.4	2.3	20.00	<b>4</b>
Internationally recognised research activity	8.7	6.3	2.2	19.14	<b>5</b>
Staff interaction in international context	8.5	5.9	2.6	22.10	<b>3</b>
Support for international students	8.5	7.4	1.1	9.35	<b>12</b>
Attendance to international conferences	8.4	6.7	1.7	14.28	<b>9</b>
International postgraduate students	7.7	5.7	2.0	15.40	<b>7</b>
International undergraduate students	7.6	6.0	1.6	12.16	<b>11</b>
Staff exchange programmes	7.4	3.8	3.6	26.64	<b>2</b>
Overseas trained staff	6.8	4.9	1.9	12.92	<b>10</b>
Overseas curriculum	5.2	3.5	1.7	8.84	<b>13</b>

**Table 2.12: Common Activities and Strategies for Internationalisation, average scores of current and ideal performance and rank according to the preference index**  
(Source: Elkin *et al.*, 2005)

This table also shows the activities which will improve internationalisation most and therefore, will maximise return on investment. “This is often where the internationalisation dimension is of great importance and where there is a major difference between desired and actual performance” (Elkin *et al.*, 2005, p. 324). The investment preference index is calculated by multiplying the score for the order of importance and the score for the gap in performance. According to this research, the most important dimension of internationalisation is the internationally focused programmes of study. The next four dimensions mostly have to do with staff exchanges and collaboration in various ways. Surprisingly, the student exchange programmes are ranked eighth according to this research, although this programme is considered by many scholars one of the most important strategies towards internationalisation (Maringe and Gibbs, 2009).

Three years later, the University of Otago carried out more research to investigate the role of strategy in advancing HEIs progress towards its desired level of internationalisation. Elkin *et al.* (2008) conclude that out of 57 international HEIs which took part in this research, 66.6% had a complete strategic focus on internationalisation. The authors claim that this figure is lower than expected since most HEIs are interested in internationalisation. This research points to two main conclusions: The major one is that the strategic focus is important to the level of achieving internationalisation. The minor one is that the greater the degree of complete strategic focus is the more likely it is for the HEI to be a research intensive rather than a teaching institution.

#### **2.4.3.4 The new phase of Internationalisation**

It is widely acceptable that the strategic focus of institutions towards internationalisation (which most universities have according to the research by the University of Otago) has created new demands for universities. These new demands have created a need by HEIs for a new strategic approach to internationalisation. Huisman and Wende (2004) distinguish between the old and new forms of internationalisation. The old approaches towards internationalisation were not an integral part of a regular planning by HEIs. They were rather an add-on activity which focused mainly on international mobility of students and academic staff. The new forms towards internationalisation are more strategically focused and are integrated in the institution’s international behaviour.



According to Enders (2002), the question whether or not internationalisation should be integrated to the HEIs mission statement and the extent that their internationalisation policies and strategies could or should be developed, still belongs to the open agenda in this field. However, Tunney and White (2008) advocate that:

Findings from AUCC's comprehensive survey in 2006 reveal a trend that shows that internationalization has in many respects become part of the mainstream of universities' organization and overall strategies (p. 1).

Ayoubi and Massoud (2007) on the other hand, conducted research to examine the extent to which UK universities' international achievements match their strategic intent on internationalisation. The research showed that 52% of the UK universities match their declared strategic intents and their actual efforts to become internationalised. This study also revealed that 74% of the mission statements of the UK universities include intents on internationalisation and 48% of these universities are internationally student active. However, this research only relied on three variables which were available from HESA and could be easily comparable among universities. Therefore, this research could not really examine the level of internationalisation of each HEI, given the many elements of internationalisation which could not be measured by the authors. Thus, the results could only be used as an indication but further research in this field should be undertaken.

In many parts of the world, we see a trend by HEIs towards integrating their internationalisation efforts in their strategic plan. According to Maassen and Uppstrom (2004, cited in Abdullahi *et al.*, 2007) the new internationalisation process consists of:

- New student and staff mobility patterns funded and regulated through specific international or national programmes;
- New geographical destinations for students and staff;
- New forms of cooperation as part of formal institutional agreements;
- New providers coming to the scene, many of them dependent on ICT, many of them are profit-making oriented towards their international teaching activities;
- New conditions for internationalisation, for example in Europe, formulated by the EU, by the Bologna Declaration, by the WTO/GATS negotiations. Also new

motives for internationalisation can be observed, emphasising economic arguments instead of cultural and academic ones;

- New realities for universities and colleges in their national context as a consequence of the greater national emphasis on internationalisation, including in the public funding mechanisms and quality assessment structures. For many institutions, quality is linked to the increased internationalisation of HE.

Governments have a role to play in pushing the new internationalisation process since it is in their interests for their HEIs to become internationalised. Wende (2007) emphasises that:

Clearly, successful internationalization strategies depend on the right mix of competitive and cooperative options. It is a major challenge for governments to design such strategies in an effective and coherent way, conscious of the fact that they define to a large extent the internationalization opportunities for HEIs. In their turn, governments work in the context of wider multilateral agreements that are designed to provide frameworks for competition (e.g., GATS) or cooperation (e.g., the Bologna process) (p. 283).

The above view that cooperation and competition define the future of internationalisation is also expressed by a number of authors, including Abdullahi *et al.* (2007). They identify two main trends or approaches in this new phase:

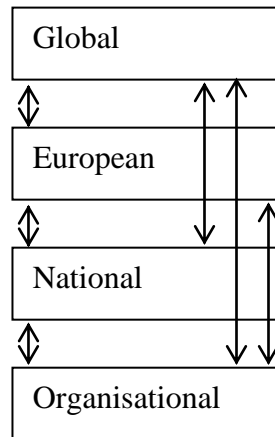
1. The growing need for HEIs to internationalise. To integrate an international and intercultural dimension in teaching and research in order to enhance their academic excellence and the relevance of their contribution to societies.
2. The growth of market-driven policies and actions. This is the result of increasing the number of international students studying overseas, declining public funding, diversification of HEIs, as well as new methods of delivery of courses.

While most HEIs understand this strong need to internationalise, they face the problem of implementing a comprehensive and practical strategy (Qiang 2003). This is a very difficult task when looked from a holistic perspective. Knight (2008) states that in recent studies and surveys, there is an increase in the importance and attention given to support internationalisation. However, while this investment in internationalisation is welcomed and needed, “it is necessary to sharpen the focus on the evaluation of

internationalization strategies and to make sure that we are ‘doing the right things’ and ‘doing things in the right way’” (p. 39). From all the above, it is understandable that without clearly focused internationalisation strategies, HEIs would be engaged in various actions which might miss the target of internationalisation.

#### 2.4.4 European Internationalisation or Europeanisation

Responses to globalisation can be seen, formulated and implemented at different levels e.g. international, European, national and institutional (Marginson and Wende, 2007). Adding to this, Lub (2002) states that the key players at these levels influence and make decisions on HE institutions and policies in addition to being influenced by each other (see Figure 2.3).



**Figure 2.13: Influence between the three levels**  
(Source: Lub, 2002)

The expansion of globalisation was followed by the spread of regionalisation as a way for the nation-states to jointly deal with its impact. This impact did not erode the nation state as forecasted by some but made the regional needs and networks more important (Knight, 2008). The best example of a strong regional centre is the case of the EU. Other examples of regional centres or networks are the North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Council (APEC).

Europeanisation is a fashionable but at the same time contested concept. It is not as widely discussed or debated as internationalisation or globalisation. However, it has been receiving a lot of attention lately, especially since the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and that is why it was added as a trend which needed to be examined as part of answering to the first research objective. Dale and Robertson (2009) emphasise that Europeanisation is becoming an increasingly complex and sophisticated process. Although its features and effects are being more effectively analysed, its interactions with globalisation and its relationships with national systems is not yet very well understood. Olsen (2002) explains that the term is used in a number of ways to describe

many phenomena and processes of change. There is not however, a shared or universally used common definition of this term.

As Radaelli (2000) correctly notes, we need to specify not only what Europeanisation is but also what it is not to avoid the danger of conceptual stretching. Vink (2002) states that the term should not be confused with convergence, harmonisation or political integration. These terms may be seen by some as the consequence of European integration but can not be used synonymously with Europeanisation. Europeanisation is also more than just EU-isation since more than the EU member states are involved in this process. Moreover, Luitjen-Lub (2007) specifies that Europeanisation involves a geographical grouping of states which is naturally the EU member states in addition to three countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway), that are members of the European Economic Area (EEA). However, as time goes by, Europeanisation involves more and more geographically European countries which are not members of the EU or the EEA.

Huisman and Wende (2004) describe Europeanisation as cooperation between EU countries aimed at increasing stability and economic growth within Europe. They point out that:

‘Europeanisation’ is often employed for describing the phenomena of internationalisation on a ‘regional’ scale. Cooperation between EU countries and economic, social and cultural activities crossing their national borders are expanding quickly based on the notion that such cooperation is required for stability and economic growth within the region. Its link to globalisation consists in the fact that this regional cooperation also intends to enhance the global competitiveness of the European region as a whole (p.10).

Similarly, Knight (2008) advocates that Europeanisation “has been part of the deliberate, planned agenda motivated by the political and economic objectives of the EU” (p. 7). Vink (2002) defines it very briefly as domestic change caused by European integration. However, a more precise definition is given by Hix and Goetz (2000) as “a process of change in national institutional and policy practices that can be attributed to European integration” (p. 27).

In HE now, Europeanisation seems to mean different things to different people. It seems that this term causes confusion in relation with internationalisation, globalisation and regionalisation. For Luitjen-Lub (2007), the definition of regionalisation can form the

basis for a definition of Europeanisation as it allows for a continuing, but changing role of nation states within a certain geographical area, which was discussed above. The researcher agrees with other scholars which describe Europeanisation as a regional form of internationalisation. Teichler (2003) underlines that:

Europeanisation is the regional version of either internationalisation or globalisation. It is frequently addressed when reference is made to cooperation and mobility, but beyond that to integration, convergence of contexts, structures and substances as well as to segmentation between regions of the world (p. 180).

However, this definition assumes in an indirect way that internationalisation and globalisation are the same which as was seen before are not the same. Furthermore, as Litjens (2005) advocates, the external challenges that HEIs have to deal with are the results of the processes of globalisation and Europeanisation. For Rudder (2000), Europeanisation of HE means several things at the same time, at least as much of which would happen anyway as it is the result of direct political action. One example of this is people opening their umbrellas when it starts raining: similar action without coordination. Accepting this view means that we need to find the historical origins of the political action that leads to Europeanisation, which is analysed in the section below.

#### **2.4.4.1 Brief Historical Roots**

It is argued that most European countries have a common history, common wars, common culture, common religion, etc. but as Rinne (2000) emphasises, they also have very different historical roots, national structure and cultures of their own. Following World War II, HE in Europe was undergoing expansion and structural reforms. Some countries were following similar paths and others quite different ones in terms of various issues of their national policies. The first attempts of some European member states to have a close cooperation between them were made after the setting up of the then European Economic Community. Europeanisation in HE became more noticeable since the European Commission (EC) developed education programmes in the mid-1970s (Litjens, 2005). However, “its initiatives were for a long period restricted to stimulating cooperation and mobility between “closed” national systems in which the controlling power entirely lay with the member states” (Marginson and Wende, 2007, p. 45). An example of an initiative which aimed at the mobility of students and staff was

the first ERASMUS, a successful programme which was highly promoted and funded. The SOCRATES programme was another initiative which aimed at the cooperation at the curriculum and the institutional level.

The emergence of the EU with the signing of the Maastricht Treaty on the 7 February 1992 developed an increasing need for skilled workers to work in cross-border jobs, speak foreign languages and travel to various countries within the EU. It is undeniable that European integration process, cemented by the completion of the European internal market in 1992, was stimulated by an important economic agenda (Marginson and Wende, 2007). The new agenda was focused on the European integration process which also included HE. It was then that for the first time the EU became responsible for the HE of its members. Article 126 of the Treaty of Maastricht (1992) states clearly that:

1. The Community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between member states and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the member states for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and their linguistic and cultural diversity.
  
3. The Community and the Member States shall foster co-operation with third countries and the competent international organizations in the field of education, in particular the Council of Europe (p. 28-29).

The whole article describes the process of Europeanisation within the EU member states, with specific reference to cooperation with third countries. According to Litjens (2005), this article enhances the chance that results of negotiations between different nation states are integrated into national policy, even though they are not legally binding. However, in the late 1990's, EU members realised that although European cross-border mobility was very successful, extra-European mobility was not at the same level. Europe was not the number one destination for international students anymore (the first place went to the USA), and this alarmed many European policy-makers. Moreover, as Marginson and Wende (2007) explain, the EU “was losing too many of its own graduates and researchers to R&D positions in the United States, and had substantially less efficient degree structures than the United States” (p. 45). It was then that the Europeans realised the need to make changes to the European educational systems.

#### **2.4.4.2 The emergence of the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Strategy**

In May 1998, the Educational Ministers of the UK, Germany, France and Italy met in Paris to discuss the harmonisation of the European HE system. They signed the so-called Sorbonne Declaration which called for the harmonisation of degree structures. One year later (June 19, 1999), the Educational Ministers of 29 European countries (not restricted to EU member states only) met in Bologna and based on the terms of the Sorbonne Declaration signed the new declaration which called for the creation, by 2010, of a European HE area. Signing the declaration and complying with its terms was voluntary for governments and HEI. Its non-binding character was one of the keys to success given the concerns of many Europeans for standardisation. Under the terms of the Bologna Declaration, students are encouraged to study abroad within the EU, despite the fact that many non-EU member states have joined this process (Altbach and Knight, 2006). It should be emphasised that the Bologna declaration did not have any formal relationship with the EU and the European Commission (EC) did not become involved in this process from the beginning. It joined this process in 2000 in order to enhance the international competitiveness of European HE.

After many years of hard work and cooperation, the European political integration led to the Bologna Process which aimed at increasing the mobility and employability of graduate students, and HEIs, becoming more competitive while establishing a good presence on the international scene. Moreover, the process harmonised different academic systems by assuring comparability and transparency of higher educational qualifications as well as transferability of credits among European HEI. The European HE integration will eventually lead to even higher mobility of students and labour. Among other things the declaration states that:

We must in particular look at the objective of increasing the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education. The vitality and efficiency of any civilisation can be measured by the appeal that its culture has for other countries. We need to ensure that the European higher education system acquires a world-wide degree of attraction equal to our extraordinary cultural and scientific traditions (Bologna Declaration, 1999).



However, despite the signing of the declaration, the EC did not become really active until 2000. It was in March 2000 that the Heads of State or Government launched the “Lisbon Strategy” aimed at making the EU the most competitive and dynamic knowledge economy in the world and achieve full employment by 2010.

The Bologna Process and the Lisbon Strategy are the most important vehicles or frameworks guiding Europe’s response to globalisation in HE (Marginson and Wende, 2007). “Although they emerged in very different ways and could be characterised as intergovernmental (Bologna) versus supranational (Lisbon), they seemed to converge slowly into one over-arching approach” (p. 45). The Bologna process is more than a vague political statement (Litjens, 2005) which is translated into a specific action plan despite its non-binding character. The Bologna Declaration is characterised by Vink (2002) as a very good example of a ‘weak’ positive integration with a substantial domestic impact. “This non-binding declaration apparently was an important inspiration for transformation of European higher education systems...” (p. 9).

#### **2.4.4.3 The Europeanisation of HE**

The consequences of European integration are affecting HE in a number of ways. A direct consequence to Europeanisation in HE is that, year after year, the European HEIs become more international in terms of competitiveness, student body and staff, and cooperation with other HEIs. Another important consequence is that the EU encourages increased mobility amongst students to boost the common goal of European integration. For Marginson and Wende (2007), the Europeanisation in HE has three set of origins: the growth of international mobility of people and ideas, the international cooperation between EU countries in their economic, social and cultural activities and thirdly the explicit commitment to a common European HE zone. Similarly, for Rudder (2000), Europeanisation in HE is mainly driven by the economy in the context of globalisation and the labour market. “That is why the changing European labour market is a major driving force in the Europeanization of higher education: it is increasingly a labor market for higher education graduates...” (p. 5).

Based on all the developments analysed above, is it justified to talk about Europeanisation of HE? According to the researcher the answer is yes. Europe is

witnessing many efforts by European HEIs to cooperate on many levels in order to face common challenges like the power of the USA in the HE market. Rudder (2000) on the other hand answers this question with a yes and a no. He argues that there are discernable but limited tendencies of Europeanisation in HE, mainly because of quite different national higher educational systems which prevail. For many people, it might seem that since the EU is cooperation oriented the role of nation states is unchallenged, but that reality is more complex (Marginson and Wende, 2007). For Rinne (2000), as the EU strengthens, the role of the nation state weakens. This helps the Europeanisation process. Adding to this is the view that the EU became a major player in promoting the Europeanisation of HE through the funding of different programmes (Rudder, 2000). These programmes sponsored by the EU offer significant economic incentives for participating HEIs and enhance the Europeanisation process.

On the other hand, Huisman and Wende (2004) highlight that while member states try to ‘Europeanise’ their HE systems they are faced with practical difficulties. One of them is the fact that some countries believe that any changes in their educational policy should remain at the national level and not transferred to the European one. For some other countries, another difficulty is introducing educational reforms without these being legally forced to by the EU. In addition, as Litjens (2005) argues, the fact that educational policy still falls under the responsibility of the national-state, instead of Europe, implies that new regulations in this area will always be subject to different interpretations about how and when to apply the rules.

Despite deep national differences and immense competition, the European nations and societies as well as their HEIs are variations of a similar theme. Otherwise, Europeanisation would not have been possible. It is very logical to assume that each country responds to policy initiatives in a different way. However, they all have common goals and aspirations. Novoa (2002) points out these differences while defining Europeanisation as preserving the differences of structure and system while seeking similar outcomes. He understands that member states are incorporating European guidelines and discourses as the best way to deal with education, economic and social difficulties. However, member states accept these “with a sense of inevitability” (p. 133). Litjens (2005) is also confident that most member states recognise that Europeanisation of HE is inevitable.

Having said that, most Europeans agree that European integration does not mean unifying national systems. Therefore, the different national systems should be made more compatible and at the same time maintain their identity if they want to improve cooperation in their academic programmes and boost the mobility of students and staff. The magic formula for this is the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) (Rudder, 2000) which aims at enhancing the readability and recognition of degrees. ECTS credits are used to indicate the workload of a student i.e. 180-240 credits for a Bachelor degree and 60-120 for Masters degree based on a system of 60 ECTS credits per year of full time study. The three-stage education which is also known as the 3-5-8 formula is by far, according to Duclaud-Williams (2004), the most important policy commitment contained in the various declarations concerning HE. According to this formula which is based on a 60 ECTS annual load rather than years needed for each qualification, not less than three years are required for a Bachelor degree, not less than 5 years are required for a Masters degree and not less than 8 years are required for a Doctorate degree. For Duclaud-Williams (2004):

The rationale underlying this limited degree of harmonisation is that, by the adoption of common labels and common definitions, the comparability and transparency of higher educational qualifications will be greatly increased and that this will open up national systems of higher education and promote mobility (p. 3).

The 3-5-8 formula is one of the most important changes which were decided for in the various agreements signed by the European Educational Ministers. For many scholars however, the Bologna and the Lisbon agreements did not fully succeed their goal. As Novoa (2002) states, there are many contradictions to the whole Europeanisation process: while education remains an exclusive matter of each member state, politicians will continue to adopt common programmes and policies in order to increase their competitive position in the HE market. Enders *et al.* (2005) criticises Europeanisation in education and elsewhere that it has been:

...much too defensive, much too place and time-bound in a mobile and connected world, and designed to secure ‘what we are’ rather than ‘what we are becoming’. It is premised on keeping out the power of America, and the rising power of China, by turning away and erecting still higher city walls that will block those other metropolises from view (p. 210).

Besides its drawbacks, it seems that Europeanisation in HE is progressing slowly but in a steady pace. However, the pace is increasing as the European nations realise that this is the only way to effectively deal with increasing competition and globalisation. If Europe wants to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge economy in the world and achieve full employment by 2010 many things need to be done yet. Above all, there should be closer cooperation between all Bologna parties involved in this process in achieving the goals set in the same way and at the same pace and timeframe. Moreover, European governments should understand that changing the legislation is not enough to achieve the common goals as agreed at various declarations. Instead HEIs need to have more autonomy in order to successfully proceed with necessary reforms (Reichert and Tauch, 2005).

## 2.5 Students' choice and decision-making in HE

The institution's task... is to determine how current and prospective customers make their decisions, including what factors they consider, how they weigh the relative importance of these factors, the process by which they arrive at a decision, and the influences that operate on that process. By understanding these dimensions of decision making and choice, the institution can be more effective in attracting and satisfying its constituents (Kotler and Fox, 1995, p. 244).

In this section the theoretical aspect of students' choice and decision-making processes is explored, which is, according to Moogan and Baron (2003), "a complex interactive process" (p. 271). In doing so, the limited, according to many authors (Chen and Zimitat, 2006, Cubillo *et al.*, 2006, Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006 and Maringe, 2006) available literature will be examined, in order to have a better understanding of:

- A. The students' choices and their motivations for studying abroad; and
- B. The factors influencing the students' decision-making process.

Examining the existing research on the above two categories will enable the researcher to analyse and understand similar research before constructing his own research for the purpose of this project. This research is specifically interested in finding and analysing the choices international students have and the factors influencing their decision-making process which made them come to Cyprus and AC. However, as Davey (2005) advocates, much less is available when one explores these processes in the context of international students seeking studies abroad as opposed to local students studying in their country. Cubillo *et al.* (2006) add to this that although existing literature focuses on students' decision-making process related to HEIs, it often disregards the influence of the country choice. The present study will mainly be focused on the international dimension of choice and decision-making process and will thus shade some light in this unknown, for Cyprus's HEIs, territory.

### 2.5.1 The importance of choice and decision-making in HE

Choice and decision-making in HE is very important for a number of reasons which are directly involved with the purpose of this research as well as its objectives presented in Chapter one. Their importance is driven by the marketisation in education as well as the

introduction of an increasing number of market-type mechanisms to attract new students. Also, Maringe (2006) argues that by having a clear picture of the choice and decision-making processes of intending applicants, HEIs will have a better understanding of the recruitment markets. Moreover, analysing students' choices "is central to developing institutional positioning in an increasingly competitive HE environment" (p. 467). Wilson and Gilligan (2002, cited in Maringe and Gibbs, 2009) define positioning as: "the process of designing an image and value so that customers within target segments understand what the company or brand stands for in relation to its competitors" (p. 60). Thus, student choice and decision-making provides to this image creation process (Maringe and Gibbs, 2009) the reasons for the purchase behaviour of applicants. In addition to the reasons above, investigating these processes will help in improving HEIs marketing strategies (Pimpa, 2003).

Cubillo *et al.* (2006) on the other hand give more emphasis on the international aspect of the decision-making process. They argue that the growing number of international students and the increase in the choice of possible destination countries increase the need for understanding the behaviour of consumers from a cross-national perspective. For Moogan and Baron (2003), analysing the selection of a HEI as a decision-making process will give valuable information to the recruitment personnel for choosing more functional tools in reaching their enrolment targets. HEIs have an explicit need to understand the information processing circumstances of the prospective student, something that should be done by first analysing the conceptual framework of choice and decision-making.

### **2.5.2 Conceptual Framework**

Research into the supply-side of HE choice or consumer behaviour in HE markets is not extensive according to Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006). In the context of research examined by Fosket *et al.* (2003), emerges the recognition that "choice is a complex iterative process based on perceptions, set within a number of important contextual influences" (p. 1). There are four brand theories which try to explain how students make these complex choices in education (Maringe and Carter, 2007):

Firstly, we have the structural models which try to explain students' choice "in the context of institutional, economic and cultural constraints imposed upon choosers whose choices and decisions can be predicted along socio-economic, cultural and ethnic lines" (Maringe and Carter, 2007, p. 462). This theory places emphasis on the external factors which influence choice but has an important drawback of disregarding individual rationality. Secondly, we have the economic theories of choice which are based on the assumption that students want to maximise their utility and minimise their risks (Rapose and Alves, 2007). In other words, unlike structural models, students under this theory will make rational choices based on the information that is available which might be precise and complete or imprecise and incomplete. Kotler and Fox (1995) are two of the important authors endorsing this theory.

Thirdly, we have the status-attainment models. These models are based on sociology, social networks and academic conditions, and the role of family. These models reject the assumption that students or their families make rational decisions (Rapose and Alves, 2007). Hemsley-Brown (2001, cited in Maringe and Carter, 2007) accept this theory and conclude that while decisions and choices made by students are under the influence of economic, cultural and structural forces, these are filtered by the preconceptions derived from the family background, culture, life history and personality. Lastly, we have the combined models which capture elements of all three previous models. According to Rapose and Alves (2007) "these kinds of models allow a considerable amount of analytical power, as they combine sociological aspects with a rational decision" (p. 2). There are many combined models but the four most widely cited are the following: Hanson and Litton (1982), Jackson (1982), Chapman (1984) and Hossler and Gallagher (1987).

Maringe and Carter (2007) state that the most current theory is the one developed by Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001a), namely the 'Four C's Model of Choice and Decision-Making'. This theory was constructed by examining some of the patterns and themes that have emerged from investigating young people's choice. It states that while choice is never a completely rational action, it is nonetheless not irrational or random and it involves three elements which determine choice (institution, career pathway, and programme). These are the context, the choice influencers and the choosers and their interaction give students the choice.

Context	Choice Influencers	Choosers	Choice
Home Environment	Institutional e.g. teachers	Protecting self-image	Institution
Lived Environment	Lived e.g. media	Pathway perception	Pathway
Social Environment	Social e.g. friends	Lifestyle ambitioning	Career
Institutional Environment	Home e.g. parents	Net personal gain Estimation	Programme
		Choice announcement	
		Justification selection	

**Table 2.14: Elements which influence Choice at the Four C’s Model of Choice and Decision-Making**

(Source: Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001b))

Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001b) conclude in this article about the Four C’s Model of Choice and Decision-Making that each individual student has a different way of choosing their pathway which is a “narrative of a personal history than a systems model can portray” (p. 10). The choice process is therefore a journey which is influenced by the interaction of the chooser with his/her environment and the choice is made along the way. In addition, Maringe and Carter (2007) emphasise that the concept of choice is both an outcome and a process that helps the student reach a decision in the decision-making process. The outcome of decision-making is choice which is already discussed. The two concepts cannot be separated and there is a very thin line in the literature which distinguishes one from the other and this can be sometimes confusing.

Maringe and Carter (2007) define decision-making as “a multistage and complex process undertaken consciously and sometimes subconsciously by a student intending to enter HE and by which the problem of choosing a study destination and programme is resolved” (p. 463). This HEI decision is characterised as high-involvement. This is because according to Kotler and Fox (1995), one or more of the following conditions exist:

1. The student’s decision will have an effect on his image and could have a long-term effect;
2. The cost of the student’s decision has a major personal or economical sacrifice;
3. There are high personal and social risks associated with a “wrong” decision;
4. There is a reference-group pressure to make a particular choice or act in a specific way and the student is strongly motivated to meet the expectations of this group.



The student’s decision stated above, otherwise called the purchase behaviour of consumers, is broadly understood as a problem solving process (Maringe, 2006) and can be seen as one form of consumer behaviour (Chen and Zimitat, 2006). “Consumer behaviour is the study of how individuals, groups, and organizations select, buy, use, and dispose of goods, services, ideas, or experiences to satisfy their needs and wants” (Kotler and Keller, 2009, p. 190).

According to Chen and Zimitat (2006), analysing the customers’ behaviour can lead to an understanding of how the purchase-related factors influence and interact with each other. Moreover, according to Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001a) research into HE choice or consumer behaviour has mainly been stimulated by an individual HEI’s need to anticipate the long-term implications of choice and to understand the key factors involved in student choice. Kotler and Keller (2009) categorise these factors into three main groups:

- Cultural (culture, subculture and social class);
- Social (reference groups, family and social roles and statuses); and
- Personal (age, stage in the life cycle, occupation, economic circumstances, lifestyle, personality and self-concept).

These factors apply mostly to the consumer of real goods and do not specifically apply to ‘customers’ of the sensitive field of education. Maringe and Carter (2007) state that consumer behaviour theory is applied to education, firstly by Chapman (1986) and later by Moogan *et al.* (1999). The decision-making stages that a student (Maringe, 2006) or even a consumer of goods (Kotler and Keller, 2009) will pass are similar. They will both follow the five-stage model described below:

	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5
Student	Pre-search behaviour	Search behaviour	Application stage	Choice decision	Registration
Consumer of goods	Problem recognition	Information search	Evaluation of alternatives	Purchase decision	Post-purchase behaviour

**Table 2.15: The five-stage model of consumer/student buying process**  
(Source: Maringe, 2006 and Kotler and Keller, 2009)

For a student, the five stage model involves the following actions and thoughts (Chapman, 1986 and Moogan and Baron, 2003):

- Pre-search behaviour:* student thinks about his future e.g. obtain a decent salary after attending a HEI.
- Search behaviour:* the student starts his research on the HEI sources of information e.g. search prospectuses of possible providers.
- Application stage:* the student assesses the shortlisted HEIs e.g. through visits, and progresses to the next phase of decision-making, the application.
- Choice decision:* the student accepts the offer of one or more HEIs e.g. he/she can accept two offers if application is made through UCAS.
- Registration:* the student decides of his final choice and registers at the chosen HEI.

In terms of minimising the HEIs choices, Kotler and Keller (2009) argue that each company should strategize to get its brand into the customers' awareness set, consideration set and choice set before reaching their final decision. However, for students applying to a HEI, there are 3 additional sets which can be shown in the student's decision funnel of Kotler and Fox (1995).

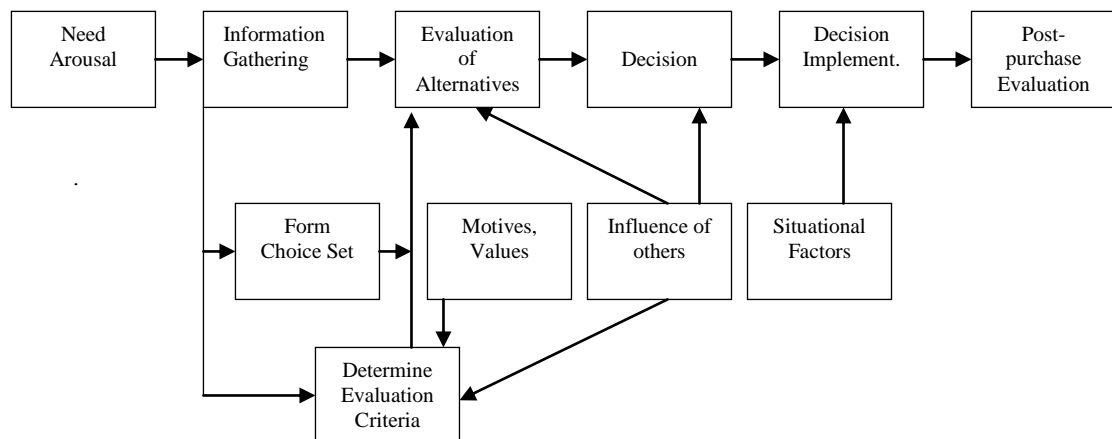
Kotler and Keller (2009)	Kotler and Fox (1995)
Total Set	Total Set
Awareness Set	Awareness Set
Consideration Set	Consideration Set
Choice Set	Application Set
	Preference Set
	Admission Set
Decision	Deposit Set
	Enrolment choice

**Table 2.16: Consumers' five-step as opposed to students' eight-step decision funnel before reaching their final decision**

(Source: Kotler and Keller, 2009 and Kotler and Fox, 1995)

The authors suggest that the student will pass through a decision funnel before reaching the decision as to where to study. However, forming the choice set for HE involves a number of steps which specifically apply to the higher educational sector. First, it is the application set where the student specifically chooses a few universities from his/her consideration set to apply to. Out of these universities there is a preference set but there is also the realistic admission set which comprises of the universities which offer a place to the student. The preference set and the admission might be the same although usually these two sets are different. Lastly, in making a decision, a student should make a deposit which secures the place at the chosen HEI until he/she is finally there and then enrolls at the chosen HEI.

This eight-step process might seem simple and straight forward but in reality forming these sets is a lot more complicated. Moreover, when a student applies to a HEI abroad, the decision becomes a lot harder and complex. The highly-complex decision-making can be seen in the following 6-stage more complicated process (Kotler and Fox, 1995):



**Figure 2.17: The highly-complex student's decision-making process**  
(Source: Kotler and Fox, 1995)

For Gibbs and Knapp (2002), the decision-making process has two critical elements, namely the informed consumers and the degree of involvement in the decision to be made.

1. Informed consumers are assumed to make rational decisions. However, many scholars argue that in reality students make decisions with incomplete information either because they cannot have access to all the information needed or because they are not willing to spend the time needed in making a rational

choice. HEIs have made major steps in providing all necessary information to students but still some students decide with minimum available information. However, for Davey (2005), students spend time and effort in reaching a decision for such a high-involvement choice as selecting a HEI.

2. The second critical element is the degree of involvement in the decision made. In general, the higher the degree of student involvement in the decision the more time, energy and resources he/she will put and the better the decision would be. Maringe and Carter (2007) add to this that the high-risk nature of the decision to study abroad increases the degree of involvement. International students have many more aspects to think about studying abroad that make their choice a lot more rational than the choice of home students.

### **2.5.3 Study abroad decision-making process**

According to Soutar and Turner (2002) recruiting for HE has been transformed from a domestic, centrally funded non-marketised entity to a highly marketised and competitive global environment. Over the years, academic institutions are becoming more aggressive in their marketing campaigns both domestically and internationally. Foreign students are being sought by so many universities around the world that make the marketing and recruitment strategies of HEIs more important year after year. Hence, the appropriate marketing mix for academic institutions should take into consideration environmental and external factors as well as the students' needs and their capacity to meet those needs.

The student's decision to study in a HEI is a very 'risky' and difficult task which is expressed by Kotler and Fox (1995) in investment terms as follow: "the prospective student can only invest in a single 'stock', while the school is investing in a diversified and therefore less risky 'mutual fund'" (p. 249). If you add to this the difficult decision to study overseas which is by itself one of the most significant and expensive initiatives that students may ever undertake (Mazzarol, 1998) you will end up with a very complicated, difficult and demanding equation. Moreover, Cubillo *et al.* (2006) advocates that the high costs involved in studying abroad add to the complexity of the decision. By choosing a country in which to study, the prospective student is not only buying the educational service of that country but he/she is also acquiring many services

jointly provided with the core service. Generally the choice of the country is also a choice of the quality of life, living standards and generally his/her new life style for the least next three or four years of his/her life. Obviously, the better the image of the country internationally the bigger the number of students who want to study there. A good example is the USA where the very good image of the country which is further boosted by Hollywood's international movies makes it the first country in international recruitment.

It is widely acceptable that the decision to study abroad can be explained by Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002) combination of 'push and pull' factors.

'Push' factors operate within the source country and initiate a student's decision to undertake international study. 'Pull' factors operate within the host country to make that country relatively attractive to international students. Some of these factors are inherent in the source country, some in the host country and others in the students themselves (p. 82).

The decision-making process through which the international students go through when selecting a HEI involves at least three stages. In stage one, the student decides to study abroad, rather than staying in his/her home country. During the next stage, the student chooses the preferred country to continue his/her education. In the final stage, the student chooses the institution according to a number of 'pull' factors which make it more attractive than other institutions. Some of the institution's 'pull' factors include its reputation for quality, range of courses, market profile and staff expertise.

According to Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), the lack of access to HE has been a key driver for students from Asia and Africa over the second half of the twentieth century. In relation to 'push' and 'pull' factors, McMahon (1992) studied the flow of international students from 18 developing countries mainly to the USA during the 1960s and 1970s. Some of the 'push' factors suggested by this study include the home country's level of economic wealth and its involvement in the global economy, the emphasis placed on education by the government of the developing country and the level of educational opportunities in the home country. McMahon's study findings on the 'pull' factors included above all the economic capacity of the student's country relative to that of the USA, the developing country's trade links with the USA and the institutional support to the host nation's students.

There are a limited number of research studies which analyse the reasons for studying abroad as well as choice and decision-making. Moreover, Gray *et al.* (2003) emphasise that “little has been written about the influence of cross-cultural values on the positioning of international education brands, even though universities are increasingly competing for overseas students” (p. 108). During the next section some of these studies will be analysed in order to understand, among other things, the reasons that push students to study away from their country, and pull them to specific countries of the educational world.

#### **2.5.4 Review of international empirical research on study abroad, choice and decision-making**

Maringe (2006) argues that available research conducted on choice and decision-making can be divided into three levels. The global level (which shows why international students study abroad), the national level (which shows why local students choose a specific university) and the limited research on the courses of study level (which examines why students choose specific courses of study). For the purposes of this research, the author is more interested on the first two and not so much on the third level. However, research into the reasons that ‘push’ students to choose specific courses can be carried out in a future expansion of this study.

In the next page, the key features of 12 international empirical research studies conducted in the past have been summarised so that what is known and established already can be analysed and reported. This section answers to the second and very important research objective about analysing other relevant empirical studies in order to identify the factors influencing international students’ decisions. These studies cover a range of different techniques, methods, types and population samples and purposes. In addition, eight of these studies involve international students, studying or intending to study in a foreign country which is the area this research is mostly interested in.

It is important to mention that each study and each questionnaire used in getting the students’ data follows its own structure. Some of the findings can be directly comparable to each other but some of them are not, due to the differences in the questions asked or due to the available possible answers which are presented to the

students by the researchers. This analysis reveals similarities and differences in choice and decision-making between local and international students which are important to highlight. By local students the author means local students at the countries where the research was conducted and not Cypriot students. Local empirical research will be analysed in the section that follows.

Table 2.18: Main empirical studies identified for this review with their main findings

Author	Country and Date	Method of Study	Type and Sample size	Purpose/Objectives	Top factors identified/main findings		
Mazzarol <i>et al.</i> (1997)	Indonesia Taiwan 1996,	Quantitative	Empirical 780 (404+361) Prospective Indonesian and Taiwanese students	Identify the reasons why students selected a particular study destination	Influencing factor motivating students' destination choice	Indonesia %	Taiwan %
					1. Reputation of institution	93	83
					2. Parents/relatives recommendation	80	67
					3. Agents recommendation	62	47
Decision to study overseas					%	%	
					1. Overseas course better than local	92	92
					2. Better understanding of the West	80	80
					3. Course not available at home	51	51
					4. Difficult to gain entry at home	49	59
					5. Intention to Migrate	40	43
LeBlanc and Nguyen (1999)	Canada 1999	Quantitative	Empirical 402 business school students	Gain more insights in to the dimensions used by business students when they consider value and to identify which cues are more important to them in their judgement of value.	Six service value factors identified by principal component analysis	% of variance explained	Regression results (betas)
					1. Functional value (want satisfaction)	35.7	0.22
					2. Epistemic value (knowledge)	7.4	0.29
					3. Image	7.0	0.21
					4. Emotional value	5.1	0.12
					5. Functional value (price/quality)	4.1	0.59
					6. Social value	3.8	0.09
Mazzarol <i>et al.</i> (2000)	Australia (Year N/A)	Quantitative	Empirical 879 (466+413) International and local students studying at an Australian HEI	Identify the reasons why students selected a particular study destination	Factors influencing choice of an institution	Mean	Discriminant rating function
					1. Offers qualifications that will be recognised by employers	6.10	Not significant
					2. Has a reputation for quality	5.66	Positive
					3. Was willing to recognise my previous qualifications	5.65	Positive
					4. Has a reputation for quality and expertise of its staff	5.48	Positive
					5. Offers a broad range of course and programmes	5.45	Not significant
					6. Makes use of the latest information technology	5.40	Not significant
					7. Has a reputation of being responsive to student needs	5.33	Not significant
					8. Is well known for innovation in research and teaching	5.19	Not significant
					9. Has a large campus and excellent facilities	5.10	Not significant
					10. Is noted for its superior use of technology	5.10	Negative
Discriminant rating function indicates whether the variable serves to classify international from local students. Positive/negative means the variable was found significantly positive/negative for International students. No significance means there is no difference between international and local students							



Table 2.18: Main empirical studies identified for this review with their main findings

Author	Country and Date	Method of Study	Type and Sample size	Purpose/Objectives	Top factors identified/main findings	
Mazzarol <i>et al.</i> (2001a)	India 1999	Quantitative	Empirical 152	Identify the reasons why students selected a particular study destination	Influencing factor motivating students' destination choice	%
					1. Reputation of institution 2. Parents/relatives recommendation 3. Agents recommendation	94 60 30
					Decision to study overseas	%
					1. Overseas course better than local 2. Intention to Migrate 3. Better understanding of the West 4. Course not available at home 5. Difficult to gain entry at home	93 59 47 47 47
Mazzarol <i>et al.</i> (2001b)	China 1999	Quantitative	Empirical 689	Identify the reasons why students selected a particular study destination	Influencing factor motivating students' destination choice	%
					1. Reputation of institution 2. Parents/relatives recommendation 3. Agents recommendation	77 52 35
					Decision to study overseas	%
					1. Better understanding of the West 2. Overseas course better than local 3. Difficult to gain entry at home 4. Intention to Migrate 5. Course not available at home	91 62 39 38 33
Nguyen and LeBlanc (2001)	Canada (Year N/A)	Quantitative	Empirical 395 business school students	Identify the main effects of institutional image and reputation on customer loyalty	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The relationship between each of the two independent variables (reputation and image) and the dependent variable (customer retention intention - loyalty) shows that both the institutional image and institutional reputation on customer loyalty are strongly statistically significant. However, the impact of institutional image on customer loyalty is more important.</li> <li>Both institution's image and reputation are derived from characteristics of service such as price, contact personnel and physical environment which help determine students' perceptions.</li> </ol>	

Table 2.18: Main empirical studies identified for this review with their main findings

Author	Country and Date	Method of Study	Type and Sample size	Purpose/Objectives	Top factors identified/main findings								
Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003)	UK 10/2001-02/2002	Quantitative and Qualitative	Empirical 62 International Students 44% from developed countries and 56% from developing countries	Examined international students perceptions of the UK education system related to price, product, place and promotion and the UK's penetration abroad	Reasons for choosing a HEI		Reasons for choosing UK for their HE studies						
					1. Courses on offer 2. Course fee 3. Teaching rating 4. Reputation 5. Accommodation Provided 6. Accommodation Costs 7. Entry Requirements 8. Scholarship Available 10. Facilities	1. Educational standard/recognised qualifications worldwide 2. Ease of university admissions and immigration procedures 3. Ease of finding employment during and after the study 4. Cost of living, accommodation, safety and culture							
Pimpa (2003)	Australia (Year N/A)	Qualitative and Quantitative	Empirical 803 Thai students	Identify various influencing factors from family in Thai students	Most important choice relating to international education				%				
					1. Choice of academic programme 2. Choice of Country 3. Choice of University 4. Choice of city				41.3 34.2 12.7 11.3				
Moogan and Baron (2003)	UK Spring 1999	Quantitative	Empirical 674 upper 6 <sup>th</sup> form pupils	Test the importance and the relative rankings of the various decision-making variables	Rankings of importance (1=high) of the most influential factor within the decision-making process		Mean value	1 %	2 %	3 %			
					Course content (Mean value 1.75)		1.75	46.5	32.5	21			
					Reputation		2.07	30	34	36			
					Location		2.17	25	33	42			
					Duration of search for information by students before making their choices				%				
					1 month or less				27.5				
					2 months or less				12				
3 months				21									
4 to 5 months				12									
6 to 11 months				18									
1 year or more				9.5									
Source of information (1 is high and 5 is low)				Mean value									
University prospectuses				1.21									
Library materials (UCAS books and leaflets)				2.47									
HE careers fairs				2.69									
Internet				N/A									

Table 2.18: Main empirical studies identified for this review with their main findings

Author	Country and Date	Method of Study	Type and Sample size	Purpose/Objectives	Top factors identified/main findings			
...continued					Influencers			
Moogan and Baron (2003)					Self Parents/Family Teachers Friends Careers Advisors			
Gray <i>et al.</i> (2003)	Malaysia, Hong-King and Singapore (Year N/A)	Quantitative survey	Empirical 1096 potential international HE students from Malaysia, Hong Kong and Singapore	Investigate the values that students in three Asian markets place on university education and the media they use to gain information about foreign universities	Importance Scale: 1 = little influence, 6 = great influence	Malaysia	Hong Kong	Singapore
					<u>Extent of influence on choice of overseas tertiary institution from:</u>			
					Myself	5.6	5.4	5.6
					Parents	4.9	4.5	4.5
					Friends	3.9	4.0	4.3
					Teachers in colleges	3.8	3.8	4.0
					Respective university agents	3.5	3.5	3.5
					<u>Communication media - Most important source of information:</u>			
					Internet/WWW	5.31	4.80	5.04
					Print media (Newspapers and magazines)	5.03	4.64	4.94
					Public relations (Open days, sponsorships and trade shows)	4.84	4.24	4.65
					Broadcast media (Television and radio)	4.64	4.27	4.62
					Word-of-mouth (HEI representatives/ agents, alumni and testimonials)	4.35	4.17	4.37
					Visual aids (Video clips, posters, banners, photographs)	4.23	3.96	4.20
					Promotional material (Bookmarks, brochures, stickers and postcards)	3.93	3.65	6.52
					<u>Brand positioning statements – Most important factor in choosing a HEI</u>			
					Learning environment (e.g. teachers, research resources, TF)	5.21	4.43	5.03
					Reputation (e.g. Brand name, achievements and quality of its courses )	5.16	4.70	5.05
					Graduate career prospects (e.g. Expect. income, employment prospect)	5.14	4.84	5.23
					Image of destination (e.g. Political environment, safety and hospitality)	5.04	4.34	4.87
					Cultural integration (Cultural diversity and religious practices)	4.40	3.77	4.21

Table 2.18: Main empirical studies identified for this review with their main findings

Author	Country and Date	Method of Study	Type and Sample size	Purpose/Objectives	Top factors identified/main findings				
Maringe (2006)	UK (Year N/A)	Quantitative	Empirical 387	Explore factors which 6 <sup>th</sup> form pupils consider important in their choice of university and courses of study	Percentage importance of factors influencing subject choice			Mean scores for university choice factors	
					In brackets the mean average % influence	Very strong influence		Factors and key constituent elements	Mean value
						Male	Female		
					1. Career opportunities (100)	84	82	1. Programme	7.8
					2. Performance in subject (97)	82	76	2. Price	7.5
					3. Advice from teachers (95)	59	64	3. Place	6.2
					4. Interest in subject (93)	58	60	4. Prominence	6.1
					5. Course prestige (76)	38	33	5. Promotion	4.8
6. Friends on course (61)	28	32	6. Prospectuses	4.6					
7. Careers advisors (61)	24	33	7. People	4.5					
8. Advice from parents (50)	12	24							
Maringe and Carter (2007)	UK (Year N/A)	Qualitative	Empirical 28 African students	Aims to explore the decision-making and experience of African students in British HE	‘Pull’ factors drawing African students to British HE		Freq. %	Fears and anxieties factors of African students	Freq. %
					1. International recognition of British HE qual.	100	1. Huge direct costs	100	
					2. Straight forward and easy application process	82	2. Failure to meet study costs	91	
					3. Excellent teaching and learning environment	65	3. Visa restrictions and frequent changes	82	
					4. Opportunities for part-time work	50	4. Inability to find suitable part-time job	65	
					5. International quality	49	5. Failure to meet course targets	39	
‘Push’ Factors drawing African students away from Africa									
1. Economic									
2. Political									
3. Lack of local capacity within countries of origin									

#### **2.5.4.1 Decision to study overseas and reasons for choosing a specific country**

According to the empirical studies of Mazzarol *et al.* (2001a, 2001b, 1997), the main reason which influences students from Taiwan, India and Indonesia to study abroad is that the overseas course is better than the local one and the second reason is to have a better understanding of the west. For China this order was opposite and this can be explained by the bigger desire of Chinese students to see, discover and understand the ‘outside’ western world which is unknown to most of them. It is important to note that the third reason for the three out of four countries is identified to be the difficulty in gaining access to public HE at home (Gupta, 2008), something that most developing countries with a big population (e.g. China, India) are currently facing. The HE infrastructure of many developing countries cannot offer enough places to their rapid increase in secondary school leavers who want to further their studies and therefore, many are forced to leave the country and study abroad. In India, for example, only 11% of high school graduates have access to HEIs (Bidwai, 2006). In China the combination of fierce competition in Chinese HE, limited places in postgraduate courses and increasing competition for employment ‘push’ students to study abroad (Wang and Shan, 2007). It is also true that as the economic situation of households improves, more and more families are able to offer financial support to their children to study abroad.

For Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003) the first reason of international students in choosing to study abroad (specifically to the UK) is the educational standard of the country together with the fact that the qualification to be earned will be recognised worldwide and the second one is the ease of HEIs admissions process. These findings are in line with the findings of the research conducted by Maringe and Carter (2007) although this is a study of only 28 African students and so the research has limited generalisability. Nevertheless, this study places the international recognition of British qualifications and the straight forward and easy application process in the first and second place of the ‘pull’ factors of African students. Surprisingly, the intention for part-time work is not, according to any of these two studies, in the top reasons for studying abroad as one might expect. Binsardi and Ekwulugo’s (2003) study ranks the employment during or after the study in the third place while Maringe and Carter’s (2007) in the fourth. None of Mazzarol *et al.*’s (2001a, 2001b, 1997) research identify employment opportunities as one of the reasons influencing students’ decision to study overseas in those four developing countries.

Mazzarol *et al.*'s (2001a, 2001b, 1997) research indicates that students from Taiwan, India, China and Indonesia have four reasons which are almost equally important in choosing an overseas country for their HE studies. These are: the ease of obtaining information on the country, the knowledge of host country, the quality of education in the country and the recognition of the country's qualifications. The importance of the choice of a country is also shown in the research study by Pimpa (2003). According to it, the most important choice relating to international education among Thai students is the choice of the academic programme while the choice of the country was ranked second. Moreover, Thai undergraduate students place the choice of country in the first place, while for postgraduates, the most important choice of their international education is the academic programme as it might be expected by the reader.

#### **2.5.4.2 Reasons for choosing a HEI**

The research study conducted by Gray *et al.* (2003) on potential international students from Malaysia, Hong Kong and Singapore revealed the top reasons for choosing a HEI. For Malaysian students, the most important factor is the learning environment of the HEI, followed by the reputation of it, and thirdly, the graduate career prospects. However, for the other two nationalities, the most important factor is the graduate career prospects, secondly, the reputation of the HEI and thirdly, the learning environment. Similarly, the study by Mazzarol *et al.* (2000) concludes that the most important factor in choosing a HEI is the recognition of the course by the employers (which can be indirectly translated into graduate career prospects) followed by the reputation for quality. The results of both studies suggest that students' employment opportunities are linked to the choice of a HEI and the qualification they will earn while the choice of country is loosely linked to opportunities for part-time work (Maringe and Carter, 2007).

Maringe (2006) examined the factors influencing university choice among 6<sup>th</sup> form pupils from the UK. The HEI programme (which includes the field of study, course majors, course structure and degree organisation) was the most important factor, followed by the price (which includes the fees, flexibility in payment, transport and living costs, opportunities for part-time work, etc.). The place was ranked third possibly due to the fact that these students were locals and therefore studying in any city of their

country did not make much difference to them. Moreover, the campus accommodation, the residential requirements and other factors which are included in this category and are critical for international students proved not to have the same importance for local students. The study of Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003) on the reasons international students choose a HEI revealed that the courses on offer are in the first place of the factors influencing their choice, followed by the course fee, the teaching rating, the reputation and the accommodation provided. These findings are on the same lines as Maringe's (2006) study on the reasons students choose a HEI although the sample of the former study involves international students whereas the sample of the latter one involves local students.

#### **2.5.4.3 Student influencers**

Another important aspect of the empirical literature is the influences students have on their HEI choice and decision-making processes. The studies of Mazzarol *et al.* (2001a, 2001b, 1997) show that the reputation of the HEI is more important for students than the recommendation of their parents. Remarkably enough, the recommendation of HEIs agents takes the last place as an influencing factor. However, Mazzarol *et al.*'s (2001a, 2001b, 1997) studies mix the people (influencers) with the influencing factors under the same question and this might be confusing for students. On the other hand, at Moogan and Baron's (2003) study, the factors and the people are treated separately and this is more easily understandable for students. This research conducted by Moogan and Baron (2003) reveals that local students decide above all based on their own judgement. Recommendations by parents, teachers, friends and careers advisors follow, in the order in which they are written down. Gray *et al.*'s (2003) study proves that international students follow more or less the same recommendations or have the same influencers, such as the local students with the exception of HEIs agents which do not exist in well developed countries like the UK. Therefore, from these studies the conclusion which is reached is that international students listen to themselves more than anybody else.

#### **2.5.4.4 Source of information**

Two of the examined studies are concerned with the source of information for HEI choice and decision-making. Gray *et al.*'s (2003) study shows the internet and the

World Wide Web (WWW) as the most important source of information for international students as many people would think. WWW is followed in the ranking of importance by newspapers and magazines, open days and trade shows, television and radio campaigns and WOM by agents, alumni, etc. It is important to note that the university promotional materials like prospectuses, brochures, etc. are the least important source of information. Adding to this, Petruzzellis and Romanazzi (2010) emphasise that WOM and the web site are key influencers with the prospectus having much less importance for prospective students. This is expectable in the era of technological expansion (Internet, CD-Roms, electronic brochures/promotional materials, etc.) which makes the printed materials ‘out of fashion’. On the contrary, analysing the research study by Moogan and Baron (2003) on local students shows a completely different tendency. The university prospectuses are the most important source of information followed by other printed library materials (e.g. UCAS books and leaflets). Surprisingly, the internet is the least important source of information for local students.

#### **2.5.4.4.1 WOM importance in the HEI’s choice**

Special emphasis should be given to the WOM as a source of information. The WOM is also included in the findings of this research. The WOM is generally agreed to be informal communication between private parties in which products or services are evaluated (Anderson, 1998). According to Mangold *et al.* (1999), a substantial body of research indicates that interpersonal communication has a significant impact on consumer behaviour. More importantly, the WOM communication is a dominant force in the marketplace for services. This is because:

“Services tend to be intangible, inseparable from their provider, perishable, and inconsistent in their delivery. These qualities make services high in experience and credence qualities, thus making consumers’ evaluation of services relatively more difficult than goods” (Prugsamatz *et al.*, 2006, p.130).

Therefore, students and other potential service customers are influenced to a great extent by the WOM from consumers of these services.

The WOM effect is an important source of information for students according to a number of studies (Petruzzellis and Romanazzi, 2010, Bruce and Edgington, 2008, Prugsamatz *et al.*, 2006 and Mangold *et al.*, 1999). Mangold (1987) (cited in Bruce and



Edgington, 2008) found that the WOM has a stronger influence on the purchase decision than other sources of influence. Consumers have been found to rely on the WOM to reduce the level of perceived risk and uncertainty that are often associated with service purchase decisions (Murray, 1991, cited in Mangold *et al.*, 1999). Murray (1991) also found that personal sources have a greater influence on purchasers of services than on purchases of products.

Although the WOM is a very important source of information for consumers, it is far less controllable than a HEI communication strategy (Bruce and Edgington, 2008). This is because the WOM can have both positive and negative effects. According to Mazzarol *et al.* (2006), the WOM has a valence i.e. that the WOM can be positive, neutral or negative. Therefore, HEIs should try and find ways to generate positive WOM. Reichheld (2003) states that only those delighted with the service will promote it to prospective students. This realisation is evident in all HEIs including AC. Therefore, it should be understood by all members of staff, both faculty and administrators, that their direct and indirect actions affect recruitment.

Petruzzellis and Romanazzi (2010) empirical research on how students choose a university reveal that: “highly satisfied customers spread positive word-of-mouth and become a mobile advertisement for an institution whose service has pleased them, lowering the cost of attracting new applicants” (p.150). Consequently, they conclude that achieving satisfaction is a key source of competitive advantage for HEIs. Moreover, Prugsamatz *et al.*, (2006) empirical research on which information sources influences Chinese students’ expectations of overseas universities’ service quality reveal that the three most influential sources are the past experiences, advertising and the WOM. Similarly to the previous empirical research, the findings of this study suggest that universities should target Chinese students with strategies such as ensuring positive past experiences for students which would subsequently drive positive WOM. Furthermore, the authors suggested that HEIs should center their advertisements around past experiences of previous Chinese students. What is more, Bruce and Edgington’s (2008) empirical research on the factors influencing WOM recommendations by MBA students concluded that all elements of service delivery contribute to a HEI recommendation through WOM.

#### 2.5.4.5 Image and Reputation

Many authors and researchers are trying to evaluate the importance of image and reputation in the HEI choice and decision-making process. These concepts are used by HEIs as positioning instruments to influence students' choice (Weissman, 1990) and may also help students' decision to stay in a HEI for further studies (Nguyen and LeBlanc, 2001). According to the empirical research studies analysed above, image and reputation have an impact on students' choice and decision-making. The results of the study conducted by Nguyen and LeBlanc (2001) reveal the obvious: that reputation and image are positively related to customer retention and loyalty. However, the impact of institutional image on customer loyalty is more important. Despite that, most empirical studies are concerned more with the reputation than the image of a HEI, maybe because the reputation term is better understood by students than image. Image is only investigated in the research by LeBlanc and Nguyen (1999) although some of the questions which make up this image value, ranking it in the 3<sup>rd</sup> place of a six service value factor, involve reputation.

The reputation of an institution is the most important influencing factor motivating the student destination choice for Indonesian, Taiwanese, Indian and Chinese students (Mazzarol *et al.*, 2001a, 2001b, 1997). In addition, reputation is the second most important factor in choosing a HEI for Malaysian, Hong-Kong and Singapore students, according to the research study by Gray *et al.* (2003). Furthermore, the results of research conducted by Mazzarol *et al.* (2000) on international and local students studying at an Australian HEI reveals that the second factor influencing students' choice of an institution is the reputation for quality.

The above findings on the significance of a HEI's reputation in the choice and decision-making are further enhanced by research conducted by Moogan and Baron (2003) on local UK students. Its findings put reputation in the second place of the most influential factor within the students' decision-making process. There is only one study which slightly undervalues the importance of reputation and that is the one by Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003). The results of this study place reputation in the 4<sup>th</sup> position on a total of 10 reasons for choosing a HEI.

### **2.5.5 Review of Cyprus’s empirical research on international students’ study abroad, HEI choice and decision-making**

Unfortunately there has been only one empirical study on any aspect related to international students in Cyprus. This research study was conducted by Konis (2009) and was completed in 2008. Its main purpose was to examine the prospects of Cyprus in becoming a regional HE centre based on the views and experiences of international students studying at various HEI. Although this study focuses more on the students’ life in Cyprus and the problems they are facing while adapting socially, culturally and academically to the environment, some of the questions asked are directly linked to the purpose of this research study. For example, the questions ‘why did you decide to come to study in Cyprus?’ and ‘did you have enough information about your studies here, life here, etc. before you came?’ are closer to the objectives of this research than the ‘post-purchase’ part of it. Nevertheless, since this is the only available research on international students studying in Cyprus’s HEIs, some parts of it are examined in more depth, in order to extract valuable information.

The sample size for this research was 496 international students which corresponded to almost 1/10<sup>th</sup> of the total population. The confidence level was 95% and the confidence interval was at  $\pm 4.2$ . The sample represented a variety of countries from the Middle East, Asia, America, Africa, Eastern Europe and other European countries. The sample of Konis’ (2009) research was broken down to 37% women and 63% men. Moreover, 19% of the sample was postgraduate students and 81% were undergraduate students.

More specifically, the answer to the question ‘Why did you decide to come to study in Cyprus?’ showed that 31.6% of international students who participated in this research ‘were convinced by an agent in their country’. This was the preferred answer from a range of predetermined options. This was followed by 29.6% who chose Cyprus because a university representative visited the student’s country and then by 24.8% who said that they had friends or relatives in Cyprus. The question ‘Did you have enough information about your studies here, life here, etc. before you came?’ revealed that the majority of international students did not have enough information before coming here. 57% replied negatively while 42% replied positively. So this research showed that the

majority of students come to study in Cyprus although they do not have enough information about their living and studying conditions.

The findings of the research regarding international students' expectations from their studies in Cyprus agree with the findings of other studies which are presented previously in Table 2.18.

What did you expect from your studies in Cyprus?	Extremely important %	Somewhat important %	Not important %
Good Education	59	33	8
A degree I can use for future employment	58	31	11
A good social experience	49	34	17

**Table 2.19: International students' expectations from their studies in Cyprus**

The most important expectation is 'Good Education', something that Moogan and Baron (2003) find in their own research about the importance of various factors in students' decision-making process. The second expectation for international students in Cyprus is the future employment which again matches the findings of other research analysed before e.g. Mazzarol *et al.* (2000) and Gray *et al.* (2003). Generally however, the findings of this research were not encouraging as to meeting the well-advertised and promoted aim of the government in Cyprus to transform the country into a regional HE centre.

## **2.6 Summary**

This literature review provided the theoretical foundation for this research study. Many documents, articles, books and other materials were reviewed and analysed, which were both relevant and helpful in fulfilling the research objectives set in Chapter 1. In the following Chapters, the importance of the choice as well as the analysis of this literature review becomes even clearer. Among other reasons, the selected literature was used in designing the students' questionnaire, in examining whether the findings of this research support or refute the available literature and in further supporting the need and importance of this research project. Moreover, the appropriate selection and analysis of the literature helped the author in specifically answering the research objective 1 and 2. Section 3.3.1 justifies how the literature review helped the author carry out this research project and why these readings were chosen to be included in this project.

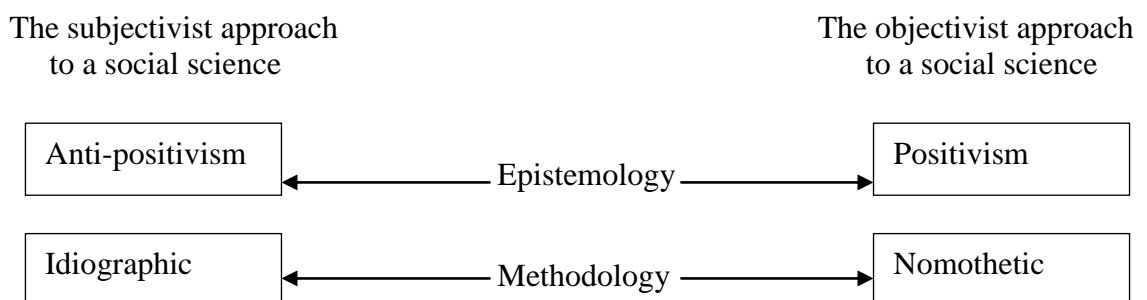
## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction and conceptual issues

This Chapter describes the methodological issues associated with this educational research. Dash (2005) defines educational research as research which is concerned with exploring and understanding social phenomena which are educational in nature. “Since theoretical questions in education emerge from different conceptions and interpretations of social reality, different paradigms have been evolved to determine the criteria according to which one would select and define problems for enquiry” (p. 1).

Closely associated with the methodology is the term epistemology. This term is defined by Dawson (2002) as “the study of the nature of knowledge and justification” (p. 18). It looks at from where knowledge has come and how we know what we know. The figure below summarises the two underlying methodological and epistemological assumptions of conceiving social reality, evident in the practices of researchers investigating human behaviour and educational problems.



**Figure 3.1: The subjective-objective dimension**  
(Source: Cohen *et al.*, 2007)

Krauss (2005) clarifies that “epistemology addresses how we come to know that reality while methodology identifies the particular practices used to attain knowledge of it” (pp. 758-759). Moreover, he adds that understanding the differences in epistemology among research paradigms begins as a philosophical exercise.

Moreover, according to Blaxter *et al.* (2003) “methodology has a more philosophical meaning, and usually refers to the approach or paradigm that underpins the research” (p. 59). According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), a paradigm may be viewed as the “basic belief system or world view that guides the investigation” (p. 105). Alternatively, Henning *et al.* (2004) define a paradigm as “a theory or hypothesis” and point out that this paradigm reflects a “communal process, informed by participating practitioners” (p. 20). While a paradigm is rather a framework within which theories are developed, Voce (2004) stresses that a paradigm fundamentally influences how you see the world, determines your point of view, and shapes your understanding of how things are connected together. Holding a particular world view influences the researcher’s personal behaviour, professional practice, and ultimately his/her position regarding the subject of his/her research. According to Blaxter *et al.* (2003), the usefulness of this term is that it offers a way of categorising a body of complex beliefs and world views.

Dash (2005) advocates that due to the remarkable growth in social sciences research during the past century, different paradigms emerged. However, there are mainly two paradigms to the verification of theoretical propositions, the positivistic and phenomenological (or naturalistic inquiry) which according to Blaxter *et al.* (2003) are usually presented as competing alternatives. The tables below summarise the two main research paradigms and their main characteristics as well as some of the main alternative terms used.

	<b>Positivistic Paradigm</b>	<b>Phenomenological Paradigm</b>
Basic beliefs	The world is external and objective	The world is socially constructed and subjective
	Observer is independent	Observer is part of what is observed
	Science is value-free	Science is driven by human interests
Researcher should	Focus on facts	Focus on meanings
	Look for causality and fundamental laws	Try to understand what is happening
	Reduce phenomenon to simplest elements	Look at the totality of each situation
	Formulate hypotheses and then test them	Develop ideas through induction from data
Preferred methods include	Operationalising concepts so that they can be measured	Using multiple methods to establish different views of phenomena
	Taking large samples	Small samples investigated in depth or over time

**Table 3.2: Research Paradigms**  
(Source: Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 1991)

<b>Positivistic Paradigm</b>	<b>Phenomenological Paradigm</b>
Quantitative	Qualitative
Objectivist	Subjectivist
Scientific	Humanistic
Experimentalist	Interpretivist/hermeneutic
Traditionalist	Inductive
Hypothetico deductive	
Social constructionism	

**Table 3.3: Alternative terms for the main research paradigms**  
(Source: Mangan *et al.*, 2003)

Dawson (2002) advocates that there has been a long-lasting discussion and arguments associated with the research methodology and the theory of how inquiry should proceed. However, much of this debate and in some cases battle is concerned with the issue of qualitative versus quantitative inquiry which according to Mangan *et al.* (2003) are generally associated with the two principal research paradigms analysed in the tables above. For Krauss (2005), despite many differences between the two main paradigms, “the heart of the quantitative-qualitative ‘debate’ is philosophical, not methodological” (p. 759). Until today, many pragmatic researchers are urging all researchers to end this debate. However, others have simply combined methods and left the philosophical



battle to others (Miles and Huberman, 1984, cited in Merriam, 1988). Mangan *et al.* (2003) points out that “the trend in management research generally is increasingly to use methods and approaches which provide a middle ground between the contrasting positivist and phenomenological paradigms and perspectives” (p. 565).

A major advantage of combining quantitative and qualitative research methodologies is the methodological triangulation. Merriam (1988) argues that combining quantitative and qualitative measures is a form of triangulation that enhances the validity and reliability of a research study. According to Mangan *et al.* (2003), this combination increasingly provides multidimensional insights into many management research problems. “Such methodological triangulation can compensate for the flaws, and leverage the strengths, of the various available methodologies” (p. 569).

Within a critical realism framework, both qualitative and quantitative methodologies are seen as appropriate (Healy & Perry, 2000, cited in Krauss, 2005) for researching the underlying mechanisms that drive actions and events. Krauss (2005) concludes on this debate that “With realism, the seeming dichotomy between quantitative and qualitative is therefore replaced by an approach that is considered appropriate given the research topic of interest and level of existing knowledge pertaining to it” (p. 762). Adding to this view, Dash (2005) highlights that “Although, each of the paradigms has corresponding approaches and research methods, still a researcher may adopt research methods across research paradigms as per the research questions she proposes to answer” (p. 4). This research used a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies which are analysed in the following sections.

### **3.2 Research Approach**

This research investigation explored the factors influencing international students’ decisions in choosing a Cyprus’s HEI and their implications in recruitment and marketing for AC. The methodology and the design of the research undertaken, the synthesis of the DCTs and the reasons for some of the decisions, as well as actions taken is what will be outlined and analysed in this Chapter. Specifically, it illustrates the choice, design and the carrying out of the interviews, participant observations, the

literature review and the students' questionnaires, as well as the analysis of the data gathered.

After the study of all the different research approaches, namely, Action Research, Soft Systems Methodology, Experiments, Surveys and Ethnography, which are used by practitioners/researchers, as well as their advantages and disadvantages, the decision was reached to employ the exploratory and intrinsic case study (CS) research method. CS is considered to be the most suitable for this type of research project. In reaching this decision the author specifically shortlisted and examined in-depth three other well-known methods that may have been viable alternatives but which were not used for the reasons briefly explained below.

The main and most important DCT for this research was the questionnaire, which was distributed to all the international students of AC. Although the distributing of questionnaires part of the project could be characterised as a Survey, it could not by itself analyse the marketing and recruitment policies of the College. Furthermore, this method, unlike CS, could not offer to the author insights into finding the implications the research question had in recruiting and marketing.

One might argue that because the researcher has the authority and is in a position to bring change to the department and organisation, he could use Action Research. However, his main research aim was to carry out a detailed in-depth research analysis of AC's admissions department and not make changes, monitor the results and take action for improvement which is one of the main characteristics of this method. Making changes to the recruitment methods and practices can take months or even years to witness their full extent. This project examined AC working environment thoroughly by analysing, among other things, the questionnaires, the interviews and the researcher's observations. Based on these data, this research project presents its findings and suggests practical actions for improvement of the AC admissions department. Therefore, in this case, the author used the CS method as a leverage to suggest changes, a method which in the future can lead to the design of a generalised model. For this reason Action Research was not the most appropriate method for this study.

Soft Systems Methodology was also considered because a project carried out with this methodology can be described as an epistemological framework for the study of organisations as purposive human activity systems. This method may also be viewed as a kind of action research, at least in respect to its fieldwork methods (Mansell, 1991). This methodology starts with an examination of the problem situation which would have been ideal for this project. However, Soft Systems Methodology approach continues by identifying and defining relevant human activity systems, and structures an imaginary “ideal” system. It then compares the ideal model with the actual model. The author believes that there is no such a thing as an ideal system or model which can be compared with how things work in a real life admissions department nor was this the purpose of this study. Furthermore, although soft systems methodology places more emphasis on analysing the problem, it can not accommodate the questionnaires in the same way as the CS, nor can it give a spherical view of the environment of the work-based researcher.

### **3.2.1 The Case Study Research Method**

An exploratory and intrinsic CS research was chosen to be employed with both qualitative and quantitative characteristics embedded, for the reasons analysed in the next section. A thorough examination of the CS method as well as the different designs of CS which were used proved to be the right choice for this research project. The most comprehensive definition of CS in general comes from Yin (2003), one of the most influential and important writers of the CS method of research. Yin’s (2003) technical definition of CS is the following:

1. A case study is an empirical inquiry that
  - investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when
  - the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident
2. The case study inquiry
  - copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result
  - relies on multiple sources of information, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result
  - benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis (pp. 13-14).

Adding to this definition, Cohen *et al.* (2007) argue that a CS provides a unique example of real people in real situations. Nisbet and Watt (1984) explain that a CS is a specific instance that is often used to illustrate a more general principle, it is ‘the study of an instance in action’ (Adelman *et al.*, 1980, cited in Cohen *et al.*, 2007, p. 253).

CS designs may be differentiated according to their characteristics, functions or disciplinary perspectives (Hancock and Algozzine, 2006). Yin (2003, 1984) analyses three research designs, namely explanatory (seeks to establish a cause and effect relationship determining how different events occur and which ones may influence particular outcomes), descriptive (provides a complete description of the situation) and exploratory. For this study, the exploratory CS design was used.

This design seeks to define research questions or run a feasibility test on other studies or procedures. According to Hancock and Algozzine (2006), this design involves fieldwork and information collection prior to the definition of a research question. According to Routio (2007) exploratory design is used when there is no theoretical basis for the intended study. The most common reason for this is that the researcher has no other choice since he/she can not base his/her research on any of the existing theories. However, even if there is a relevant theory or model, the researcher might deliberately decide not to use them. Exploratory research means that hardly anything is known about the matter at the start of the project. The researcher begins with a rather vague impression of what he/she should study, and it is also impossible to make a detailed work plan in advance. An exploratory case-study then tries to find patterns in the data and eventually come up with a model within which to view this data. Moreover, Yin (2003) advocates that some types of ‘what’ questions are exploratory, “the goal being to develop pertinent hypotheses and propositions for further enquiry” (p. 6).

This is exactly what this project was all about i.e. to find out what are the factors that influence international students to choose AC for their studies. This study is an exploratory tool that focuses on exploring the influencing factors mentioned above and presenting them not on a formal hypothesis testing. Moreover, this research examines how these factors affect the recruitment of new international students and finally examines AC’s marketing and recruitment practices in order to answer the question: What are the ways to increase the recruitment of new international students?

Yin's (2003) three types of CS designs described above accord with Merriam's (1988) ones, namely the descriptive, interpretative and evaluative. Stake (1994), on the other hand, proposes another three CS classifications, that is, instrumental (used to better understand a theoretical issue or problem, collective (usually involves several instrumental cases to enhance our understanding of the problem) and intrinsic, which is the one employed in this study. With intrinsic CS the researcher wants to know more about the case being studied, thus gaining a deep understanding of the issue under investigation, something that fitted well with this type of CS research as opposed to the other two methods. Although Hancock and Algozzine (2006) indicate that with this design "researchers are not necessarily interested in examining or creating general theories or in generalizing their findings to broader populations" (p. 32), this is not always the case. This design method can be used for projects which need a deep understanding of the case being investigated even if some kind of generalising is inevitable.

### **3.2.2 Rationale for employing the Case Study method of research**

The author believes the CS method of research was the most appropriate and suitable for this research project, considering its aims and objectives. What he wanted to achieve was a richly descriptive analysis of the current AC recruitment and marketing practices, based on various sources of information and suggest changes, based on the findings of this research. According to Hancock and Algozzine (2006), a CS represents another type of qualitative research which should be used if a spherical and comprehensive analysis of a single unit is needed. In order to bring to life the complexity of the phenomenon being studied, the researcher needs to employ a synthesis of different forms of data, e.g. the views of key participants, anecdotes, the main points derived from interviews and other literary techniques.

The CS method was used in the past by various authors who associated it with the decision-making processes and HE. Merriam (1988) claims that CS research "is an ideal design for understanding and interpreting observations of educational phenomena" (p. 2). Hancock and Algozzine (2006) claim that through CSs, researchers hope to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (e.g. particular event, situation or activity) under investigation. That is, the CS research method "normally seeks to identify themes

or categories of behavior and events rather than prove relationships or test hypotheses” (p. 16). One theoretical example of a straight-forward CS that the authors give, which is on the same line as this research project, is ‘seeking greater insights into decision-making processes that influence the adoption of a software programme in an organisation’. Another real CS example similar to this project is the research by Howe *et al.* (2002) on the impact of the school choice programmes in Boulder Valley School District.

Adding to this, Merriam (2001, cited in Hancock and Algozzine, 2006) suggests that insights gleaned from CSs can directly influence policy and procedures, which was the ultimate goal of the current project. This reinforces the fact that the CS is the most advantageous approach among all others. Given the CS detailed analysis of the admissions department and the factors that influence the choices made by international students of AC, the general idea of this project was to influence the recruitment and marketing policy of AC and, if needed, improve the relevant procedures and practices.

Another reason why CS was chosen was to use the specific example of AC and generalise it. Cohen *et al.* (2007) argue that:

...the case study researcher typically observes the characteristics of an individual unit – a child, a class, a school or a community. The purpose of such observation is to probe deeply and to analyse intensively the multifarious phenomena that constitute the life cycle of the unit with a view to establishing generalizations about the wider population to which that unit belongs (p. 258).

The sample population of international students at AC is indicative of the characteristics of the wider population of international students in Cyprus, since the sample size is a significant percentage of the whole population. Generalising the findings to the whole population is a typical example of using the CS method. These findings can easily be applicable to other HEIs, since this research’s sample is statistically significant to the population of international students in Cyprus.

Moreover, by following the CS and not any other research method, a more general idea is being analysed in-depth, which is very popular in Cyprus’s HEIs these days. This is simply because the way international students choose and decide to study in Cyprus affects nearly all academic institutions. Similarly, the way they choose and decide to

study in a specific HEI (even though it involves an institution based in Cyprus) affects but to a lesser extent, foreign HEIs. These institutions would be seriously interested in the results of this research. This knowledge may be useful to others who are searching for answers to similar research questions and would be willing to acquire it and apply it to their organisation. Therefore, the author will not only provide AC with an in-depth needs analysis but he will also add an important asset to his organisation i.e. the ‘intellectual capital’.

Another basic characteristic of the CS is its ability to be used in many different contexts, which enables boundaries around the case to be drawn. Cohen *et al.* (2007) explain that “the single instance is of a bounded system” (p. 253), which for the purposes of this project, is a HEI based in Cyprus (AC). The boundaries of this research project can be clearly defined and this will help the future reader, as well as the future researcher, read and understand it. More specifically, the inner boundaries of this CS project can be set out to be the admissions department and the outer boundaries AC. This way the ideas can be more easily understood rather than being presented with theories or principles. For Hancock and Algozzine (2006), in CS “the phenomenon being researched is studied in its natural context, bounded by space and time” (p. 15). This research was carried out in a specific HEI, AC, in Nicosia, Cyprus (the space) during a particular academic semester, Fall 2009 (the time).

In reaching the decision to use CS research, among other things the researcher also examined three basic conditions which according to Yin (2003) are:

- a. the type of research question posed;
- b. the extent of control an investigator has over actual behavioural events;
- c. the degree of focus on contemporary, as opposed to historical events.

The main research question was to find the factors influencing international students in their HEI decision-making process, a real-life contemporary issue. While some of these factors can be ‘controlled’ by the College (e.g. the level of TF), most of them are beyond the College’s control or sphere of influence. Some of these factors are: students’ perception about Cyprus, location of the College, available information gathered about Cyprus from international students, preference for other educational

destinations, the students' influence by their friends and family members, etc. If, on the other hand, there was no access or control to actual behavioural events then the author would be dealing with a 'dead' past and therefore it would be most appropriate to have used the history method of research. Yin (2003) states that:

In general, case studies are the preferred strategy... when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context (p. 1).

It is clear that this project investigated a current event which for the last 30 years had been very popular in most HEIs and is expected to become even more critical as time goes by. Yin (2003) explains that the CS research method relies on many of the techniques which are used when employing the history research and this can be sometimes confusing. However, he also adds two sources of evidence which are mostly used in CS and hence distinguish it from historical research. These are the direct observations of the events being studied and interviews from the persons involved in the events, both of which were used in this project. From all the above it can be seen that Yin's last two conditions are met by using the CS.

The first condition about the type of research question posed is also met in this CS research. This is because the main research question is trying to find 'what' are the factors influencing students' decisions with regard to their studies. Generally, 'how', 'why' and 'what' type of questions are characterised as questions suitable for CS research, as opposed to the 'where' and 'who' type of questions. For example, the question 'What are the factors influencing international students' decisions to study at AC?' tries to find the reason why students choose AC for their studies. Similarly, one might simply argue that this research tries to answer the basic question of why students study in Cyprus in the first place and in doing this, the author will have to find the factors which influenced their decision. According to Yin (2003), these types of questions justify the use of a CS as a research method.

According to Hitchcock and Hughes (1995), a CS has several hallmarks. First of all, CS focuses on individual actors or groups of actors and seeks to understand their perceptions of events. For this project, the author was interested in finding the



perceptions of the group of international students studying at AC. Also in CS, the researcher is integrally involved in the case which is examined. This is very important and fully applies to this case since the insider-researcher is integrally involved and focused on analysing this case which is one of the objectives of this research. Adding to this, Hancock and Algozzine (2006) emphasise that:

Because it involves collecting and analyzing information from multiple sources, such as interviews, observations, and existing documents, case study research sometimes requires the researcher to spend more time in the environment being investigated than is the case with other types of research (p. 16).

The author's position in AC allowed as much time as was needed to be spent in the environment being studied and observe, interview, question, collect and finally analyse the information gathered without any time limitations or other barriers.

### **3.3 Data collection techniques**

All research involves some type of collecting data to be analysed. However, as Blaxter *et al.* (2003) point out, data collected during and for research may vary considerably in their characteristics. It is therefore imperative for the researcher to present the DCTs and analyse them in detail so that the reader can understand and follow the logic behind their use. In this research project a mixture of DCTs were used which are suitable for this CS. Yin (2003) argues that:

Although case studies and histories can overlap, the case study's unique strength is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence-documents, artifacts, interviews and observations-beyond what might be available in a conventional historical study (p. 8).

For the present CS research, the following techniques were used in order of importance which are analytically explained below:

1. Review of the relevant literature;
2. Distribute questionnaires to all AC international students;
3. Conduct personal interviews with AC staff members (SMs) responsible for recruiting international students;
4. Carry out participant observations of the admissions department;

The data collected and analysed are a mixture of both qualitative and quantitative ones. Moreover, for the purpose of this project, both deskwork and fieldwork was used in gathering all the data needed. The insider-researcher went into the field and collected data directly from the source; the student questionnaires and the observations are characterised as fieldwork whereas the AC document review, the relevant literature review and the various statistics used on the number of international students are characterised as deskwork.

### **3.3.1 Literature Review**

One of the most important issues of this research was to determine what was already known and not known about the topic of this research. This was done by carrying out a literature review. Cooper (1998) defines literature review as:

... a literature review uses as its database reports of primary or original scholarship, and does not report new primary scholarship itself. The primary reports used in the literature may be verbal, but in the vast majority of cases reports are written documents. The types of scholarship may be empirical, theoretical, critical/analytic, or methodological in nature. Second a literature review seeks to describe, summarise, evaluate, clarify and/or integrate the content of primary reports (p. 104).

Another definition of a literature review is given by Hart (1998) as follows:

The selection of available documents (both published and unpublished) on the topic, which contain information, ideas, data and evidence written from a particular standpoint to fulfil certain aims or express certain views on the nature of the topic and how it is to be investigated, and the effective evaluation of these documents in relation to the research being proposed (p. 13).

These two definitions highlight the importance of literature review for any research project. Without it, the researcher will not gain a deep understanding of the case being studied, and what has already been studied by others on similar projects. This might lead to wrong decisions, as to the designing of the research plan. In turn, this might eventually lead to repeating common mistakes that others have made. Hancock and Algozzine (2006) argue that: “reading existing literature helps researchers identify possible research designs and strategies for their own research efforts” (p. 28).

Additionally, Hart (1998) emphasises that a review of the literature is important because without it, the researcher cannot acquire an understanding of his/her topic, of what has already been done on it, how it has been researched and what the key issues are. In preparing the review, one will be expected to show that he/she understands previous research on his/her topic. This necessitates showing that he/she has understood the main theories in the subject area and how they have been applied and developed, as well as the main criticisms that have been made of the work to this subject.

Furthermore, for the purposes of this CS research project, the literature review included a review of relevant AC documents which were presented in the literature review section, and in the findings and recommendations Chapters. For the author, a document review is part of the literature review. However, some authors make a distinction between the two and consider document review as another DCT. Gathering information from relevant documents of the organisation being studied is a very important research tool, especially when using the CS research method. In many cases, access to secondary analysis can provide the researcher with extremely valuable information.

Moreover, document review is a very good way of providing cost-efficient resources. Blaxter *et al.* (2003) argue that “all research projects involve, to a greater or lesser extent, the use and analysis of documents. Researchers are expected to read, understand and analyse critically the writings of others...” (p. 167). Hancock and Algozzine (2006) state that: “when planning to use documents, the researcher asks: *Who* has the information? *What* part of it is needed? *Where* is it? *When* was it prepared? *How* will it be collected?” (p. 51). Blaxter *et al.* (2003) point out that the researcher should ask the question of any existing document as to the conditions of its production. “For example, why, and when, was the document produced/written and for whom” (p. 170). CS researchers often review existing documents in order to gather information related to the unit being studied and the research question. The organisational documents hide valuable information which can be unravelled for the purpose of the research. These documents are essential in cases where we have an insider research practitioner.

Generally, adding to the importance of reviewing the relevant literature is, according to Hart (1998), part of the researcher’s academic development, of becoming an expert in his/her field. This process, according to Bell (2006), is anything but easy, as it involves

questioning assumptions, querying claims made by other authors, considering the findings of one researcher compared to those of others and evaluating. Collecting facts is one thing but selecting the important ones, organising them and classifying findings into a coherent pattern is the difficult part.

For this research, many documents were reviewed and analysed, which were both relevant and helpful in fulfilling the research objectives. These were the following:

- Literature on the background and context of tertiary and HE in Cyprus, as well as a description of AC and its setting, which is relevant for this research.
- Literature on the evolution and use of HE Marketing;
- Literature on current trends in the HE setting affecting HEIs;
- Literature on policy and research context on students' choice and decision-making in HE;

Following is the analysis of how the literature study was conducted, why the specific literature was chosen and what the reading of each section led to.

### **Literature on the background and context of tertiary and HE in Cyprus and description of the AC setting**

It was important to start the literature review Chapter with a literature analysis on the Cyprus's tertiary and HE setting. This was presented in section 2.2. This section was included as it was assumed that the reader of this research (especially the foreigner) would like to know the historical background on Cyprus's higher education and its evolution throughout the years. Reading on the local HE background, as well as the Law enacted in 1996 which governs PITE, helped the author, as well as the reader, understand the environment in which AC operates better. This assisted in the development of a clear rationale as to the need of this research for AC, a small tuition-dependent HEI in Cyprus.

In this literature review, important statistics were presented for the growth of HE in Cyprus which were needed in the analysis of the conclusions and recommendations Chapter. Presenting key numbers on the Cyprus's HE setting was considered important to support the need for changes into the recruiting and marketing practices of AC in

order to target and attract more quality international students. Finally, the author was informed of the impact of the Bologna process on Cyprus's HE through studying the biennial Bologna Process national reports of 2004-2005, 2005-2007 and 2007-2009. Among other things, this was important in demonstrating that the rise in the places offered by the public HEIs would put tremendous pressure on other HEIs which would have to find ways to increase their international students intake in order to survive.

AC is of course part of the Cyprus's HEI map and is also affected by the Bologna process. In this section a brief presentation of AC's facts and figures which are relevant for this research project was included. In extracting these numbers, an extensive work in the college's administration software that AC uses, was carried out in order to get significantly comparable figures. Moreover, the literature review of AC documents included all the promotional materials (Bulletin, International Students Guide, etc.), as well as other important documents such as agendas and minutes taken from the admissions department meetings, and the reports of various staff on previous trips abroad.

### **Literature on the evolution and use of HE Marketing**

A literature search was carried out on marketing in HE in order to find out its evolution and today's use by various HEIs. The analysis of the reviewed literature can be found in section 2.3. This literature review was chosen because it was considered important to illustrate how marketing is used in today's changing environment by other HEIs. This was followed by an analysis of the important and long-lasting debate of supporters and critics of using marketing in HEIs in the same way as it is used in any other business. This review also provided the author with a good foundation on the reason marketing was used by HEIs in the first place to help ease concerns over the recruitment numbers and keep the institutions financially sound. In addition, it enabled the author to clarify what educational marketing is and find out what the arguments for and against its use are. Finally, it gave the opportunity to the author to strengthen his point of view in favour of using marketing in education to promote a HEI's purpose, values and products in order to attract more students.

### **Literature on current trends in the international HE setting affecting HEIs**

In section 2.4 as part of answering the first research objective, four processes were analysed, which play an important role in forming today's academic arena, namely globalisation, internalisation, marketisation and Europeanisation. These processes are also present in most current discussions on the future of HE. This section of the literature review aimed at establishing a core understanding of key issues which shape both the educational marketing and the international recruitment. Associated with these processes are issues which should be well known to academics, marketers and HEIs' decision-makers. Some of these issues, just to name a few, are: the economic elements in education, market competition, internationalisation strategies, transnational education, entrepreneurial involvement, government intervention and market competition.

For this section, several online searches in the Athens online database were made in order to find various relevant journal articles. Moreover, search in the library catalogues of the University of Cyprus and the library of AC was carried out to find relevant books, newspapers and journals. This search led the researcher to find many books and journal articles which were relevant in analysing the conceptual framework of the research. Through the reading of this section, the researcher learnt about the views of the critics and supporters of each one of the four processes. Although the author had his own views on some of these issues, this reading helped him refine and in some cases develop his own stance on each of these issues. A clear rationale was developed as to why these processes had emerged in the first place and why they are so important to HEIs which want to improve their marketing and recruitment activities. Finally, this reading made the author aware of the fact that all HEIs should adapt if they want to successfully follow the changing environment. This literature was even more important for this research because it examined issues which involved international students who were influenced by this changing environment.

As Bassett (2009) believes, these processes are incredibly broad research areas with complicated histories, but when someone examines them in conjunction with each other, "these areas provide a fascinating look at the modernization, innovation, and even, commodification of higher education today" (p. 17). All these processes affect

one way or another most HEIs which have entered or are entering now the ‘competition’ stage or which just want to survive in this new era.

### **Literature on policy and research context on students’ choice and decision-making in HE**

In section 2.5, an extensive literature search in a big number of online full text journal articles was carried out to find relevant literature on the theoretical background of key words associated with this research e.g. students’ choice, HEI decision-making process, etc. This section was one of the most important literature review sections of this research. Its importance lay in the fact that the background on how prospective students make their decisions to study in other HEIs was determined. More specifically, the author was informed about the policies on students’ choices and their motivations for studying abroad, as well as the factors influencing the students’ decision-making process. Furthermore, this literature review included reading books which dealt with students’ choice and decision-making process. Through this reading, various models were identified which try to explain these processes. The author was also able to understand the more practical stages in choice and decision-making as proposed by various authors. The foundations were therefore laid for constructing the actual research of this project which followed.

In this section, literature on previous empirical research work which is related to choice and decision-making in HE was searched, found and examined thoroughly. This was vital because it enabled the researcher to analyse and understand similar research, identify its advantages and drawbacks and finally base the construction of this research on them. The reading gave the author a very good foundation as to how different authors viewed similar research to this one, which issues were mostly targeted, what the aims of their studies were, how they analysed their data, as well as how these authors presented their findings.

Although many more empirical studies were examined, it was decided to study 12 of them in detail. This number was assumed to be sufficient to allow the in-depth investigation and understanding of other research based on actual and prospective students from various HEIs around the globe. These studies were selected based on the degree of comprehensiveness of their focus and relevance to this research. The details of

these, as well as their main findings are presented in Table 2.18. By identifying examples of good research, this investigation gave insights into how to approach some of the research questions better, by identifying key themes and common patterns.

Moreover, through the review of empirical research on study abroad, HEI choice and decision-making, the researcher was able to see the importance of undertaking this kind of research in introducing changes in AC's practices based on these findings. Finally, a literature review was considered necessary to investigate the existence of similar empirical research undertaken in Cyprus. One such study was discovered and included in the project which was mostly associated with students' 'post-purchase' behaviour. The author however managed to take advantage of it and analyse a few questions which were related to this project.

### 3.3.2 Questionnaire

Questionnaires are one of the most widely used DCTs. Blaxter *et al.* (2003) state that: "The idea of formulating precise written questions, for those whose opinions or experience you are interested in, seems such an obvious strategy for finding the answers to the issues that interest you" (p. 179). Bell (2006) emphasises the fact that in reaching the stage of designing a questionnaire, there is a lot of work to be done on planning, consulting and deciding on the questions to be asked based on the needs of the researcher. She continues by warning researchers that designing a questionnaire is harder than what might be imagined. Therefore, very good planning and designing should precede the actual writing of the questionnaire to make sure that the responses provide the researcher with the needed information. However, although questionnaires may seem an obvious DCT to use, Cohen *et al.* (2007) underlines that the researcher will have to judge as to the appropriateness of using a questionnaire and, if so, the kind of questionnaire that should be used.

A badly planned questionnaire might mean that the responses might be impossible to deal with. Therefore, good planning undertaken during the design stage will ensure better and more targeted responses. "Of course, there is no such thing as the ideal questionnaire" (Blaxter *et al.*, 2003, p. 179) but some careful judgment regarding the



question wording should take place. Hence, this research's questionnaire (Appendix 1) was carefully designed from the first to the last step in the best possible way.

In this research project, the main research question was finding the factors that influence international students' decisions with regard to studies in a Cyprus's HEI. A questionnaire distributed to all AC international students was one of, and probably the most important DCT for this project and thus more emphasis was given to it. Therefore, the way it would be administered had to be decided before structuring the questionnaire. This was because its structure would slightly vary accordingly. Questionnaires can be sent by post to intended respondents, completed during a telephone conversation or completed during a face-to-face appointment which according to Blaxter *et al.* (2003) is more like a highly structured interview. Each of these methods has advantages and disadvantages which need to be weighted before a decision is made.

The author decided to hand-out the questionnaires during the registration period and asked students to complete it and return it to him. This method was chosen mainly because of the scale of the population size. Although, it was preferable that questionnaires be completed during a face-to-face meeting in terms of having a better response rate, this would be very time consuming considering that approximately 1300 such appointments had to be made. Also, with face-to-face appointments the author would be probably getting biased responses since students would not answer freely and honestly to all the questions due to the 'Director's presence'. Therefore, it was decided that the best possible way, that would give valid responses from the large number of international students to be surveyed, was the handing-out of the questionnaires with a request for their non-compulsory completion at their own free time.

After reaching this decision, the first thing which was done was to plan and structure the questionnaire. Before deciding the kind of questionnaire to be used in each research, Cohen *et al.* (2007) suggest the following 8 steps for planning a successful questionnaire:

1. Decide the purpose/objectives of the questionnaire;
2. Decide the population and the sample;

3. Generate the topics to be addressed and the data required in order to meet the objectives of the research;
4. Decide the kinds of responses required;
5. Write the questionnaire;
6. Check that each issue from (3) has been addressed;
7. Pilot the questionnaire and refine if needed the questions;
8. Administer the final questionnaire.

Typically, questionnaires can be divided into three main categories: structured, semi-structured and unstructured. Cohen *et al.* (2007) state that:

...there is a rule of thumb: the larger the size of the sample, the more structured, closed and numerical the questionnaire may have to be, and the smaller the size of the sample, the less structured, more open and word-based the questionnaire may be (p. 320).

Adding to this, there are two main types of question which can be used in the designing of a questionnaire, namely the open-ended (respondents answer questions in the way they want) and closed-ended (respondents choose from provided pre-determined answers) questions. Most researchers use a combination of both. Open-ended questions are useful when there is a very big range of possible answers or simply when the answers are not known. Moreover, open-ended questions can provide the researcher with more in-depth and detailed answers. On the other hand, closed ended questions are used when the possible answers are known and the possible number of responses is reasonable.

In choosing the structure of the questionnaire, it was assumed that the number of students who would register for Fall semester 2009 was approximately the same as the number of students registered in the semester before. This number was also the same as the number of students registered during the same semester last year, which is the Fall 2008. The questionnaire's population of 1300 was considered big and was characterised as a survey. In order to achieve the best response out of AC's students, a structured questionnaire was designed with both open-ended but mainly closed-ended questions. More specifically, both highly structured closed-ended questions (generating frequencies of responses which could be statistically analysed) and very few open-ended questions (where the range of answers might be unknown or doubtful, or the

answers sought might have an exploratory character) were included. As a result Cohen *et al.*'s (2007) rule of thumb was applied to this questionnaire since the sample size was considered big and therefore most questions used were closed-ended. The reason why mostly closed-ended questions were used was because the range of most answers to the questions were mainly known either from other similar empirical research analysed in the literature review or were added by students when piloting the questionnaire.

Bell (2006) emphasises that the more structured the question is, the easier it will be to analyse it. Additionally, Cohen *et al.* (2007) state that if the researcher uses a closed and structured questionnaire then this will enable patterns to be observed and comparisons to be made. In this research, the author used this type of questionnaire precisely to come up with valuable patterns and compare different data which would help the analysis. The questionnaire had a more quantitative character since measurements and statistical analysis and comparison was needed. However, Cohen *et al.* (2007) warn that this type of questionnaire needs to be “piloted and refined so that the final version contains as full a range of possible responses as can be reasonably foreseen” (p. 321). The piloting of this research's questionnaire added possible responses which were not included by the author. These additions are presented in Table 3.5.

In general though, researchers should pilot the questionnaire in order to make sure that the gathered data would be appropriate for answering the research questions. Bell (2006) very simply stresses that “All data-gathering instruments should be piloted to test how long it takes recipients to complete them, to check that all questions and instructions are clear and to enable you to remove any items which do not yield usable data” (p. 147). Similarly, Blaxter *et al.* (2003), emphasise that:

Piloting or reassessment without tears, is the process whereby you try out the research techniques and methods which you have in mind, see how well they work in practice and, if necessary, modify your plans accordingly. You may think that you know well enough what you are doing, but the value of pilot research cannot be overestimated. Things never work quite the way you envisage, even if you have done them many times before, and they have a nasty habit of turning out very differently from how you expected on occasion. So try a pilot exercise. If you don't, you will probably find that your initial period of data collection turns into a pilot in any case. In a sense, of course, all social research is a pilot exercise (p. 135-136).

Moreover, Middlesex University (2007/2008) highlights that:

Designing an effective questionnaire is not easy. It is therefore essential that you undertake a small scale pilot of your questionnaire... The pilot should test if the questions make sense, are in the correct sequence and are visually presented (p. 88).

A structured questionnaire makes the need for piloting even greater. One other important reason why it was decided to use a structured questionnaire with mainly closed-ended questions had to do with the students themselves and the frequency of responses the author wanted to get. First of all, using a more unstructured version with more open-ended questions would have two consequences:

- A. The researcher would get fewer completed questionnaires due to the complexity or difficulty of writing the answers to its questions as opposed to the closed-ended type of questions with predetermined answers. Also, many students would feel bored answering to open-ended questions due to the time they would need to do so since the questionnaire was considered to be lengthy (9 pages, 21 questions).
- B. The level of English of AC's average student (especially the fresher ones who are firstly required to pass the intensive English courses for a semester or two) hinders him/her to express himself/herself in English that well when answering the open-ended questions. Therefore, this would lead to getting wrong answers and the analysis would eventually lead to incorrect and invalid results.

Choosing from a range of predetermined answers seemed the only option.

Gill and Johnson (2002) stress that a vital skill in designing questionnaires “is the ability to structure, focus, phrase and ask sets of questions in a manner that is intelligible to respondents” (p. 115). Although, a questionnaire could be designed with more intellectual and complex questions, these would not match the students' level of understanding and the questionnaire would simply fail. For this reason, jargon or technical terms that students would not understand were intentionally avoided. The language was simple and the questions were easy to understand. Also, Dawson (2002) view was taken into account when she points out that in questionnaires the researcher should not use words which have two meanings or can be misinterpreted. Additionally, words in questionnaires should not be emotive and the questions should not be ambiguous. Most importantly, she continues, the researcher should avoid questions which might cause annoyance, frustration, offense, embarrassment or sadness.

Questions should also be kept short and simple. Moreover, the questions used should not contain some type of prestige bias and of course should not lead the respondent to a specific answer.

After the decision to use mainly closed-ended question, came the decision on the type of question. There are many types of closed-ended questions. According to Bell (2006) these are the following:

- List questions: A list of possible answers is given, any of which may be selected;
- Category questions: The response is one, only from a given set of categories;
- Ranking questions: The respondent is asked to place the possible answers in rank order;
- Quantity questions: The response is a number giving the amount of some characteristics;
- Grid questions: A grid is provided to answer to two or more questions at the same time;
- Scale questions: The respondent is asked to scale answers to uncover strength of feeling. However, the most straightforward and easiest to manage is probably the Likert scale.

Likert scales ask respondents to indicate strength of agreement or disagreement with a given statement or series of statements, generally on a five or seven point range. Answers are then scored, generally from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) and a measure of respondents' feelings can be produced (p. 219).

For this research's questionnaire, list questions were mainly used, as well as a few category questions (e.g. regarding age), quantity questions (e.g. number of semesters studying at AC) and some scale questions, using the Likert scale. Moreover, some ranking questions were used even though these were answered unsuccessfully during the piloting of the questionnaire. However, the author decided to use them (in addition to the other questions) and evaluate the outcome of the completed questionnaires. In doing so, the researcher added more clarity to the instructions as to how Part E of the questionnaire (which includes the scale questions) should be completed. Moreover, since it was shown by the piloting that most students answer these questions wrongly, it was decided to have this in mind when inputting the data in the statistical software for

the analysis. Therefore, only the correct answers to these scale questions were taken into consideration in order to have meaningful results.

Moreover, piloting revealed the sections which needed revision or which needed to be added to the empirical indicators (shown in Table 3.4) already found as part of the analysis of the second research objective. Some of these additions are presented in Table 3.5.

### 3.3.3 Interviews

The questionnaire formed the quantitative and statistically comparable data of this research as opposed to the interviews which formed the basic qualitative data gathering. Easterby-Smith *et al.* (1991) suggest that this DCT is sometimes used only when the use of other well-known methods are not appropriate. For example, if the researcher is seeking answers to a number of fairly simple questions then a questionnaire might well be more appropriate. On the other hand, the interview is a powerful implement for researchers (Cohen *et al.*, 2007) and interviewing as part of a research project has a number of advantages over the questionnaire. Thus, the choice of using interviews is a vital part in a lot of research studies undertaken, including this one. In this regard, Bell (2006) argues that:

A skilful interviewer can follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate motives and feelings, which the questionnaire can never do. The way in which a response is made (the tone of voice, facial expression, hesitation, etc.) can provide information that a written response would conceal. Questionnaire responses have to be taken at face value, but a response in an interview can be developed and clarified (p. 157).

Additionally, Blaxter *et al.* (2003) state that “the interview method involves questioning or discussing issues with people. It can be a very useful technique for collecting data which would probably not be accessible using techniques such as observation or questionnaires” (p.172).

Using interviews in CS research method is significant. This DCT was also used for the purposes of this study. The interview is, according to Yin (2003), although surprisingly, one of the most important sources of CS information. Furthermore, this DCT is according to Hancock and Algozzine (2006) very common in CS research. Moreover,

Easterby-Smith *et al.* (1991) argue that: “the most fundamental of all qualitative methods is that of in-depth interviewing” (p. 71). Cohen *et al.* (2007) illustrate that:

Interviews enable participants – be they interviewers or interviewees – to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view. In these senses the interview is not simply concerned with collecting data about life: it is part of life itself, its human embeddedness is inescapable (p. 349).

Yin (2003) highlights that throughout the interview process, the researcher/interviewer has two jobs: To follow the line of enquiry reflected by the CS protocol and to ask the questions in an unbiased manner that also serves the needs of his/her line of inquiry. However, one of the strengths of using interviews as a DCT is their adaptability (Bell, 2006). Although the researcher usually follows a specific protocol, it can deviate if by doing it he/she would best meet the research objectives.

Interviewing admissions officers who are responsible for the recruitment of international students at AC was both appropriate as well as essential for this research. However, this was not an easy task. Many authors believe that although interviews might seem a straightforward task, getting it successful is a more complex matter (Bell, 2006, Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 1991). It thus needs good planning and designing to avoid ending up with a normal social conversation which would not serve the purposes of the research. Hancock and Algozzine (2006) suggest that in order to conduct a successful interview, the researcher should follow several guidelines which were used in designing the interviews and which are analysed below. These are:

1. Identify key participants;
2. Develop an interview guide or interview protocol;
3. Consider the setting where the interview can be conducted;
4. Develop a means for recording the interview data;
5. Adhere to legal and ethical requirements (see section 3.5).

First, the researcher should identify the key participants who can give valuable information to the type of research undertaken. Moreover, as Hancock and Algozzine (2006) highlight, selecting the interviewees is a critical step that directly influences the quality of the information attained. Although participants may be interviewed

individually or in groups, it was decided for this research to conduct individual face-to-face interviews. This was done in order to get the unbiased views of each interviewee without losing valuable information, a major drawback of conducting group interviews. These primary data could only be gathered by interviewing SMs who have the knowledge and experience of travelling abroad for recruitment purposes. Hancock and Algozzine (2006) stress that “the most important consideration is to identify those persons in the research setting who may have the best information with which to address the study’s research questions” (p. 40).

The key interviewees for this research were the Director of International Studies, the Assistant Director of Admissions and three admissions officers. The small number of interviewed SMs (who were the only ones responsible for the promotion and recruitment of AC internationally) helped the researcher overcome the major disadvantage of interviewing, the fact that it is a very time-consuming DCT (Bell, 2006, Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 1991).

Secondly, the researcher should develop an interview guide or an interview protocol (Appendix 5). This is done by identifying the type, as well as the actual questions that the interviewer will ask. These questions are usually designed to help the researcher gain insights into the study’s fundamental research questions. In this case, some of the questions asked were similar to the questions asked in the questionnaire. The author wanted to check whether the responses he would get from specific questions from the questionnaire were the same or different from the ones he would get from the interviews. This would also help the triangulation. Other questions were of course added to the interview protocol that gave me answers which were specifically suitable for answering some research questions.

Thirdly, the researcher chose to carry out the interviews in the natural setting of the admissions office conference room which is considered to be the most distraction-free location rather than seek a more neutral location outside AC (e.g. a coffee shop). This was done to enhance realism. Moreover, since the research objectives were mostly associated with student choices, the researcher was positive that the participants were feeling relaxed and therefore, conducting the interviews in the working environment would not put additional stress to the whole process. The fact that the interviews took



place away from their offices made them feel more comfortable since they could be interviewed in an undisturbed and quiet environment.

Fourthly, according to most authors, a basic and important decision is whether to audio-record the interview or take notes (Cohen *et al.*, 2007, Hancock and Algozzine, 2006, Yin, 2003, Blaxter *et al.*, 2003, Dawson, 2002). Cohen *et al.* (2007) caution that if recording the data of the interview is not done successfully, there is the potential for massive data loss, distortion and the reduction of complexity. They also add that: “audiotape is selective, it filters out important contextual factors, neglecting the visual and non-verbal aspects of the interview” (p. 365). On the other hand, Blaxter *et al.* (2003) state that: “Note-taking gives you an instant record of the key points of an interview. Even if you decide to tape, you may find that some of your interviewees refuse you permission to do so, so you should practice note-taking, whatever your plans” (p. 173). The author, therefore, decided to use both these data recording methods.

The interviews were firstly documented by taking notes of all the data transmitted from the interviewees. An interview layout form was used which included all the questions that were asked and a range of possible answers. Their inclusion was done in order to record some of their responses. However, the researcher did not reveal any of the answers written down to the questions asked because he did not want to influence the interviewees. Moreover, another reason why the answers were coded and categorised was to concentrate as much as possible on the process of the interview. Therefore, the participants’ basic answers were recorded in the fastest possible way while having enough time to record other important details. Also, some empty space was left underneath of each question and notes to answers were kept which were not identified before or were unknown to the researcher. Blaxter *et al.* (2003) comment on taking notes that: “note-taking gives you an instant record of the key points of the interview...and do not need to worry about initial sorting, categorizing and analysis of the data collected” (p. 173). Finally, once the interview was over, the interviewees were asked to check the notes written under each question by the researcher for accuracy, thus aiding clarity and understanding.

Also, in addition to note-taking, all the interviews were audio-recorded using a digital voice recorder. Yin (2003) believes that: “Audiotapes certainly provide a more accurate

rendition of any interview than any other method” (p. 92). For Bell (2006), “tape-recording can be useful to check the wording of any statement you might wish to quote, to allow you keep eye contact with your interviewee, to help you look interested and to make sure that what you write is accurate” (p. 164). Nevertheless, researchers should not assume that all respondents will be willing for their comments to be recorded (Bell, 2006). That is why at the beginning of each interview the researcher asked the permission of the interviewee to use an audio-recording device.

During the interviews open-ended questions were used which would directly give answers to most of the research questions and at the same time allow the interviewees to express their views while answering. Yin (2003) emphasises that CS interviews require the researcher to operate on two levels at the same time: satisfying the needs of the research’s line of inquiry while at the same time putting forth “friendly” and “nonthreatening” questions in his/her open-ended questions. As a result “most commonly, case study interviews are of an open-ended nature” (p. 90). However, for the purposes of this research, it was decided to use the ‘focused interview’ type instead of the ‘open-ended nature’ type. The difference between the two is that although the questions followed in ‘focused interviews’ were still open-ended, it was not considered to be an ‘open-ended nature’ type of interview since a certain set of questions derived from the CS protocol was followed.

Different authors give this type of interview a different name. For example, the focused interview which is described above (suggested firstly by Merton, Fiske, and Kendall, 1990, cited in Yin, 2003) is the same as the standardised open-ended interview (suggested firstly by Patton, 1980, cited in Cohen *et al.*, 2007). However, the most well known name given to this type of interview is the semi-structured one. The interviews conducted had the characteristics of the semi-structured format. This according to Dawson (2002) is perhaps the most common type of interview used in qualitative research. Hancock and Algozzine (2006) advocate that semi-structured interviews are particularly well suited for CS research. Using this format, the researcher asks “predetermined but flexibly worded questions, the answers to which provide tentative answers to the researchers’ questions” (p. 40). Similarly, Dawson (2002) points out that using semi-structured interviews:

The researcher also wants the interview to remain flexible so that other important information can still arise. For this type of interview, the researcher produces an interview schedule. This may be a list of specific questions or a list of topics to be discussed (p. 29).

There are also other major issues involved in interviewing which, for the purpose of this research, were taken into consideration before or during interviewing. Bell (2006) points out that it is very easy to fall into the bias trap if, for example, the researcher selects only those items which support his/her point of view. Interviewing is a highly subjective technique and as such, there is always the danger of bias. In work-based research like this one, where there is only one researcher who conducts a set of interviews, the bias may be consistent and therefore go unnoticed. Cohen *et al.* (2007) go one step further by admitting that bias may be difficult to avoid, not least because research reports and publications are placed in the public domain. On the other hand, Kitwood (1977, cited in Cohen *et al.*, 2007) believes that although all kinds of biases are liable to creep in, with skill these can largely be eliminated. In doing so, the researcher needs to first recognise the fact that all interview transactions involve bias and therefore he/she should take measures to control it.

Recognising this very important issue, the author tried to overcome the problem in various ways. First of all, the author tried to cover the whole range of questions relevant to this research in order to get a full range of answers. In addition, the author tried not to concentrate on questions or topics which supported what he had in his mind as being the answers to the research questions. He let interviewees be uninfluenced during the interviews and he did not in any way lead their answers to a specific outcome. Furthermore, the interviews were conducted in the most friendly and relaxed way, making sure that the interviewees' responses were not affected by the author's authority as a Director and owner of AC. At the end of each interview, the interpretation of the data was done in a critical way, looking for signs of possible bias. The author tried to make his case based on clear evidence rather than on personal opinions. Triangulation also helped overcome this challenge.

Another important issue in interviews is choosing the right questions to be used, which according to Bell (2006) is a difficult task. The questions were designed in such a way as to get the maximum out of the participants' answers. Yin (2003) states that in the 'focused interview', the specific questions must be carefully worded so that the

researcher appears naïve about the research topic. This will allow the respondent to provide fresh commentary about the topic. On the contrary, if the researcher asks leading questions, the purpose of the interview will not be served. Thus, asking leading questions was avoided and the other party was let to do most of the talking, mainly uninterrupted unless it was needed to do so. This helped build a trust between the two parties since the interviewees realised that the purpose of the interview was not to criticise their views. On the contrary, the interviewees were given a very good opportunity to present the facts, as well as their own views in their own terms without commenting or giving signs of facial or verbal agreement/disagreement. Dawson (2002) stresses that:

Researchers have to be able to establish rapport with the participant – they have to be trusted if someone is to reveal intimate life information. This can be difficult and takes tact, diplomacy and perseverance. Also, some people find it very difficult to remain quiet while another person talks, sometimes for hours on end. Researchers need to remain alert, recognising important information and probing for more detail. They need to know how to tactfully steer someone back from totally irrelevant digressions (p. 28).

Concluding, it can be said that the choice of interviewing was an invaluable and useful tool for this research project which helped the researcher reveal useful data that complemented other DCTs. This technique taught the researcher a lot as to the way a successful researcher approaches his/her interviewees in order to get the most useful information. Moreover, it greatly helped the researcher to confirm the results of the questionnaire analysis and assisted a lot in adding that extra bit which could not be taken out of any other DCT. Indeed, the interview “is a flexible tool for data collection, enabling multi-sensory channels to be used: verbal, non-verbal, spoken and heard” (Cohen *et al.*, 2007, p. 349). Despite the difficulties associated with interviewing the author fully supports Bell’s (2006) view that “the interview can yield rich material and can often put flesh on the bones of questionnaire responses” (p. 157).

### **3.3.4 Participant Observation**

In CS research, interviews are a primary source of data; so are observations. (Merriam, 1988). As Hancock and Algozzine (2006) state: “observations of the setting by a case

study researcher may provide more objective information related to the research topic” (p. 46). Yin (2003) postulates that:

By making a field visit to the case study “site”, you are creating the opportunity for direct observations. Assuming that the phenomena of interest have not been purely historical, some relevant behaviors or environmental conditions will be available for observation. Such observations serve as yet another source of evidence in a case study (p. 92).

Observations of the research environment by the researcher are a frequent and valuable source of information in work based research as well. Additionally, Gill and Johnson (2002) encourage the use of this technique by pointing out that participant observation may be the only method of discovering what is actually happening in the setting being studied. However, Bell (2006) argues that:

...before you begin to consider observation as one of your data collecting techniques, you need first to decide what you wish to observe, what your main areas of interest are and why you think observation will produce the information you need. Is it to be one of several data-collecting methods or only one? Are you considering observation as a form of validating other evidence? Do you really need evidence from observation, because it requires considerable skill... (p. 184).

The observations were mainly aimed at validating the data already collected firstly from the questionnaires and secondly from the interviews. Observations were not used as the major and most important DCT for this research that would give the researcher a big amount of data to be analysed. Thus, they were rather a more casual data gathering activity and less emphasis was placed on them. On this note, Yin (2003) underlines that observations can range from formal to casual depending on the researcher. “Less formally, direct observations might be made throughout a field visit, including those occasions during which other evidence, such as that from interviews, is being collected” (p. 92).

Although observations were not the main DCT, they gave the researcher valuable insights and in some cases shed some light on details which could not be acquired through the use of the questionnaires. Yin (2003) highlights that observations are often useful in providing additional information about the topic being studied. In this research project, the observations focused on specifically answering the research questions and

were not used to possibly uncover other issues i.e. problems related to international students' life in Cyprus, etc. Bell (2006) characteristically illustrates this with the picture of people overlooking a busy street. She argues that these people would probably observe different things. The observers should have their own specific focus and interpret significant events in their own way. In addition, Merriam (1988) states that:

What to observe is determined by several factors. The most important is one's purpose in conducting the study in the first place – that is, the conceptual framework, the problem, or the questions of interest determine what is to be observed (p. 89).

The author's focus was mainly to confirm the data of the other two DCTs which were related to the research. More specifically, it was decided to observe:

- The communication (observing the phone call correspondence and studying the email communication) as well as the face-to-face interaction of all the admissions' staff with prospective students, representatives of the College abroad, international students already registered in the College and parents of students;
- International students' behaviours and reactions to College and immigration policies which were related to their choice of Cyprus and AC;
- Meetings of the admissions department.

Another reason why the author primarily used this DCT was to gain valuable insights into the international students' HEI decision-making as well as to observe some of the AC marketing and recruitment practices. There were many ways that the research environment could be observed from the work-based learner. Cohen *et al.* (2007) state that this observation approach can take the following four forms:

- Complete participant - a researcher who takes on an insider role in the group being studied, and maybe he/she does not even declare that he/she is a researcher.

- Participant-as-observer – a researcher who is part of the social life of participants and documents and records what is happening for research purposes.
- Observer-as-participant – he/she like the participant-as-observer, is known as a researcher to the group, and may have a less extensive contact with the group.
- Complete observer participant – a researcher who does not reveal his role to the group and, consequently, they do not realise that they are being observed (e.g. using a one-way monitor), hence this is another form of covert research.

In reality according to Merriam (1988), CS researchers are rarely complete participants or complete observers. For this CS research the participant-as-observer approach to observations was specifically adopted, since there was no problem for the researcher to gain access to the group under study. Thus, the author was a ‘participant-as-observer’ or participant-observer and all SMs of the admissions department were aware of his role as a researcher. This usually involves the researcher participating in the daily life of the group to be observed. In this research case the groups to be observed were the international students of AC visiting the admissions department and interacting with the admissions staff. Moreover, all SMs observed were informed and also gave their consent to listen to their public phone call conversations, study the exchanged emails which were printed and filed and observe their interaction with agents, students and parents.

Cohen *et al.* (2007) suggest that this approach is particularly useful in studying small groups or when the events and processes to be observed are frequent, both of which applied to this research case. In addition, this approach is appropriate for researchers “who wish to reach inside a situation and have a long time available to them to ‘get under the skin of behaviour or organizations, and when the prime interest is in gathering detailed information about what is happening” (p. 404). Moreover, Yin (2003) stresses that a participant-observer is not merely a passive observer. He/she may assume a variety of roles within a CS situation and may even participate in the events being studied. The participant-observer may even be a key-decision maker in an organisational setting i.e. the Director of Admissions in a HEI. From all the above it can be seen that this technique was both appropriate and useful for this research study.

Further to using the participant-observer approach, the actual observations of this research were semi-structured and thus sufficient time was spent on fieldwork in gathering useful data. A semi-structured observation will have one agenda of issues but the researcher is allowed to gather data in an unsystematic manner (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). Of course, the more clear the objectives of the study the more structured the observations are. However, semi-structured instead of structured observations were chosen because the author wanted to allow some of the focus to emerge from the observations themselves rather than have everything predetermined.

Field notes are the way of recording data from observations and according to Merriam (1988) every researcher can devise his/her own technique for remembering and recording field notes. For Dawson (2002) these might be practical details about events, times, dates, places or even methodological notes concerning the researcher's role, his/her influence on the encounter, his/her relationship with the informants, etc. According to Cohen *et al.* (2007), observations can take various forms some of which are:

- Quick jottings of key words;
- Transcriptions and more detailed observations written out in full;
- Descriptions that can be later on assembled and written out from a comprehensive and comprehensible account of what has happened;
- Reconstructions of conversations;
- Descriptions of events, behaviour and activities;
- Description of the researcher's activities and behaviour.

A number of ways were used to collect field notes. Due to the author's position as a Director of AC, he had the authority as well as the time needed to observe and take notes. Thus, more detailed as well as concrete observations were mainly used which were written out in full almost immediately after each observation. The author was aware that if time was allowed to pass it would have been harder to recall important details and put them in writing. Records of the time and place of the observations were always kept together with the taking of notes of as much information as possible. This was done in order to help in the analysis of the data knowing that it was not easy to remember what was observed by just writing a few key words. In addition, each of the



observations was divided into the comments or even direct quotations of what people said and into the researcher's comments of the specific observation. This helped the author to remember who had said what, whether the data were comments made by him or by the people observed (students and admissions' SMs) or whether the words written were the actual words they used or general comments of the observed event.

Generally, participant observation is not as easy as one might think. "It is certainly not an easy option" (p.15) according to Nisbet (1977, cited in Bell, 2006). It requires of the researcher skill and organisational persistence if meaningful results are to be drawn. Bell (2006) argues that observations also depend on the way people perceive what is being said or done. The fact that all human beings are imperfect does not mean that there is little point in including observations as one of the DCTs. However, this means that researchers have to be particularly aware of the dangers, do their best to eliminate preconceived ideas and prejudices and constantly be on the alert for possible signs of bias.

The author was fully aware of the drawbacks of using participant observation and therefore wanted to get meaningful and to-the-point (of the research questions) results. Critics of this approach as a data-gathering technique point to the highly subjective and therefore unreliable nature of human perception (Merriam, 1988). There is always the danger of the insider being biased on what is observed and how it is interpreted. Furthermore, as Yin (2003) mentions, the researcher has less ability to work as an external observer and sometimes he/she has to "assume positions or advocacy roles contrary to the interests of good scientific practice" (p. 94).

This method, like interviewing, is also very time consuming. Blaxter *et al.* (2003) state that: "The time absorbed occurs not just during the observation, but afterwards as well, when you come to interpret and analyse what you have recorded" (p.178). Therefore, the observations were categorised by the researcher in order to save time and be focused on detail. Another major problem with participant observation is that there is also a chance of the participant-observer becoming a supporter of the group being studied if such support did not already exist. This is why, as Dawson (2002) advocates "In participant observation, however, the researcher becomes much more involved in the lives of the people being observed" (p. 32).

These limitations apply to the whole of the research, because the author is, as a work based learner, an insider researcher. Yet, he overcame this by:

- Getting other SMEs and people who know the subject to comment on the subjectivity of this work;
- Challenging the subjectivity at regular intervals and taking corrective measures where needed.

What is more, it is important to note that a more unstructured type of this approach was used in the everyday working life in the College. The researcher's previous experience made him feel confident that unbiased information could be collected from observations. The author's knowledge and experience was used in interpreting what was observed in order to add to the answers of the research questions. This process helped him see things that might have been missed-out and new aspects of the HEI decision-making were uncovered.

### **3.4 Project Activity**

Prior to the start of this research, the work was divided into different stages in order to reach this study's objectives. This was presented in the proposal for this research. Although, the author had a good idea of the time frame for each of the project's phase, he soon realised that the time needed for the completion of each phase needed to be reassessed due to the degree of difficulty or load of work required. For example, more time needed to be spent on the literature review section than what was initially expected. This had definitely assisted the author in getting a more spherical literature review of the project's area than what was expected from him. However, in doing so the author realised that he had to stick to the new time frame if he wanted to finish the project on time. Therefore, time was reallocated accordingly and a new and more realistic time frame was prepared which was followed until the end.

This section describes and analyses some of the steps the author took to carry out this research project as efficiently and effectively as possible. It also explains how he collected the data, his various concerns how to successfully gather them, issues which needed to be resolved or actions which had to be taken to achieve the research objective.

### 3.4.1 Stage 1 – Literature Review

Most of the literature study for this project was completed during the first stages of the project activity. However, occasionally during the conduct of this project, the researcher had to go back and add a few pieces to the literature that would help either clarify a point or add additional knowledge to a particular section. These additions arose from additional reading which was done throughout the project (e.g. newspaper cuttings, new journal articles, etc.) or from clarifications given from people close to this research on a number of issues.

It was considered crucial for this background reading to be done first in order to get well informed on a number of areas which were needed for this project. Studying the gathered literature helped the author widen his horizons to different, and in some cases contradicting to him, views. For example, the author considered that education could be promoted in the same way as any other service. However, from the literature study it was evident that there are serious objections to this view by a number of authors, as well as practitioners. Generally, by reviewing the literature, the author became aware of issues which needed to be included in this research or which would help design and carry out this research project better.

The literature review section could not have been completed if there was no access to a number of sources. First of all the researcher, as a Director of AC, had unlimited access to a number of books, periodicals and journals of the College library. That was a good starting point but it was definitely not enough. Therefore, he applied and became full member of the much bigger University of Cyprus's library. Moreover, the Athens online database was used quite extensively. This is because finding out relatively new articles relevant to this research was considered of great importance. Occasionally, in cases where a specific article could not be located which the author considered significant to this research, he contacted the authors of these articles directly and asked to provide him with a copy of the article. Alternatively, the rights to download some articles were purchased. Moreover, a good selection of books was purchased on HE marketing and on practical research methods. These books and articles were considered valuable for this research as well as for the author's personal library, which could be used for future reference on further research.

Information was acquired from a number of sources some of which were more important than others: books, journals, internet-based documents, newspaper articles, AC documents and other sources. However, this review did not only establish the theoretical basis of this study. For example, the review of other similar research on HEI choice and decision-making helped identify the structure of these studies which either had similarities with this research study or possible trends which proved useful for the findings of the project. This section offered considerable help in planning and designing the structure of the questionnaire (the questions to be included), as well as the interviews. Also, the review of the AC documents with special emphasis on the quantitative data was a vital part of this project. Section 3.3.1 briefly described what the literature review entailed.

There were times during this literature review stage when the researcher was puzzled about a specific subject because different authors were stating different views. However, he realised that as more in-depth study on a subject was done, everything was becoming clearer. Even the opposing views came out naturally since various authors agree or disagree while expressing their own views. The researcher also learned how to be critical of the opposing views and also evaluative as to the choice of what to be included in this review.

As more and more articles were gathered, it was realised that it would be very difficult to have them organised efficiently without a good filing system. A good filing system was considered to be important in order to easily find what the author was looking for in the least possible time. This would allow the reading, filing and finding of articles any time the author wished in the least possible time. The researcher saved and printed all the articles read and many more which were not read since it was later considered that these were not so relevant for this research. These articles were kept in various box files with the name of the authors in alphabetical order. Most of them were also kept in electronic form (most of them can be found in PDF format) so as to save time in searching for articles instead of manually looking in the many box files created.

### 3.4.2 Stage 2 - Questionnaire

The questionnaire used in this research revealed much information which verified the appropriateness of using it to achieve this research objective. For this research, the population of the survey consisted of all the international students registered at AC during the Fall semester 2009. All these students were given equal chance to complete the questionnaire in order to have a random sample. This lengthy data collection process (from designing the questionnaire, distributing it, analysing the results, etc.) took the researcher nine months to complete.

The questionnaire was the major DCT for this project. It was therefore designed very carefully and in the best possible way. However, it proved that it was not as easy as the researcher had thought at the beginning. It definitely took much more time to be prepared, before even starting to put anything in writing, just to make sure that the answers sought could be obtained. The questionnaire was designed to help answer some of the research questions. Therefore, the questions chosen were exactly aimed at extracting the best possible answers needed from the students. Not all research objectives could be answered from the use of the students' questionnaire and therefore other DCTs were needed. However, at least the ones which could be answered were thoroughly structured since it was understood that the questionnaire could only be distributed once. If it was structured wrongly then the questionnaire would eventually be faulty and the whole research would fail. More specifically, the questionnaire could provide answers (fully or partly) to the following research objectives presented in Chapter 1:

- Identify the factors and the people influencing AC international students' choice;
- Identify the strengths and weaknesses of AC;
- Suggest changes which will increase the international students intake;
- Determine supporting procedures or practices which might help in the recruitment of students.

A good starting point was provided by examining the literature on other research studies conducted by various authors on choice and decision-making in HE. The questions and

the possible answers to some of the questions, which were aimed at providing answers to the first research objective above, were mainly taken directly from these empirical studies presented in Table 2.18 (called empirical indicators, i.e. data gathered from empirical investigation). However, other questions and answers were added which came out from the researcher's experience or which were identified by some students when piloting the questionnaire. Moreover, this process required the check-up that all items which needed to be covered had been addressed by the questions of the questionnaire.

All the identified factors which influence choice were gathered and placed in Table 3.4. There were many research studies mainly on the factors but also on the people that influence students' choice. Thus, these studies provided the researcher with valuable questions and answers in constructing this research's questionnaire. However, this was not an easy task as it involved analysing some empirical studies which were very different from each other and then coding their results. For example, the research by Gray *et al.* (2003) categorised the most important factors in choosing a HEI into 5 big groups (each consisting of a number of sub-factors). On the other hand, the research by Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003) identified ten reasons for choosing a HEI some of which were included in the sub-factors of the five big groups of the previous study.

Additionally, the reasons international students leave their home country and choose a foreign country for their studies were also gathered in Table 3.4. These reasons were associated with the country rather than the HEI and they were therefore treated separately from the factors influencing HEI choice. Moreover, other subsidiary issues (other than the main research question) derived from these empirical studies were grouped together. These included the influencing power of others (family, friends, etc.) into choosing a HEI, the sources of information which help the students in their decision and others. Careful categorising was needed to analyse these studies which provided the author with valuable knowledge to structure this DCT in order to meet the main objective of the research.

In addition to the empirical indicators, the questionnaire was enriched with additional answers to these questions given from the students during piloting. Moreover, not all research objectives could be answered by constructing questions and answers based on these empirical indicators. For example, the ways in which a HEI can increase its

international students intake was not found in the empirical literature and therefore it was decided to include this as an open-ended question in order to get a full range of answers.

Empirical indicators on students' choice of a HEI	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offers qualifications that will be recognised by employers</li> <li>Has a reputation for quality</li> <li>Was willing to recognise my previous qualifications</li> <li>Has a reputation for quality and expertise of its staff</li> <li>Offers a broad range of course and programmes</li> <li>Makes use of the latest information technology</li> <li>Has a reputation of being responsive to student needs</li> <li>Is well known for innovation in research and teaching</li> <li>Has a large campus and excellent facilities</li> <li>Is noted for its superior use of technology</li> <li>Courses on offer</li> <li>Course fee</li> <li>Teaching rating</li> <li>Reputation</li> <li>Accommodation Provided</li> <li>Accommodation Costs</li> <li>Entry Requirements</li> <li>Scholarship Available</li> <li>Facilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Programme</li> <li>Price</li> <li>Place</li> <li>Prominence</li> <li>Promotion</li> <li>Prospectuses</li> <li>People</li> <li>Learning environment (e.g. teachers, research resources, TF)</li> <li>Reputation (e.g. Brand name, achievements and quality of its courses )</li> <li>Graduate career prospects (e.g. Expect. income, employment prospect)</li> <li>Image of destination (e.g. Political environment, safety and hospitality)</li> <li>Cultural integration (Cultural diversity and religious practices)</li> </ul>
Empirical indicators on the reasons international students leave their home country and choose a foreign country for their studies	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overseas course better than local</li> <li>Better understanding of the West</li> <li>Course not available at home</li> <li>Difficult to gain entry at home</li> <li>Intention to Migrate</li> <li>Educational standard/recognised qualifications worldwide</li> <li>Ease of university admissions and immigration procedures</li> <li>Ease of finding employment during and after the study</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cost of living, accommodation, safety and culture</li> <li>International recognition of HE qualification</li> <li>Straight forward and easy application process</li> <li>Excellent teaching and learning environment</li> <li>Opportunities for part-time work</li> <li>International quality</li> </ul>
Influencers (factors and people) of students HEI decision-making process	Sources of information for students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reputation of institution</li> <li>Parents/relatives recommendation</li> <li>Agents recommendation</li> <li>Self</li> <li>Parents/Family</li> <li>Teachers</li> <li>Friends</li> <li>Careers Advisors</li> <li>University agents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>University prospectuses</li> <li>Library materials (UCAS books and leaflets)</li> <li>HE careers fairs</li> <li>Internet</li> <li>Internet/WWW</li> <li>Print media (Newspapers and magazines)</li> <li>Public relations (Open days, sponsorships and trade shows)</li> <li>Broadcast media (Television and radio)</li> <li>Word-of-mouth (HEI agents, alumni and testimonials)</li> <li>Visual aids (Video clips, posters, banners)</li> <li>Promotional mat. (Bookmarks, brochures, stickers/postcards)</li> </ul>

**Table 3.4: Questionnaire's Empirical Indicators**

In designing the questionnaire, the analysis of its input data in the easiest and most efficient way had to be taken into consideration. Therefore the author had to learn the way the questionnaire should be analysed before constructing it because this would affect its general format. Otherwise, a very common mistake could be made according to the reviewed literature, that of distributing a questionnaire which could be either very difficult to be analysed and interpreted or which could miss the research objectives altogether. Cohen *et al.* (2007) emphasise that:

a researcher will need to plan the layout and structure of a questionnaire survey very carefully in order to assist data entry for computer reading and analysis; an inappropriate layout may obstruct data entry and subsequent analysis by computer (p. 86).

For this very important reason time was spent in ensuring that this mistake would not happen in this research. It was decided that a visit to a market research company would help enrich the author's knowledge on the software used, as well as the coding needed for this type of questionnaire. This visit helped the researcher in gaining valuable and more importantly practical information on structuring, as well as administering a questionnaire. The more experienced market researchers made three points very clear which were taken into consideration:

1. The good design of a questionnaire offers a tremendous help in analysing it;
2. The questions chosen should specifically address the research questions with the aim of meeting the research objective;
3. The coding of the variables is very important as this might lead to either correct or incorrect results.

The first step was to choose the questions that would answer the research questions shown at the beginning of this section and meet the research goals. The various variables were identified and coded to help make the inputting process fast and easy and the analysis more reliable, valid and easily comparable. The variables were then measured, by giving values to them in order to test the questionnaire. All these steps were needed prior to finishing with the writing up of the questionnaire. Altogether, six questionnaire versions were created by making changes and improving the questionnaire every time. This was possible either by getting the views of colleagues and advisors or by finding ways to improve it after examining other real-life



questionnaires and studying practical research books with real examples of CS questionnaires. After finishing with designing it, the questionnaire was then progressed into its two phases. Phase 1 was a pilot test to poll a sample from the AC international students which would act as a good indication of its success or failure. Phase 2 was a full poll on all AC international students.

**Phase 1:** After designing the questionnaire, it was very important for the researcher to pilot test it and refine it for two reasons. First, he wanted to make sure that all possible responses to the chosen questions were included, and if not add these, with the aim of getting as many valid answers as possible. Secondly, the researcher wanted to test that the questionnaire worked well, was comprehensible by AC students, the instructions were clear, the language used was understood by students, and lastly calculate the time needed to be completed. In addition, in order to have better results during piloting, the researcher chose students who had been studying at AC for several semesters, their level of English was good and more importantly, were not afraid, stressed or felt shy to suggest changes or comment on the overall design of the questionnaire.

Although, the students during piloting admitted that the instructions were clear, they faced difficulties in completing the ranking questions. Most students understood that the ranking numbers were scale numbers that could be used to indicate the importance of each answer. Others just ticked the answer or answers they thought they were the most important ones without ranking them. Moreover, during piloting, some students pointed out (some by writing at the indicated space and others verbally) a few answers which were missed out from the pilot version. These additions are presented in Table 3.5 below.

Question	Addition
Why did you decide to study abroad?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I want to get international experience in education</li> <li>• I want to improve my English language skills</li> </ul>
Why did you choose Cyprus for your studies?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Well-known for hotel and catering programmes offering paid practical training</li> <li>• Low cost of living</li> <li>• Lower TF compared to other education destinations</li> <li>• Established population of international students</li> </ul>
Which factors influenced you in your choice to study at AC?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Willing to accept my previous qualifications</li> <li>• Scholarships available after coming to Cyprus</li> </ul>
Which is the most important source of information which would better work for you before choosing a college/university?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meet a college/university admissions officer and learn more about that institution</li> </ul>
What in your opinion are the factors which influence other students to come to Cyprus for their studies?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Well-known for hotel and catering programmes offering paid practical training during summer</li> </ul>
According to you, what is the best way for a HE institution (college or university) to attract more international students?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer lower TF</li> <li>• Have lower admission requirements</li> </ul>

**Table 3.5: Students' additions during the questionnaire's piloting**

The questionnaire was slightly changed after each pilot testing by improving the clarity of the instructions and adding the missing answers. The piloting in this case was done a few times in order to reach the best possible outcome. Getting the responses from this testing gave the author the opportunity to change, refine and add whatever it was needed. This helped the questionnaire's reliability, validity and practicality.

**Phase 2:** The final step was to administer the final questionnaire to the research population. Nearly 1200 questionnaires were distributed to help the reliability of the results. They were given during the Fall 2009 registration period to all AC international students. The instructions given asked the students to optionally complete it at their own free time and return it to the admissions department. Students were also given a letter explaining the purpose of the research and a written statement about their rights and the researcher's responsibilities together with an informed consent form (Appendix 2). If they agreed to participate in this research they would then have to fill it out and hand it in together with the questionnaire.

Students were also given a small reward (a free drink) for completing the questionnaire (Appendix 1). A coupon was given to students for claiming their reward from the AC cafeteria. The reason this offer was made was simply to have a better response rate. The

general rule in determining sample size is that the bigger the better, since the larger the sample the more representative it would be of the population (McMillan and Schumacher, 1997). The author believed that without this small reward, most students would not be interested in completing the questionnaire. This was admitted by many students when returning the completed questionnaire.

### **3.4.3 Stage 3 - Interviews**

During stage 3, the key persons who could help the researcher answer the research questions and meet the objectives of this research were identified and interviewed. They were five SMs, including the Director of International Office, the Assistant Director of Admissions and three admissions officers all of whom had experience in travelling abroad for recruitment or promotional purposes. All five had signed the informed consent form (Appendix 4), thus accepting to be interviewed. Having said that, they all seemed very keen to assist the researcher in this research project since it would help improve AC recruiting practices and as a consequence make their jobs easier and more productive.

The interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and they took place in the admissions department's conference room. The interviews were audio-recorded using a digital voice recorder for ensuring the preciseness of the students' answers. Notes of the key points of the interview, as well as the recording of some of their visual and non-verbal characteristics were taken and done on the spot. The interviews had the characteristics of a 'focused interview'. Although the author used open-ended questions to listen to what the interviewee had to say, he was following a specific set of questions, called the interview protocol (Appendix 5), which were derived from the CS protocol. This protocol was designed, having taken into consideration the research questions that needed to be answered and the knowledge and experience of the admissions department SMs. The interview protocol questions that could not be answered or that could put the interviewees into a difficult position were specifically avoided.

After the first interview the researcher decided to improve the way he would ask the questions of the interview protocol. Many authors believe that it is not only acceptable but expected that the researcher improves his data collection skills. The researcher

immediately knows if the research objective is not met by the data gathered from a specific DCT. However, even if it is met, there is always room for improvement. As Merriam (1988) and Cohen *et al.* (2007) stress, collection and analysis should be a simultaneous process. This way the theory generated by the researcher should start being constructed. Therefore, this preliminary analysis can show the way for improvement of the way data are gathered. In this research's case, after the first interview, where the interviewee had not been interrupted, the author decided to ask clarifying questions when needed. This was done in order to make sure that the author would get correct answers to the specific questions in cases where the interviewee was not clear about the question. Even if the interviewees initially thought they understood the question the author would repeat and explain what the type of answer (and not the answer itself) should be. These clarifications before, during or after an interviewee's answer made the author seek answers that targeted the research objectives.

During the interviews, the interviewees gave their own views on students' choice and decision-making with special emphasis on the experience they had had with AC students. It was also important and quite interesting to hear their views on ways of improving the AC current recruitment and marketing practices. They suggested things they believed did not work well and wanted change. They also found this interview very useful since it gave them a first class opportunity to express their own views on their everyday work at the College. All five supported this idea a lot. However, the researcher was surprised when two of the SMs, recognising the need for such practical research studies, proposed that they would like to see more like this in the future. Moreover they assured the researcher that they would like to help in any way they could and ensured him that he could count on their even closer participation.

#### **3.4.4 Stage 4 - Observations**

During this stage of the project activity plenty of time was allowed to observe the work of the admissions department which was relevant to this research. The fact that the researcher's office is situated in the department and close to the offices of all SMs (and not in another building for example) proved very helpful in achieving the best results from this DCT. Furthermore, the fact that during this period the author was out of his office and next to the SMs more often than before was welcomed by all SMs who urged

him to continue this for longer. The truth is that most SMs were feeling relaxed during the author's presence since they were used to the author spending a lot of time with them. A friendly and above all pleasant environment was created and was maintained which is free from stress and tensions. The author considers this very important because in his view every department reflects the working environment to its customers. This indirectly leads to better results in terms of recruitment, at least to the recruitment which takes place in the admissions department.

Around two months were spent observing the admissions department and valuable information from both students and SMs was gained. There was no specific time for observations but the author judged when it was best to observe according to the work load of the staff. The admissions correspondence with agents/representatives and parents/students was also observed at the absence of AC's staff, because the author did not want to disturb them from their work. That used to take place either late in the afternoon or on Saturdays when the office was empty and quiet. During those two months the following were observed:

- AC admissions' SMs;
- prospective transfer students from other HEIs;
- newly recruited international students;
- current students who wanted to bring their friends/relatives to AC;
- visiting alumni of AC;
- newly recruited agents/representatives;
- well-established agents/representatives visiting Cyprus and AC.

It was soon realised that many of the observations involved students visiting the admissions office for various issues which were not a responsibility of the department as such. However, that was unavoidable since newly recruited students felt that they were closer to the admissions SMs that corresponded with them before coming to Cyprus than to any other staff or department of the organisation. That of course changes as time goes by and gradually students become more closely involved with faculty members, the student affairs department, etc. These observations did not assist the researcher in finding the answers to the research questions despite the valuable time

spent in them. However, there was no other choice since the ‘subject’ of the observation was not known beforehand.

During the observation period, the researcher faced two major difficulties. First of all, during the researcher’s presence, students thought that they were given an excellent opportunity to talk to the Director and discuss not only the issue they initially wanted to raise but many other issues which the big majority of students characterised as very important. That in turn created two additional problems:

1. The idea was to observe the way SMs work and interact with students and agents and not to interact with them personally. Although this would have given the researcher direct information it would have been under the same criticism of the researcher’s bias.
2. This process needed considerably more time than what initially imagined and planned for this DCT. After a week, the researcher realised that it was better to simply pretend that he was doing some work in another office next to them while observing e.g. the conversation of the SMs with a student or an agent. That solved this problem to a great extent.

The second problem involved the SMs of the admissions department. While observing, the author would hear them making a few small mistakes and giving imprecise information to students and/or representatives of the College. Although, their conversation should have been interrupted and their mistake be explained in the best possible manner, this was not done since it would destroy the observation. Anyway, many observations entail discovering new issues which the researcher is unaware of. However, since giving wrong and misleading information to students was a very serious matter, the author decided to intervene but afterwards and not during the observation. This was a good opportunity for SMs to correct their mistakes. SMs were of course asked to contact the student/agent and correct some of the wrong information given.

### 3.5 Reliability, Validity and Generalisability

All research involving quantitative or qualitative research methodologies should address the issues of reliability and validity. Bell (2006) highlights that data should always be examined critically to assess whether they are reliable and valid. “Reliability is the extent to which a test or procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions” (p. 117) whereas validity which is a more complex concept “tells us whether an item or instrument measures or describes what it is supposed to measure or describe...” (p. 117). Blaxter *et al.* (2003) explain in a more simple and practical way that if another researcher works on the same research questions and setting with the same data, he/she should come up with more or less the same results. The only thing that might be different is the interpretation of the findings. If this is the case then the work might be judged reliable.

Cohen *et al.* (2007) state that validity is an important key to effective research and if a research is invalid then it is simply worthless. Validity is also important in both qualitative and quantitative research. There are 18 types of validity according to Cohen *et al.* (2007) but in this research the five most well-known ones are briefly analysed. These are the following:

- Content validity;
- Criterion-related validity;
- Construct validity;
- Internal validity;
- External validity.

Content Validity is concerned with the extent to which the assessment instrument adequately samples the content domain (Moskal and Leydens, 2000). Similarly, Cohen *et al.* (2007) claim that the instrument must show that it fairly and comprehensively covers the domain or items that it claims it covers. For example, a history exam in which the questions use complex sentence structures may unintentionally measure students’ reading comprehension skills rather than their historical knowledge. A teacher who is interpreting a student’s incorrect response may conclude that the student does not have the appropriate historical knowledge when actually that student does not

understand the question. The teacher has misinterpreted the evidence rendering the interpretation invalid (Moskal and Leydens, 2000).

In this research, and given the fact that many AC's students level of English was not high it was intentionally decided to use a more simple language in the questionnaire in order to make the questions easily understandable. Moreover, with the exception of Part B (which included some questions on student experiences), all other parts of the questionnaire were directly associated with the research objective of finding the factors that influence international students' decisions in coming to Cyprus and AC. Most questions of the questionnaire were asking the students to give their personal opinion with the exception of two questions which on purpose were asking students as to why other students (and not themselves) do something.

Criterion-related validity refers to the capacity of the test scores to make predictions on future performance or to estimate current performance on some valued measure other than the test itself. (Neville, 2005). In other words, according to Moskal and Leydens (2000), it is the extent to which the results of an assessment correlate with a current or future event. For example, Neville (2005) argues that 'Reading readiness' scores might be used to predict a student's future reading achievement or a test of dictionary skills might be used to estimate a student's skill in the use of a dictionary (which is determined by observation). In the first instance, the interest is in prediction and in the second instance, the interest is in estimating present status.

This research's findings cannot be used to predict the students' choices in the future. However, a similar test at a future date might reveal if predictive validity (which according to Cohen *et al.* (2007) is one form of Criterion-related validity) can be achieved. Moreover, Concurrent validity (which is the other form of Criterion-related validity) which means that data gathered from using one DCT must correlate highly with data gathered from using another DCT (Cohen *et al.*, 2007) can be used in this research since three DCTs were used to answer the research question. This type of validity is a form of triangulation which is discussed in a separate section of this research.



Construct validity “is sought on the ‘operationalized’ forms of a construct clarifying what we mean when we use the construct. Hence in this form of validity the articulation of the construct is important; is the researcher’s understanding of this construct similar to that which is generally accepted to be the construct?” (Cohen *et al.*, 2007, p. 138). They continue by adding that to establish construct validity, the researcher should be assured that his/her construction of a particular issue agree with other constructions of the same issue. This can be achieved through correlations with other measures of the issue or by rooting the researcher’s construction in a wide literature search. Therefore, a researcher can confirm his/her construction with that given in relevant literature but also look for counter-examples which might falsify the researcher’s construction. Construct validity in this research was achieved by firstly examining other empirical studies which were undertaken on the same subject and then constructing the research based on various elements of these other empirical research. Furthermore, the findings of the current research were then cross-examined with the findings of other research studies in order to identify similar patterns or even differences which the reader should note.

Internal validity “has to do with whether your methods, approaches and techniques actually relate to, or measure the issues you have been exploring” (p. 221). In other words, internal validity deals with the question of how one’s findings match reality (Merriam, 1988). On the other hand, external validity is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations. According to Merriam (1988) this simply tries to find how generalisable the results of a study are. Qualitative case studies usually have high internal validity. However, the issue of generalisability is especially discussed for single case studies.

Those who view external validity in terms of traditional research design take one of two positions: Either they assume that one cannot generalize from a single case study and thus regard it as a limitation of the method, or they attempt to strengthen external validity by using standard sampling procedures. Within a single case study, for example, one can randomly sample from a subunit -say, teachers in a school-and then treat the data quantitatively (p. 174).

Yin (2003) emphasises that the external validity problem has been a major barrier in doing case studies. Critics argue that single cases offer a poor basis for generalising. “However, such critics are implicitly contrasting the situation to survey research, in which a sample (if selected correctly) readily generalizes to a larger universe” (p. 37).

In this research, external validity was strengthened by using standard sampling procedures. Thus, the researcher used the random probability sampling in choosing the students completing the questionnaire. Thus, the students had an equal chance of completing this research questionnaire. This, according to Merriam (1988) allows the researcher to generalise the results of the study from the sample to the population from which it was drawn.

Dawson (2002) advocates that for quantitative data analysis, the issues of validity and reliability are very important. It is easier to check these issues in quantitative rather than qualitative data. For example, because most questionnaires of this research were anonymously completed, this encouraged more honesty. Of course, a researcher might not know if all the answers are honest but he/she can check whether the questionnaires were filled out correctly and accurately. However in qualitative data, participants might be influenced from the research process or by the researcher who might bring his/her own preferences and experience to the study. The analysis of the same qualitative data might lead to very different results. Hence the issues of reliability and validity are difficult to be determined. Dawson (2002) claims that because qualitative research analysis is a very personal process “some researchers criticise qualitative methods as ‘unscientific’ or ‘unreliable’” (p. 111).

Both issues discussed here were taken seriously into consideration. For this reason, the author managed to continually ask the opinions of colleagues, either academics or administrators on both the validity and reliability of this research, with special care to the qualitative data collected. Some of them were pleased to comment on this work and either affirm or dispute any vague, unclear, confusing or in any way ambiguous statement written on the questionnaires or the interview protocol.

Moreover, for the quantitative data the researcher aimed at a sample that would confidently represent the wider characteristics of the population. As Gill and Johnson (2003) explain, sampling is needed as it is impractical and impossible to have the whole population participating in a research. “The aim is to ensure that those who participate are a representative sub-set of the research population and thus any findings can be generalized or extrapolated to that target population with confidence” (p. 101). Although a specific sample size could not be asked for, since this depended on the

number of students completing the questionnaire, the final number of participants served its purpose and as Gill and Johnson (2003) state, the random sample was adequately sized (see Table 4.1). Thus the research sample made the statistical requirements of the analysis as reliable as possible. The sampling in this research was done randomly as it would have been difficult to use stratified sampling with the size of the population and the number of students interested in participating in this research. In the analysis of the findings the author deals more with other key issues which are important in determining the sample size for a probability sample, that of the confidence level and the confidence interval.

### **3.6 Insider researcher, objectivity and bias**

Blaxter *et al.* (2003) argue that research is not entirely objective. They further argue that: “it is a social activity powerfully affected by the researcher’s own motivations and values... ..especially if you carry it out within your own or another organization” (p. 15). This is particularly so with the worker (insider) researcher who needs to be balanced through engaging in detached reflexivity at suitable steps. Moreover, Merriam (1988) points out that in doing research, ethical dilemmas are likely to emerge at two points: during the collection of data and in the dissemination of findings. Reflexivity is simply managing to be objective on your dual role as a researcher and worker and applying self criticism in every step of the research. For Cohen *et al.* (2007):

Reflexivity suggests that researchers should acknowledge and disclose their own selves in the research, seeking to understand their part in, or influence on, the research. Rather than trying to eliminate researcher effects (which is impossible, as researchers are part of the world that they are investigating), researchers should hold themselves up to the light, echoing Cooley’s (1902) notion of the ‘looking glass self’ (p. 171).

Bell (2006) points out that there are definite advantages in being an insider researcher. Some of the examples are the intimate knowledge the researcher has of the context of the research and the micropolitics of the institution. In addition, travel to the institution is not a problem and subjects can be easily reached. Moreover, colleagues welcome the opportunity to air problems and have their situation analysed by someone who understood the practical day-to-day realities of their task. However, there are also some disadvantages or problems which the insider researcher should be aware of and try to

overcome. For example, interviewing colleagues (or even worse employees, like the case of this research project) might be uncomfortable for both parties.

The researcher paid a lot of attention to the issue of reflexivity given the fact that he is not only an insider researcher but also the owner of AC. Therefore, collecting unbiased information from the employees of AC was considered difficult. However, the researcher is confident that his dual role as an insider researcher did not negatively affect this study in any way. On the contrary, he believes that he made the most of the advantages of his dual role. In addition, he made use of his experience in the best possible way in order to tackle the problem efficiently and meet the aims of the research. Also, being an insider researcher meant that the researcher had extensive experience concerning the research subject and most importantly, the students. This proved very helpful when collecting data for the CS as the researcher was in a very good position to assess the objectivity of such data. Furthermore, the fact that he is a Director and an owner of AC proved beneficial because the necessary authority and autonomy was given to carry out this project and propose the necessary changes.

Additionally, extra hours were added to this research project in a way that it did not affect the author's current responsibilities. Generally, a high level of reflexivity was applied throughout this research study. The researcher's extensive experience in this field as well as the smaller scale studies conducted in the past offered the extra knowledge to tackle this very important issue.

Additionally, Cohen *et al.* (2007) argue that "The participants as practitioners and researchers need to apply to themselves the same critical scrutiny that they are applying to others and to the research" (p. 310). The author therefore challenged his objectivity at regular intervals and took corrective measures wherever and whenever needed. This was necessary to ensure the objectivity of this study. Moreover, the effects of this research on the researched as well as the researcher were taken into consideration. The nature of this study was such that did not harm or negatively affect any of the researchers. On the contrary, both SMs and students welcomed the idea of this research, the first of its kind in the history of AC.

The author is fully aware of the fact that it is difficult to remain objective if you are very close to the problem that needs a solution. It is also understood that researchers may be influenced by external factors and be tempted to modify the outcome of their research. In order to overcome these problems, the author was aware of any biases or strong beliefs he had about certain issues and used reflexive thinking to overcome them. Additionally, other College senior SMs as well as academics and people who know the subject of this research project were encouraged to critically comment on the objectivity of this work. This research project tried to look at the situation under investigation through the eyes of many participants or stakeholders. The author is positive that collaborating with others who know about the research subject and understand how research is done (e.g. Doctoral degree holders, Directors of other departments) proved beneficial and crucial to the success of this work.

The researcher's reading as well as the research undertaken made him fully aware of the issues involved in carrying out research as an insider researcher. Throughout this research, the disadvantages which arose from the author's dual role as a worker and researcher were minimised. In addition, the issue of objectivity and bias was tackled as efficiently as possible. Although it is impossible to eliminate these issues completely, applying self-criticism made the author see various issues with a different view. In general, the fact that this work-based research tackled a real life issue of AC helped a lot in overcoming many of the problems of the insider-research. This is because as Bell (2006) demonstrates in a real life example:

If I had to choose one strategy that I would encourage prospective inside researchers to adopt, it would be to relate the research report to the pragmatic concerns of the institution. That might perhaps help to persuade colleagues that participation in research will be as beneficial to them as it is to the researcher. (p. 54).

The fact that this research suggested changes to the recruitment and marketing practices of AC was welcomed by SMs who saw this research as an opportunity to make their jobs easier and bring better results to the HEI that employs them.

### 3.7 Data Analysis

As was described above, data were collected by means of questionnaires, interviews, observations and reading. However, generally various authors agree that data mean very little until they are analysed and interpreted. According to Bell (2006) these data are considered raw until they are recorded, categorised, analysed and interpreted. “We are constantly looking for similarities and differences, for groupings, patterns and items of particular significance” (p. 203). The researcher may have preconceived ideas about the categories needed and may even direct respondents of the research to reply in certain ways. However, assuming that the researcher eliminated bias, the first-thought categories will give him/her just a start. Most definitely, others will emerge on the way.

The data gathered for this research were both quantitative (questionnaires) and qualitative (interviews, observations). They were both combined to address the initial research objective. Yin (2003) points out that: “Data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing, or otherwise recombining both quantitative and qualitative evidence to address the initial propositions of a study” (p. 109). There are different approaches to data analysis and there is no single or correct way to do it. However, as Dawson (2002) claims, the methods used to analyse the research data depend on the research family employed (quantitative or qualitative) “and this choice will be influenced by personal and methodological preference and educational background” (p. 110). In addition, Cohen *et al.* (2007) highlight that the researcher must be clear what he/she wants the data analysis to do as this will determine the kind of analysis performed on the collected data. They continue that “this, in turn, will influence the way in which the analysis is written up” (p. 461). However, Yin (2003) emphasises that “analyzing case study evidence is especially difficult because the strategies and techniques have not been well defined” (p. 109).

Whatever the chosen approach, most researchers and especially CS researchers adhere to several guidelines (Hancock and Algozzine, 2006). One guideline suggests constant focus to the research objective. Researchers can feel overwhelmed by the large amount of information obtained from the DCT and might deviate from the fundamental research objective. Therefore, researchers should always focus on the research questions when gathering and interpreting the information gathered and each new piece of information

should be examined in light of these questions. Another guideline involves collection, examination and analysis of those data that are potentially meaningful to the research effort and elimination of irrelevant information. For example, this is exactly what the author faced during the observation period when various other matters were observed which were not relevant to the research objective.

Another guideline is to “develop a method for labelling, storing, and gaining access to information acquired during the research effort” (Hancock and Algozzine, 2006, p. 57). These might include the date, location, persons involved and the circumstances surrounding that incidence (for example the details surrounding an observation in the admissions department). A final guideline involves the use of all available resources which can help in the interpretation of information. A good example of this is the use of the Statistical Product and Service Solutions Software (SPSS) computer software in the analysis of the questionnaire for this research which is suggested by a number of authors (Cohen *et al.*, 2007, Bell, 2006 and Dawson, 2002).

The first step in the analysis was the grouping of the data collected from empirical studies during the literature review stage. Although these findings involved other studies and not the current one, they were considered important in meeting the first research objective. Moreover, these findings were also needed in the analysis stage when comparing them with the findings of this research. Answers to some of the questions of this research (e.g. the factors influencing students’ choice of a HEI) proved very useful when examined in combination with the results of other studies with completely different population and sample. For the grouping, a few broad groups of questions and answers to the issues of choice and decision-making in HE were firstly created that the author personally had in mind from experience which would help answer the research questions. As more and more studies similar to the current one were examined, more groups were created and this initially assisted in structuring the questionnaire.

The next step in the analysis was to deal with the collected questionnaires. Since this was the most important DCT for this research the researcher decided to analyse it first. However, the choice of the statistical package to be used for analysing the questionnaire was very important and the one which would be used had to be chosen before the start of the coding of the variables. After evaluating two statistical software packages

(QPSMR and SPSS), the researcher started working on the Statistical Product and Service Solutions software (SPSS) V17.0. SPSS is widely used in many social sciences worldwide and according to Dawson (2002), it is the most common package used by social scientists. It is also a very powerful, trustworthy and user-friendly package. It enables the user to analyse his/her data in order to support a theory or give a reason to modify it.

However, there was a lot of work to be done before starting to analyse the data. This required the careful coding and then the input of all the variables in the software before starting to enter the data of the questionnaire. The coding needed was done very carefully since it was soon realised that if the correct labels were not given to the variables then the meaning of the answers would be completely different. Moreover, the worst case was that if a mistake was made at the coding stage it would most probably lead to misleading answers. However, the author would not know if something went wrong during the coding stage in order to correct it unless there was a hint derived from the results.

The coding process is very important when dealing with quantitative data and can make the researcher's analysis much easier, assuming of course that the questionnaire to be analysed is properly constructed and worded. Just before running the software, the answers were categorised according to the research objectives. Some were directly and others indirectly linked with these objectives. This helped the researcher to focus on the purpose of the research as well as triangulating the data with the data gathered from other DCTs associated with the same research objectives.

The data from the questionnaire were exploratory and non-parametrically analysed using frequencies and percentages. Cohen *et al.* (2007) indicate that exploratory data analysis "is a form of analysis which is responsive to the data being presented, and is most closely concerned with seeing what the data themselves suggest, akin to a detective following a line of evidence" (p. 206-207). These data are usually descriptive. In addition, they explain that non-parametric tests make few or no assumptions about the distribution of the population or its characteristics simply because these are unknown. "The tests do not assume a regular bell-shaped curve of distribution in the wider population; indeed the wider population is perhaps irrelevant as these tests are



designed for a specific population – a class in a school...” (p. 415). The advantage of using non-parametric tests is that they are being tailored to particular institutional, departmental and individual circumstances e.g. students of a HEI.

According to Cohen *et al.* (2007), difference testing is an important feature in better understanding data. In the analysis, the chi-square test was used, which is a test based on the notion of probability, to investigate difference. This test was used to determine whether there were differences which were statistically significant between the mean values of any two of the research groups. These research groups (e.g. their nationality, age group or semesters already completed) were created from the questionnaire’s valid answers to some of the questions. For example, there were questions which the answers given to them by Asian students were not statistically significantly different from the answers given by African students. For Gujarati (1992) this simply means that “when we say that a test is statistically significant, we generally mean that...the observed difference between the sample value and the hypothesized value cannot be due to mere chance” (p. 104). The chi-square was used after assuming that the students from different continents come from a very different background and therefore their mentality towards studying abroad is different and needs to be examined. This test was needed in some parts of the questionnaire analysis because unlike the t-test, it can be applied when using two or more variables.

After the initial analysis of the quantitative data, the author then proceeded in analysing the qualitative data of the research. Cohen *et al.* (2007) agree with Yin (2003) that there is no single or correct way to analyse qualitative data and that the analysis should depend on the fitness for purpose. Hancock and Algozzine (2006) recommend using a systematic procedure to make analysis of field notes more manageable. For the purposes of this study, the data collected from the interviewing of admissions’ SMs were firstly broadly categorised according to the research objective. The method of content analysis was then used for analysing the data gathered from the interviews. In order to reach the decision as to the method that would be used to analyse the data from the interviews, the two main methods for analysing qualitative data were studied and presented, namely the content analysis and the grounded theory.

Grounded theory is a process which seeks to create a theory that explains some action, interaction or process (Hancock and Algozzine, 2006). The investigator is the primary instrument of data collection and tries to inductively derive meaning from the data. “The product of this type of qualitative research is a substantive theory that is ‘grounded’ in the data. Substantive theories tend to explain more specific, everyday situations than do more formal, all-encompassing theories” (p. 9). Strauss and Corbin (1994, cited in Cohen *et al.*, 2007) remark that “grounded theory is a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analysed” (p. 491). Miles and Huberman (1994, cited in Gill and Johnson, 2002), stress that grounded theory explains variations in phenomena observed in the field by observing it across different settings in order to identify patterns and processes, commonalities and differences. The reason this method of analysis was not used for analysing the data of the interviews was that the purpose of the analysis was not to create a theory but to explain in a systematic and more quantitative methods the interviewees’ replies. This type of analysis is described by the content analysis which better suited the analysis of these data.

Cohen *et al.* (2007) emphasise that content analysis can be applied to any written material, from documents to interviews transcriptions and from media products to personal interviews. Many researchers see content analysis as an alternative to numerical analysis of qualitative data. However, according to Cohen *et al.* (2007), this is not so, although it is widely used as a device for extracting numerical data from word-based data. This analysis takes texts and analyses, reduces and interrogates them into summary form. Middlesex University (2007/2008) states that “‘Content analysis’ starts with qualitative data and attempts to explain its meaning by a systematic, quantitative analysis of the content. Examples could be categorising the positive and negative statements in a report...” (p. 94). Similarly, Bell (2006) advocates that the method of content analysis usually involves counting the number of times particular items or ‘recording units’ occur in a research sample. Having established the frequency of the chosen terms or units, the researcher must then be able to place them in context before interpreting and explaining them.

The data from the interviews were categorised according to the frequency of the replies to each category of answers. Cohen *et al.* (2007) stress that “once the data have been

coded and categorised, the researcher can count the frequency of each code or word in the text, and the number of words in each category” (p. 481). However, “words and single codes on their own have limited power, and so it is important to move on associations between words and codes, i.e. to look at categories and relationships between categories” (p. 481). Moreover, Weber (1990, cited in Cohen *et al.*, 2007), suggests that it is preferable to retrieve text based on categories rather than single words because categories tend to retrieve more than single words, taking into consideration synonyms and conceptually close meanings. That is why the analysis of the data derived from the interviews was done based on the categories of answers given and not on specific words from the interviewees’ replies. Moreover, Dawson (2002) points out that:

Using this method the researcher systematically works through each transcript assigning codes, which may be numbers or words, to specific characteristics within the text. The researcher may already have a list of categories or she may read through each transcript and let the categories emerge from the data (p. 118).

The findings presented in section 4.3 were then generated after this analysis. These findings were constantly being associated with findings from other DCTs which could answer the same research objective. Moreover, various concepts and ideas were identified which were thought useful to be added in the analysis. Generally, these data offered the salt and pepper of the questionnaire analysis. This is because details as well as fine points emerged that helped in the analysis and subsequently in better answering the research questions. After the initial analysis and where needed the author referred back to the notes as well as the audio-recordings of the interviewing.

As stated above in this Chapter, the observations were not the most important DCT. They were rather a more casual data gathering process which aimed at offering the researcher details which had been missed from the other DCTs and thus aid the validating of data which were already collected. The categories created above were also used in the analysis of the semi-structured observations. The category or categories which the data collected related to were noted down next to each observation. Cohen *et al.* (2007) state that there are three types of observations: observations of facts, observations which focus on events and observations which focus on behaviours or qualities. The semi-structured observations for this research were mostly focused on facts (e.g. number of international students sending promotional materials to friends or

relatives) and behaviours (e.g. degree of aggressive or friendly behaviour among students visiting the admissions department). Cohen *et al.* (2007) argue that “the semi-structured and unstructured observations will review observational data before suggesting an explanation for the phenomena being observed” (p. 397). Because the observations were semi-structured, some data were not assigned into categories because although they seemed useful just before the observations, they later on proved irrelevant for this research.

Cohen *et al.* (2007) advocate that if the researcher wants to go into a situation and let the elements of the situation speak for themselves then it may be more useful to choose a less structured observation. The analysis of this type of observations is derived within the agenda of the participants and is honest to the situation as it unfolds. “Here selectivity derives from the situation rather than from the researcher in the sense that key issues emerge from the observation rather than the researcher knowing in advance what those key issues will be. The analysis of the observational data offered this research the fine points supporting the findings of other DCTs.

The categorisation of data from all the DCTs allowed the researcher to work more closely with the second stage of the analysis. Firstly, all the data collected were examined and placed in the various categories based on their relevance to each research objective. The researcher then looked-out for patterns and regularities, similarities and differences, various themes and generally whatever would make the analysis easier. Backed-up with the processed data, theories were developed which would interpret these data. For example, one theory might be that ‘students rely on the persuading power of agents/representatives’. Is this theory backed-up by the data of this research? All the DCTs used as well as the initial data analysis undertaken to accomplish the research objectives of this project were summarised in Table 3.6.

**Table 3.6: Summary of all DCTs used and initial data analysis undertaken accomplishing the research objectives**

Research Objective	Data Collection, Project Activity and Analysis
Identify from the relevant literature current trends in the international HE setting affecting HEIs and transforming the education world as we know it today;	This was achieved through the review and analysis of the available literature which was relevant for this research objective.
Identify from other relevant studies the factors influencing international students' decisions with specific reference to the factors influencing their mobility around the globe.	This was achieved through the review and analysis of empirical studies found in the literature review section. This research objective helped the author in structuring the questions and answers of the questionnaire which were based on these empirical studies which were similar to this research study.
Identify the factors and the people influencing AC international students' choice.	This was achieved through the distribution of the questionnaire to all AC international students and the analysis made to the 400 completed ones. Also the observations contributed to the data gathered for this research objective.
Identify the role of current students and alumni in recruitment and marketing.	This was achieved mainly through the observations of current students interacting with the admissions staff. In addition, the questionnaires and the interviewing of SMs generated additional data relevant to this research objective. The interviewing of SMs who meet AC alumni all over the world was particularly important in shading more light into this.
Determine how the behaviour/conduct by key members of the recruitment staff affects recruitment.	This was achieved mainly by observing the interaction of SMs with students. The use of observations greatly enhanced this objective by examining how students actually perceive the role of SMs in the recruitment. Also, the analysis of the questionnaire assisted the author in finding out the degree of influence by our SMs before coming to AC and generally the role of admissions officers in persuading a student to come to AC. Finally, this objective was achieved by analysing the interviewing staff's thoughts on their perceived role in recruitment.
Identify the strengths and weaknesses of AC.	This was achieved by analysing the views of students who completed the questionnaire as well as the interviewed admissions staff responsible for the AC recruitment. The actual observations and the identification of both strengths and weaknesses helped support the views of SMs and students.
Determine supporting procedures or practices which might help in the recruitment of students.	These procedures were extracted from the views of students and SMs participating in this research. Answers to this question were mainly derived from the interviews of SMs who actually deal with recruitment.
Critically analyse the current marketing and recruitment policy and existing practices in AC and suggest changes which will increase the international students' intake.	This was achieved firstly through the review and analysis of organisationally based documents describing the current marketing and recruitment policy as well as practice of AC. The critical analysis and the suggestions for changes were achieved by comparing these policies with the product of the analysis of the data drawn from all five DCTs. More specifically, the examination of all the data collected led to suggestions for improving the current practices and thus increasing the recruitment of international students at AC.

The last and most important step in the project activity was to take the product of these findings from all DCTs and based on that suggest changes that would improve the recruitment and marketing practices of AC. Having identified the factors that influence international students' choice, the author compared these with the current policies and practices of the College. Also, identifying the role of current and alumni students on the recruitment of international students at AC made me understand their important role in the recruitment. Thus, all necessary actions have been taken and more attention has been given in making them 'ambassadors' of the College. Additionally, this project suggested ways to better 'use' them in promoting AC abroad.

### **Triangulation**

During the second stage of the data analysis, all the data as well as the findings of all DCTs were triangulated. Triangulation became possible because of the initial analysis and the categorisation of all data. This helps in triangulating by comparing data which are derived for the same categories. In addition, triangulation was possible by the fact that more than one DCT was used in this project and therefore, this allowed the cross-checking of the findings. Triangulation, according to Cohen *et al.* (2007) is defined as the use of two or more DCTs in the study of aspects of human behaviour. More is obviously better as it makes your findings more valid. Laws (2003, cited in Bell, 2006) offer a simple way to see triangulation as seeing the same thing from different perspectives and thus being able to challenge the findings of one method to that of other(s). Therefore, the validity of the findings of this research was enhanced by the use of four DCTs and the triangulation of their data. In CS research, Yin (2003) advocates that using a single DCT is not recommended. On the contrary a major strength of CS data collection is using multiple sources of evidence and the development of converging lines of inquiry, a process of triangulation. "Thus, any finding or conclusion in a case study is likely to be much more convincing and accurate if it is based on several different sources of information" (p. 98).

### 3.8 Ethical Issues

According to Blaxter *et al.* (2003), the conduct of ethically informed social research should be the goal of all social researchers. Ethical issues are thought to arise predominantly with qualitative methods of data collection because of the closer relationship between the researcher and the researched. This close relationship is also present in projects undertaken by insider-researchers and therefore various ethical problems need to be addressed.

For this research project, many ethical concerns were taken into consideration and are analysed below separately for each DCT. This was done since each DCT needed its own special treatment on the very important ethical issue. In general, the rights and ethics of the participants in the present research study were not threatened in any way. As already mentioned above, both SMs and students completing the questionnaires were informed of the purpose of the research. Also, a written statement of their rights was handed-out. This is a basic ethical consideration which was implemented throughout this research study. Cohen *et al.* (2007) state that:

A major ethical dilemma is that which requires researchers to strike a balance between the demands placed on them as professional scientists in pursuit of truth, and their subjects' rights and values potentially threatened by the research. This is known as the 'costs/benefits ratio' ... (p.51).

The author was also aware that both SMs and students might feel obliged to participate in this research because of the author's position as one of the Directors of the College. The author tried to overcome this by explaining to the SMs that there was no obligation for them to participate and that if they wished not to take part in this research, this would not have any negative implications on their job. It was also made clear to students in writing that their participation to the research was not obligatory in any way. Anyway, if some students decided not to take part in this research, it would not negatively affect their studies in any way since there was no way to find out who did or did not complete the questionnaire.

The great importance of the informed consent was understood and applied throughout this research. The researcher therefore designed, handed-out and obtained the informed

consent of all the SMs that were interviewed as well as the consent of all the students that filled out the research questionnaire. Blaxter *et al.* (2003) state that:

Ethical research involves getting the informed consent of those you are going to interview, question, observe or take materials from. It involves reaching agreements about the uses of these data, and how the analysis will be reported and disseminated. And it is about keeping to such agreements when they have been reached (p. 158).

The author paid attention to the fact that all ethical agreements should be kept until the end of the research. The participants of this research project were allowed to partly or fully withdraw from it anytime they wished without any negative consequences. Also the author made sure that the confidentiality, anonymity (Bell, 2006) and non-traceability of students were not at risk by filling out the questionnaire.

In addition, after the collection of data there is always the issue of deciding what is important and what is not and this is another ethical problem of the insider researcher. Merriam (1988), states that data are filtered through the researcher's particular theoretical position and biases. However, this might lead the researcher to exclude data contradictory to his/her views. Although it is practically difficult to be nonbiased, the researcher should at least be aware that these biases might exist without being so readily apparent to him/her. Moreover, the researcher should include enough data to let readers draw their own conclusions.

### **Ethical Considerations in Questionnaires**

The researcher was aware that a questionnaire is an intrusion into the private life of the respondent, which in this case is the student (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). More importantly, Gill and Johnson (2002) advocate that data derived from one organisation as part of research undertaken by one interested party such as management should be carefully and ethically structured. This is because as Reeves and Harper (1981) explain:

1. the results of decisions taken by managers may affect the respondents;
2. therefore, all interested parties should know the purpose of the survey and the manner it is conducted;
3. the choice of questions may also be governed by organisational considerations;



4. providing opportunities for employees to express their say should be seriously taken into consideration.

Furthermore, in work-based research, the researcher should consult with all interested parties before starting his/her fieldwork and should proceed only after acquiring the consent of these parties. Similarly, Cohen *et al.* (2007) states that the respondents cannot be forced into completing a questionnaire. They might be strongly encouraged to do so, but the decision whether to complete it or withdraw before its completion is entirely theirs.

In designing the questionnaire the author was aware of the many ethical issues which are addressed by a number of authors in using this DCT. Taking into consideration these issues, students participating in the research by completing this questionnaire were asked to firstly fill out an informed consent form (Appendix 2). This is because all human beings have the right to freedom and self determination. Although this research did not expose students to any stress or mental pain, they had the right to withdraw at any stage or not to complete specific questions in the questionnaire. Additionally, writing the student's name and number was optional, thus giving the option to some students to complete the questionnaire anonymously. The author also made sure that their confidentiality, anonymity and non-traceability were not at risk by filling out this questionnaire. In this way the author tried to get as many non-biased and independent views as possible.

### **Ethical Considerations in interviewing**

According to Cohen *et al.* (2007), there are three main areas of ethical issues that the researcher should take into consideration. It is the informed consent, the confidentiality and the consequences of the interviews. They also highlight that if a researcher does not give an informed consent, it can lead “to participants feeling duped, very angry, used and exploited, when the results of the research are eventually published and they realize that they have been studied without their approval consent” (p. 125). Additionally, Bell (2006) explains that the researcher has the responsibility of explaining to the respondents what the research is about, why you want to interview them and what you will do with all the information. This should be done beforehand and not orally so that respondents have the opportunity to ask any question for anything which may be

unclear to them. More importantly, Merriam (1988) claims that in-depth interviewing may have unanticipated long-term effects.

After reading about the many significant ethical issues associated with interviewing, special attention was placed in them, and the appropriate precaution measures were taken (preventive measures). Before the interviews, an informative memo (Appendix 3) about the research was sent to all SMs who were interviewed. More importantly, an informed consent (Appendix 4) form was handed-out and the interviewees were asked to read it, ask any questions they might have and then sign it and return it to the author's office if they agreed to be interviewed.

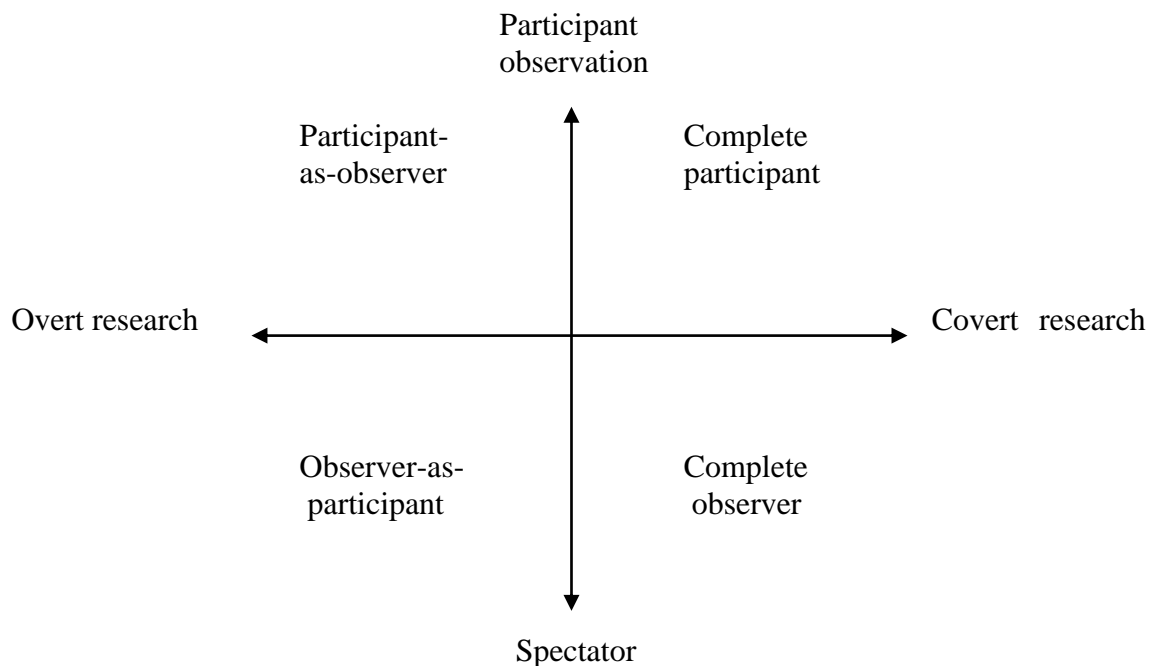
Also just before the start of the interview, in addition to the memo, a few minutes time was spent explaining to the interviewees what the interview was about. In addition, the interviewees were informed of the approximate time this interview would take and were asked whether that was acceptable. They were also assured that complete confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained making sure that their names would not be published in the final project or any other report associated with this research.

### **Ethical Considerations in Participant Observations**

There are two main ethical considerations regarding this DCT. Dawson (2002) stresses that “because of the nature of participant observation there tends to be more issues involving ethics and morals to consider.... What if your participation within a group causes problems, anxiety or argument amongst other members” (p. 103). Moreover, Merriam (1988) argues that the participant observer must be aware of the extent to which his/her presence is changing what is being observed. Knowing when to intervene is perhaps the most confusing ethical dilemma facing case study investigators.

The author believes that in this research these problems did not exist since he is already a key person and decision maker in the admissions department and therefore his involvement or acceptance by the group to be observed is a natural outcome of his role at the College. The author's involvement in the everyday running of the admissions department is expected by both students and SMs. Therefore, his observations which anyway take place in the everyday life at the College will not cause any additional stress or anxiety to students or SMs.

Moreover, a big ethical issue is whether the observations are overt or covert. This issue is according to Cohen *et al.* (2007) a big dilemma which is well documented in the literature. Gill and Johnson (2002) explain that: “This refers to whether the subject(s) know about, or are aware of, the presence of a researcher, or where the actual purpose of the observer is hidden” (p. 146). A useful conceptualisation of these choices is offered by Gold (1958) and later Junker (1960, cited in Gill and Johnson, 2002) as follows:



**Figure 3.7: A taxonomy of field roles**

(Source: Gill and Johnson, 2002)

Although in participant observations the subjects to be observed usually know that they are being observed, in this research and after careful consideration it was decided to use a method which would give more unbiased and trustworthy data. Thus although the SMs knew about the author’s role as an observer and gave their consent, the students did not know they were being observed. Practicality was one of the reasons it was decided not to inform them about this research since it would be difficult to do so. In addition, the author was positive that without the students knowing about his role, this would lead to more honest observations without exaggerations or lies. Cohen *et al.* (2007) point out that: “Covert research can also be justified on the grounds that it overcomes problems of reactivity, in particular if the researcher believes that individuals would change their natural behaviour if they knew that they were being observed” (p. 409).

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

#### 4.1 Introduction

“Data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing or otherwise recombining both quantitative and qualitative evidence to address the initial propositions of a study” (Yin, 2003, p. 109). The initial goal of this research study was to examine the factors that influence international students’ decisions in choosing a Cyprus’s HEI and based on the findings suggest changes in the recruitment and marketing practices of AC. The study utilised the CS research method. The findings of this project were the outcome of the analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data derived from the literature review, the questionnaires, the interviews and the observations. This Chapter encloses the main findings of this research separately for each DCT, followed by an analysis of the findings grouped together according to their relevance to each research objective.

#### 4.2 Data analysis strategy

According to Yin (2003), analysing CSs does not follow fixed formulas or recipes.

Instead, much depends on an investigator’s own style of rigorous thinking, along with the sufficient presentation of evidence...The tools are important and can be useful but they are usually most helpful if you know what to look for (i.e., have an overall analytic strategy), which returns you back to your original problem (p. 110).

For this research project and the analysis of the research data, the author used the thematic analysis in order to reach the research objectives. Hancock and Algozzine (2006) emphasise that:

Although each strategy has unique characteristics, most strategies have in common a basic process-repetitive, on going review of accumulated information in order to identify recurrent patterns, themes, or categories.... Through use of this strategy, each new piece of information is examined in light of a particular research question in order to construct a tentative answer to the question (p. 61).

The analysis was carried out in a different and more suitable way for each DCT and followed the order of their importance. Thus, the questionnaire was analysed first, followed by the interviews and lastly the more casual observations. The analysis for both the questionnaire and the interviews was based on the actual questions asked, whereas the observation analysis was based on observation notes, which were directly (while being recorded) categorised separately under each research objective. In order for the reader to follow this Chapter and have a better understanding of the analysis, the author mostly followed the order of the questions as they are laid down in the actual questionnaire and interview protocol (Appendix 1 and 5 respectively). In order to strengthen the points being raised, direct quotations of the participants most important responses were included in this Chapter. According to Middlesex University (2007/2008), “Researchers often use quotations from participants. Meaning may be lost in selecting, interpreting and summarising the data, and quotations help the reader to understand the reality of the situation under investigation.” (p. 94).

Separately from the initial analysis of the three DCTs, the findings of this research were synthesised, interpreted and then triangulated, being put together according to the research objective they involved. This strategy is preferred by Yin (2003) who points out that “regardless of the choice of strategies or techniques, a persistent challenge is to produce high-quality analyses, which require investigators to attend to all the evidence, display and present the evidence separate from any interpretation” (p. 109). Moreover, and where necessary, reference to the literature review is made to either amplify or affirm the research results.

### **4.3 Questionnaire**

The questionnaire was distributed to all AC international students during the registration period of the Fall Semester 2009. In order to ensure the maximum representativeness of the results all international students of AC were selected to represent the population of this questionnaire. In total 1193 questionnaires were given out and 509 were returned back completed by students. The confidence level (explained in Appendix 6) of this research, was set to 95%, which is the level most researchers use according to <http://www.surveysystem.com/ssca>. Furthermore, Chan (2003a) supports that from the confidence interval we are able to assess the quality of the results. As is shown in Appendix 6, in order to find the confidence interval which shows how sure the

researcher can be of his/her results three factors are taken into consideration in order to determine its size. These are the sample size (which in this case was 509) the population size (which in this case was 1193) and the percentage (which in this case was set to 50 which is the worst case percentage). Given these three numbers the maximum margin of error at a 95% confidence level associated with the aforementioned sample size of 509 and population size of 1193 was calculated to be  $\pm 3.29$  (the confidence interval) as shown in Table 4.1. In other words, if for example 70% of the students of this sample were satisfied with the level of education at AC, the researcher would be 95% sure that if he asked the entire population the same question between 66.71% (70-3.29) and 73.29% (70+3.29) of the students would have given that answer.

**Table 4.1: Finding the Confidence Interval**  
(Source: <http://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm>)

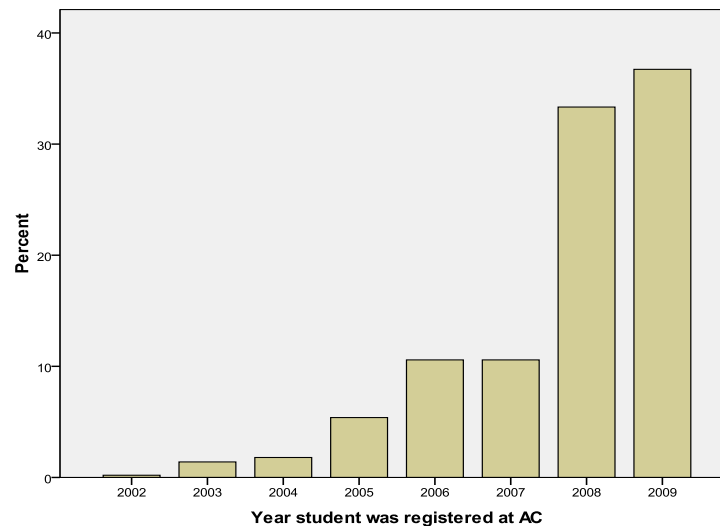
Find Confidence Interval	
Confidence Level:	<input checked="" type="radio"/> 95% <input type="radio"/> 99%
Sample Size:	<input type="text" value="509"/>
Population:	<input type="text" value="1193"/>
Percentage:	<input type="text" value="50"/>
Confidence Interval:	<input type="text" value="3.29"/>

In many cases during this analysis section, graphical representations were used in order to present the major findings in a much clearer way than including the tables with the actual figures. However, all the table outputs from SPSS with their corresponding figures are given in Appendix 7 for further studying. Moreover, most of the findings of the questionnaire are presented in the triangulation section to avoid repetition.

### 4.3.1 Analysis of Part A - Demographics

It is important to note that out of the 509 students who completed the questionnaire, 70% were registered in the years 2008 and 2009. This added to the reliability of the research since the factors which influenced them to come to Cyprus and AC were still ‘fresher’ in their minds.

**Figure 4.2: Year sample students registered at AC**



The big majority of the students registered in the Fall Semester 2009 followed either the Hotel Management or Travel and Tourism Management programme of study. This is, as we will see later on, directly linked with their need to work while studying, which is also part of their practical training, in order to earn their pocket money.

**Figure 4.3: Sample Students' Programme of Study**

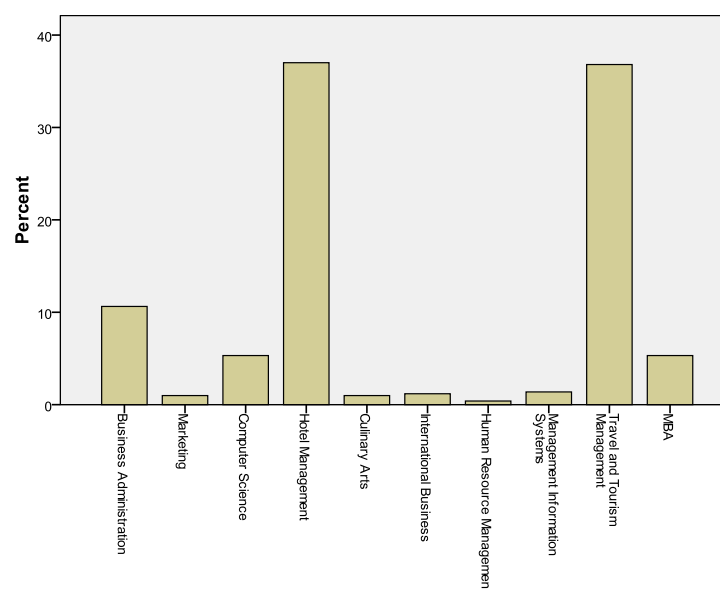
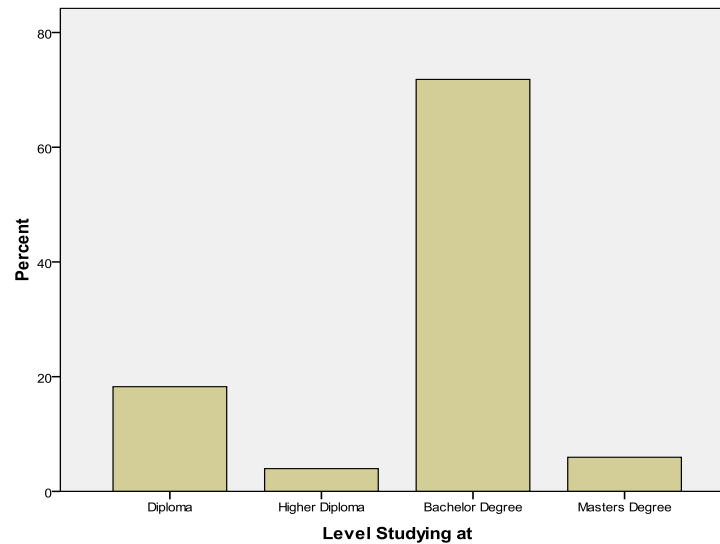


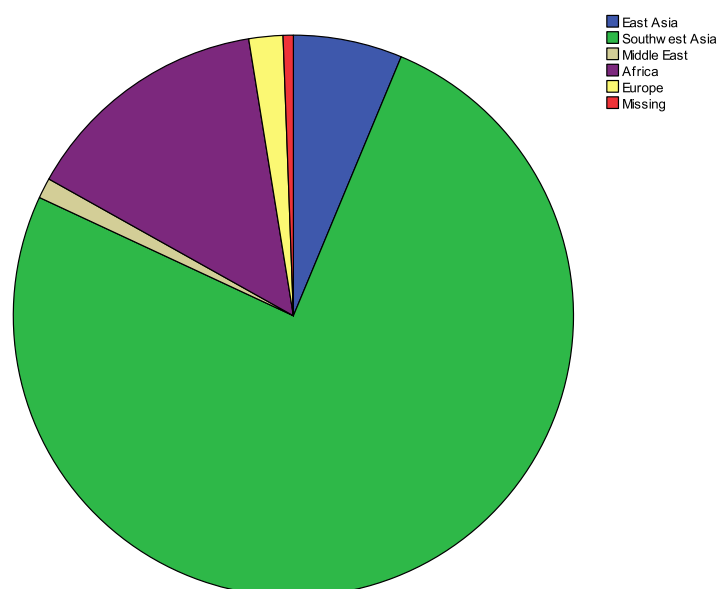
Figure 4.4 shows that 94% of the students of AC's sample were studying at an undergraduate course, whereas only 6% were studying at a postgraduate course. More specifically, the breakdown of all the participant students' level of education is as follows:

**Figure 4.4: Sample students' Level of Studies**



Moreover, as can be seen from Figure 4.5, the very big majority (76.1%) of AC's sample students come from countries of Southwest Asia, followed by 14.4% from African countries and 6.3% from countries of East Asia.

**Figure 4.5: Sample students' Country of Origin**





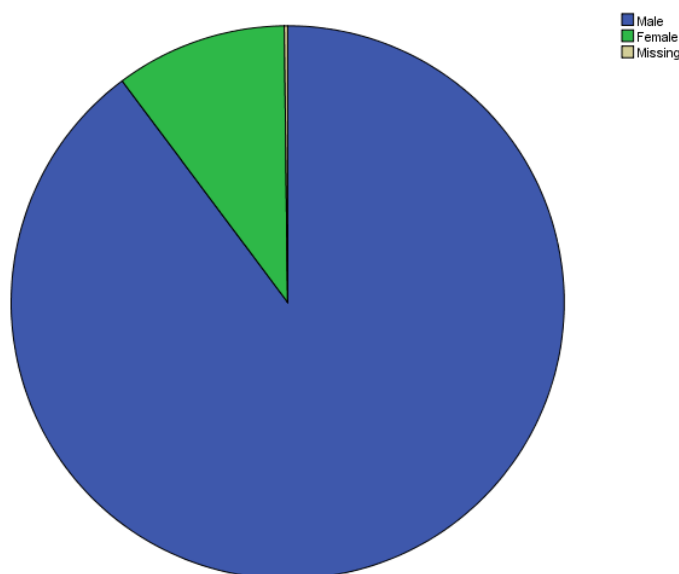
The countries comprising each of the 5 geographical regions are given in Table 4.6. Based on the author’s experience recruiting from these countries, there is a very big difference in the mentality of Southwest Asians with that of East Asians and that is why they were separated for the purposes of this research.

**Table 4.6: The division of the 5 geographical regions**

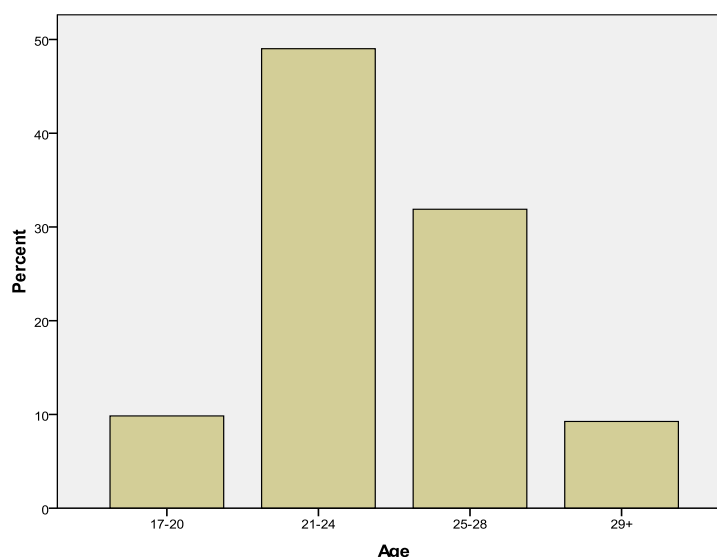
<b>Geographical Region</b>	<b>Countries included</b>
Europe	All EU and non-EU countries belonging to the geographical region of Europe
Middle East	Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Iran, Egypt, UAE, Israel, Palestine
East Asia	China, Mongolia, Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand
Southwest Asia	India, Pakistan, Sri-Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh
Africa	All countries (with the exception of Egypt) which belong to the geographical region of Africa

Another noteworthy demographic of the population sample is the big difference in the percentage of males (90%) and females (10%) who completed the questionnaire (see figure 4.7). This is a characteristic of the population which can be explained by a number of factors (not an objective of this research).

**Figure 4.7: Sample Students’ Gender**



Moreover, the age distribution of the students participating in the questionnaire is shown in the figure below:

**Figure 4.8: Sample Students' Age Distribution**

### 4.3.2 Analysis of Part C and D - Students' Choice and Decision-Making

As can be seen from Appendix 1, Part B of the questionnaire included some statements regarding students' experiences. Although this research's aims and objectives did not involve students' experiences, these statements were added in order for the researcher to take advantage of the first-ever research on AC students and get as much information as possible. The analysis of this section is not presented in this research because of its irrelevance to the present study.

Part C included ten (10) questions which were associated with the students' choice of AC and Cyprus. More specifically, Part C included the following questions which can be found in Appendix 1:

**Table 4.9: Questionnaire's Part C Questions**

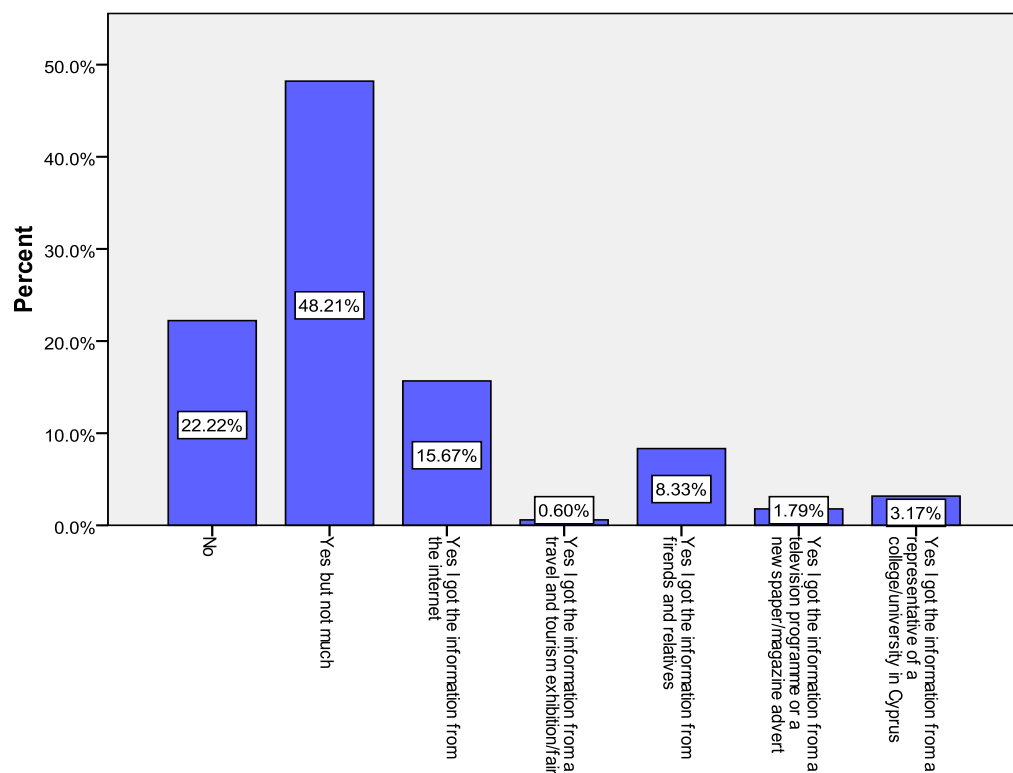
No.	Question
1	Did you have any information about Cyprus before coming here?
2	Why did you decide to study abroad?
3	Which other countries did you think of studying in before deciding to come to Cyprus?
4	Why did you choose Cyprus for your studies?
5	Who influenced your decision to study in Cyprus?
6	Who influenced your decision to study at Americanos College?
7	Did you consider any other colleges/universities in Cyprus before deciding to study at Americanos College?

8	Which factors influenced you in your choice to study at Americanos College?
9	Which of the following sources of information did you use before coming to study at Americanos College?
10	Who is financing your studies in Cyprus?

The answers to most of these questions are presented in graphical form in the figures which follow along with a brief description. The results produced for this part of the questionnaire, which were associated with the research objectives, are analysed in section 4.6 along with a more detailed discussion.

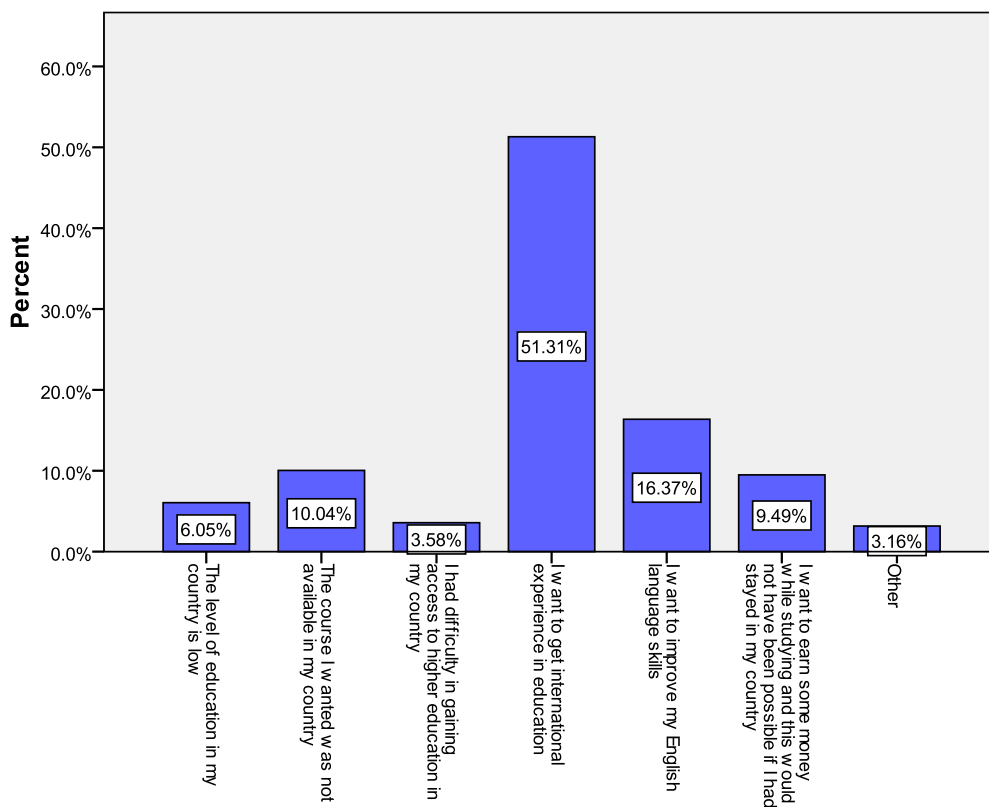
The answers to question C.1 show that nearly half the sample students did not have much information about Cyprus before coming here. Moreover, nearly one fourth had no information at all about Cyprus and this reinforces the view that Cyprus is basically unknown to most students prior to their studies here.

**Figure 4.10: Did you have any information about Cyprus before coming here?**



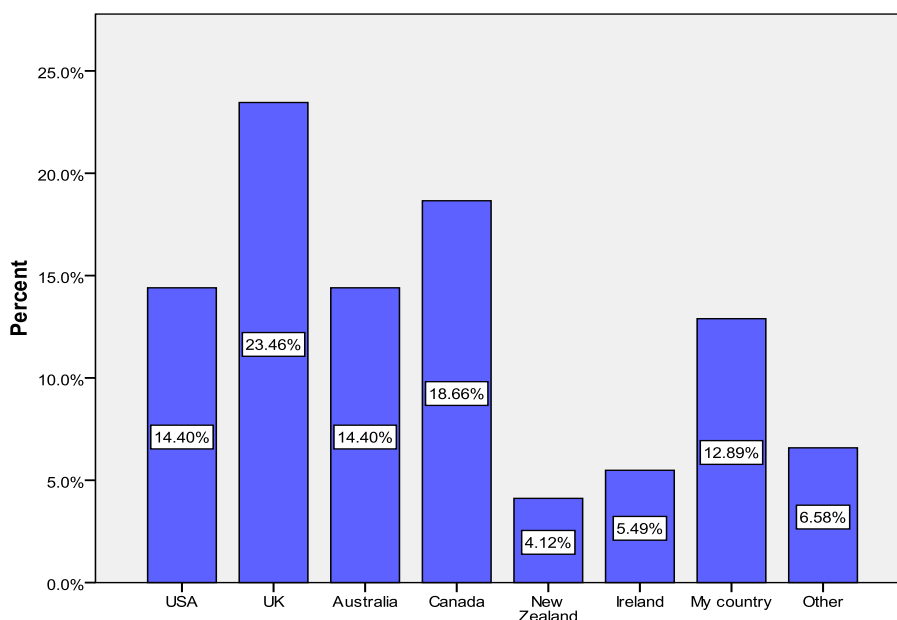
The answers to question C.2 show that more than half of the sample students decided to study abroad because they wanted to have an international experience in education. This is a finding which can also be seen in other similar studies mentioned in the literature review. Figure 4.11 presents the other less preferred answers.

**Figure 4.11: Why did you decide to study abroad?**



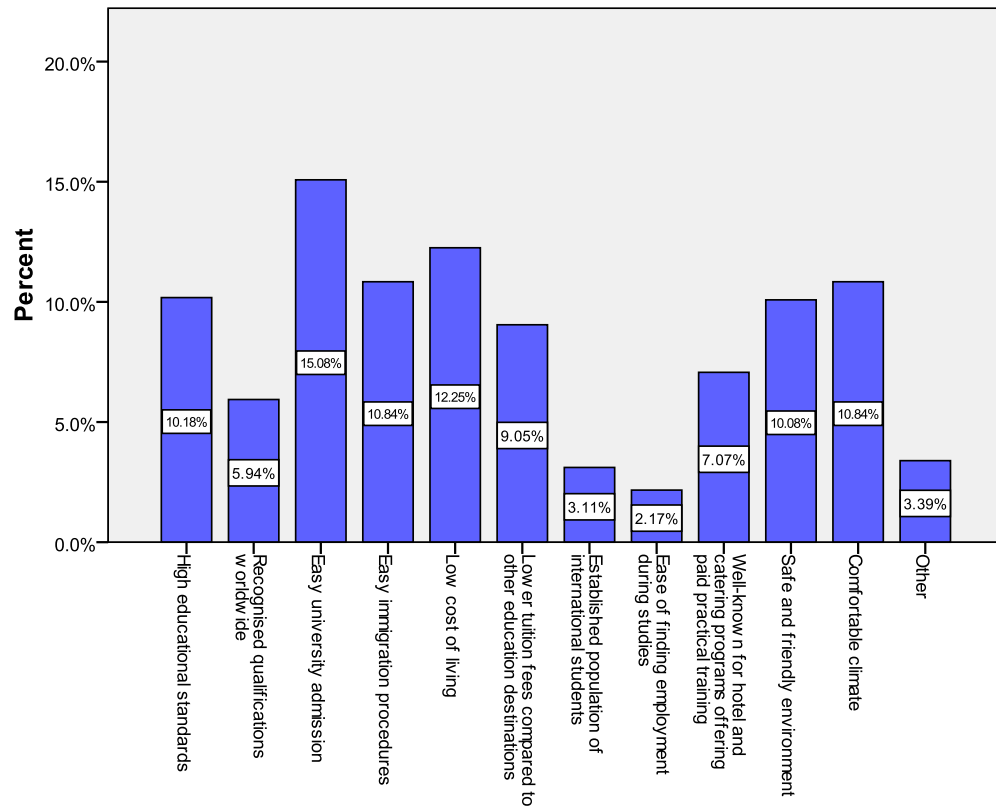
The next questions wanted to demonstrate that students, before making their decision to study in a Cyprus HEI, were thinking of studying in the countries shown in Figure 4.12, with their corresponding percentages.

**Figure 4.12: Which other countries did you think of studying in before deciding to come to Cyprus?**

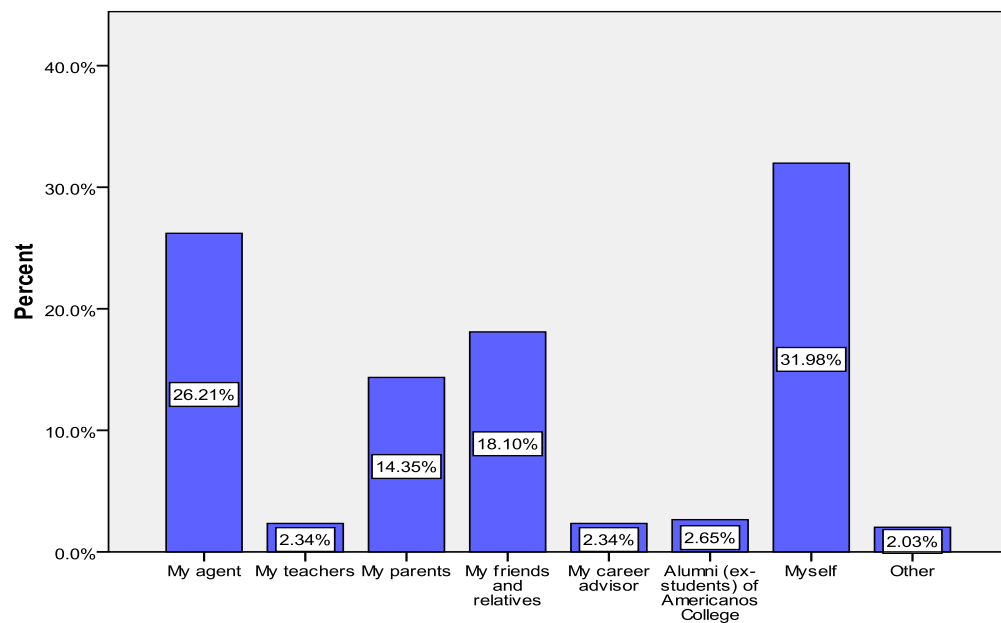


Question C.4 wanted to find the reasons why students chose Cyprus for their studies and answer partly the third research objective. All the sample students' answers are shown in Figure 4.13 below.

**Figure 4.13: Why did you choose Cyprus for your studies?**



The second part of the third research objective was to find out the persons that influence students' decisions to study abroad. This was the reason why question C.5 was added to the questionnaire. The answers which are presented in Figure 4.14 reveal that other than the students themselves, the next influencing person was the agent of the HEI followed by their friends or relatives.

**Figure 4.14: Who influenced your decision to study in Cyprus?**

Question C.6 was added in order to find out the difference between the influencing persons regarding the students' decision to study at AC as opposed to Cyprus. Figure 4.15 demonstrates that when it came to deciding on the HEI, the students themselves, as well as their agent had slightly more influencing power than the decision on the country of studies.

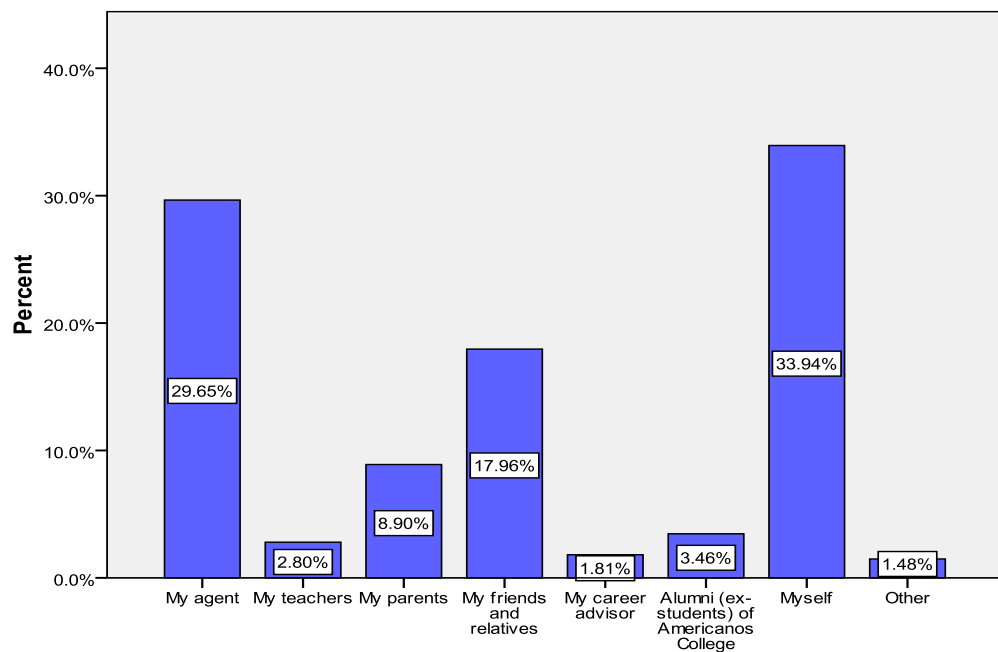
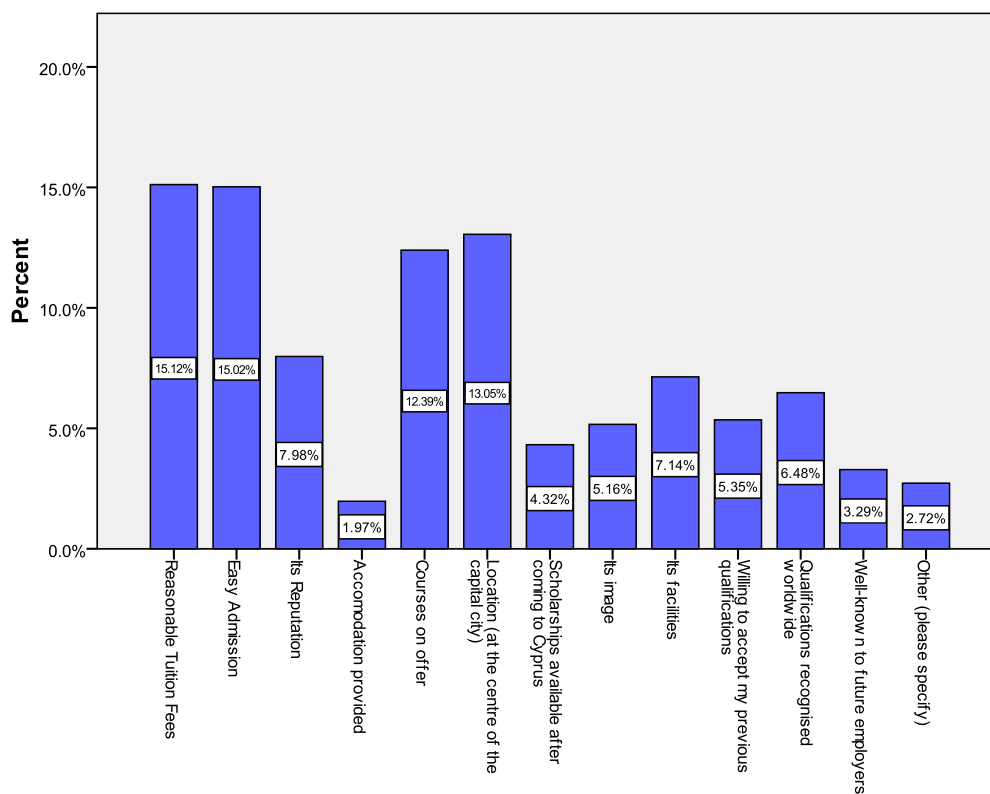
**Figure 4.15: Who influenced your decision to study at AC?**

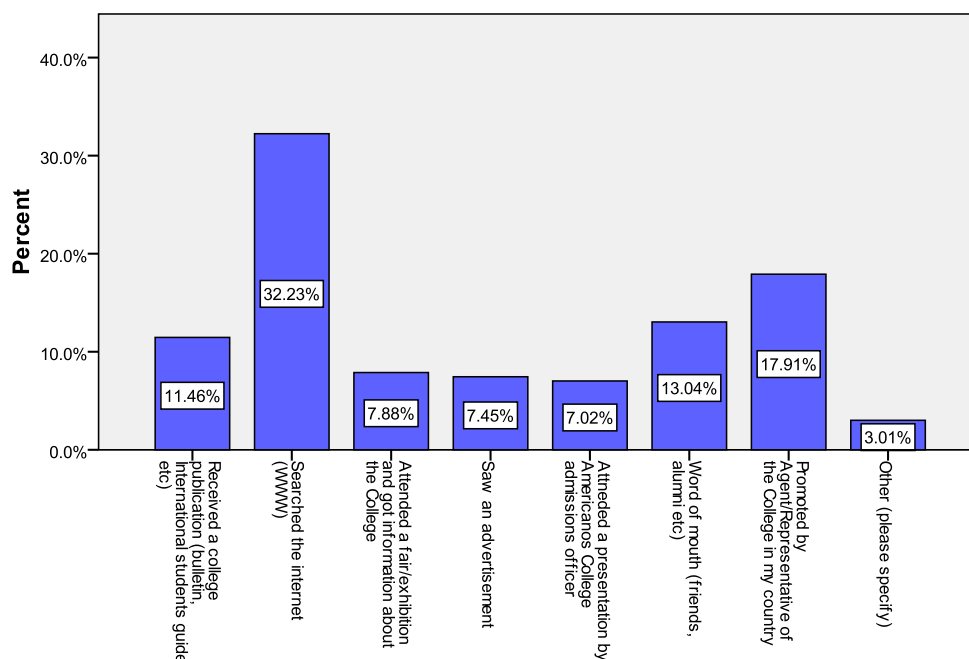
Figure 4.16 presents the answers to question C.8 as to the factors which influenced students in their choice to study at AC. The answers relate to the third research objective and are analysed in-depth in section 4.6.

**Figure 4.16: Which factors influenced you in your choice to study at AC?**



The next question (C.9) was added in the questionnaire in order to find out the sources of information students had before coming to study at AC. Figure 4.17 illustrates that nearly one third of the students searched the internet in order to find information on AC.

**Figure 4.17: Which of the following sources of information did you use before coming to study at AC?**



Part D of the questionnaire was mostly (with the exception of one question) associated with other more general questions which did not specifically involve Cyprus or AC. In particular, this part dealt with issues like the students' source of information for HEIs, the ways HEIs can attract more international students and the preference to HE studies of various countries. Part D included the following questions which can be found in Appendix 1:

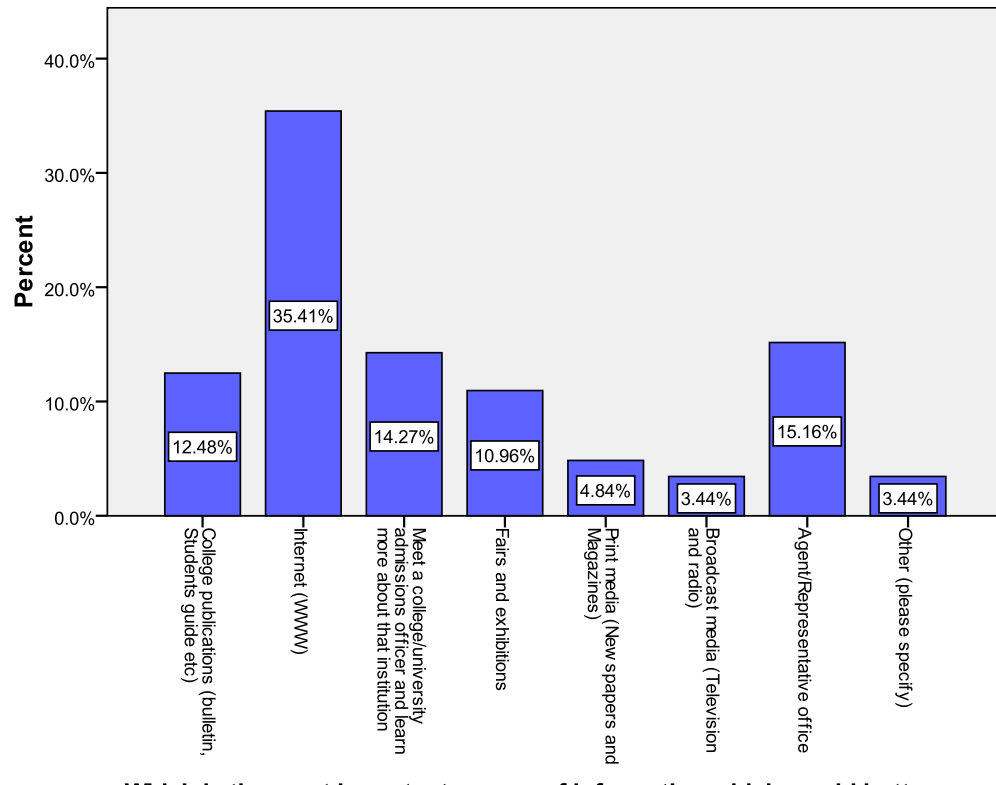
**Table 4.18: Questionnaire's Part D Questions**

No.	Question
11	Which is the most important source of information which would better work for you before choosing a college/university?
12	What in your opinion are the factors which influence other students to come to Cyprus for their studies?
13	According to you, what is the best way for a higher education institution (college or university) to attract more international students?
14	Which according to you is the ideal country or countries for higher education studies?

Question D.11 involved the source of information that students believed would better work for them before choosing a HEI. This question helped the researcher in answering the eighth research objective. As can be seen below, the internet is once more the most preferred source of information that students believe will give them the information they want. Figure 4.19 shows all the answers given by the sample students.

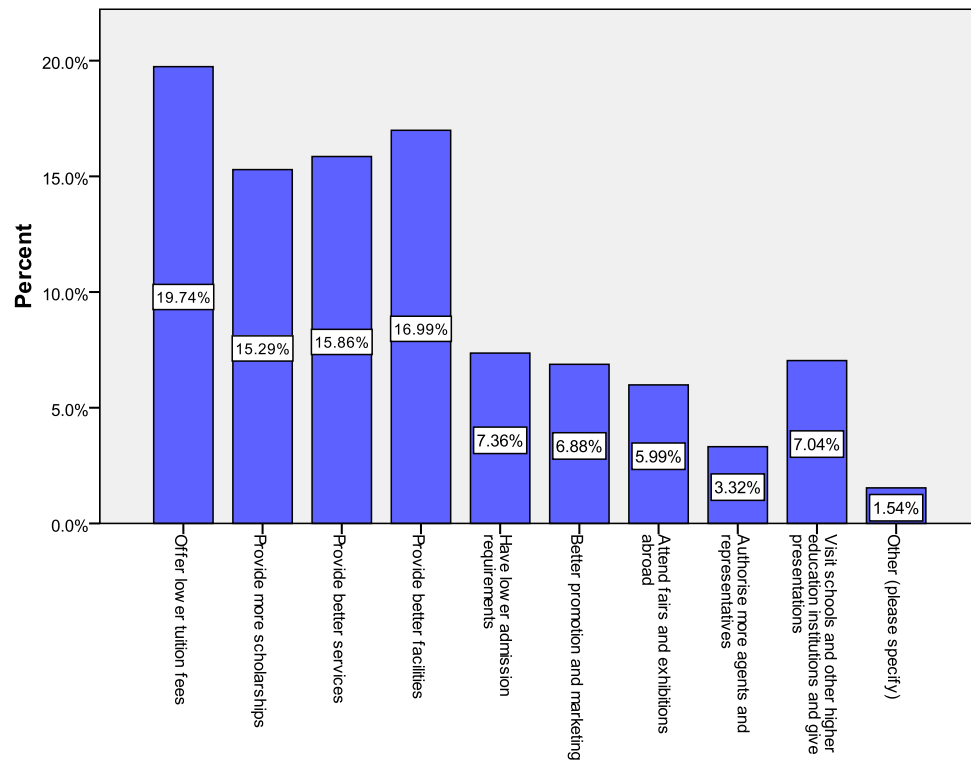


**Figure 4.19: Which is the most important source of information which would better work for you before choosing a college/university?**



Question D.12 was added in the questionnaire in order to get the students' views as to the last two research objectives: that is the ways to increase the international students' intake. Figure 4.20 presents all the answers given by students. It can clearly be seen that there are five major and another three minor ways to attract more international students according to the sample international students studying at AC.

**Figure 4.20: According to you, what is the best way for a higher education institution (college or university) to attract more international students?**



In analysing section C and D of the questionnaire, it was considered important to use a test to reveal whether there was a difference between the answers given from students of the five different geographical regions in order for them to be analysed separately. Categorical data on variables such as sex, country of birth or dichotomous (yes or no) answers which do not have a mean value can also be statistically analysed. A chi-square test is used when the researcher wants to see whether there is a relationship between two categorical variables. For this purpose the chi-square test was used. Additionally, the chi-square test (short for Pearson's chi-square test) allows the researcher to test for significance in the analysis of frequency distributions like the case of Part C and Part D questions of the questionnaire.

The objective of this test was to find out whether there was a statistically significant difference between the expected and the observed frequencies of each of the five geographical groups of students. Do the frequency data differ significantly? If not can generalisations be made on the population? Is this difference due to a sampling error or is it a real difference? In other words, is there a relationship between any of the frequency questions and the five geographical groups?

The null hypothesis, denoted by the symbol  $H_0$  states that the five geographical groups of students' observed frequencies on Part C and D questions are not statistically significantly different and therefore any small differences in their responses might be due to chance alone. The alternative hypothesis, denoted by the symbol  $H_1$  states that the mean of the values are statistically significantly different from each other.

The computed chi-square values which are shown in Table 4.21 were compared with the critical chi-square values associated with the 5% probability level with  $N-1$  degrees of freedom (degrees of freedom refers to the number of observations that can be varied without changing the constraints or assumptions associated with a numerical system minus one restriction  $df = N-1$  where  $N$  = the number of categorical responses). From the chi-square table the chi-square critical values are shown in Table 4.22.

**Table 4.21: Chi-Square Tests**

		Country of Origin
C.1	Chi-square	35.303
	Df	28
	Sig.	.161 <sup>a,b</sup>
C.2	Chi-square	92.369
	Df	28
	Sig.	.000 <sup>a,b,*</sup>
C.3	Chi-square	101.296
	Df	32
	Sig.	.000 <sup>a,b,*</sup>
C.4	Chi-square	82.046
	Df	48
	Sig.	.002 <sup>a,b,*</sup>
C.5	Chi-square	14.652
	Df	21
	Sig.	.840 <sup>a,b</sup>
C.6	Chi-square	101.443
	Df	32
	Sig.	.000 <sup>a,b,*</sup>
C.8	Chi-square	73.912
	Df	52
	Sig.	.025 <sup>a,b,*</sup>
C.9	Chi-square	49.57
	Df	32
	Sig.	.025 <sup>a,b,*</sup>
C.10	Chi-square	28.888
	Df	20
	Sig.	.090 <sup>a,b</sup>
D.11	Chi-square	39.479
	Df	32
	Sig.	.170 <sup>a,b</sup>
D.12	Chi-square	89.011
	Df	40
	Sig.	.000 <sup>a,b,*</sup>
D.13	Chi-square	88.124
	Df	40
	Sig.	.000 <sup>a,b,*</sup>
D.14	Chi-square	128.476
	Df	36
	Sig.	.000 <sup>a,b,*</sup>

**Table 4.22: Chi-square critical values**

Degrees of freedom	X <sup>2</sup> 5%
28	41.33
28	41.33
40	55.76
50	67.50
21	32.67
40	55.76
50	67.5
32	46.19
20	31.41
32	46.19
40	55.76
40	55.76
36	50.99

Results are based on nonempty rows and columns in each innermost subtable.

a. More than 20% of cells in this subtable have expected cell counts less than 5. Chi-square test may be invalid.

b. The minimum expected cell count in this subtable is less than one. Chi-square tests may be invalid.

\*. The Chi-square statistic is significant at the 0.05 level.

If the calculated chi-square value is equal to or greater than the tabular critical value of Table 4.22, the null hypothesis would be rejected. This means that there would be a significant difference between the data sets that cannot be due to chance alone. In this situation, the rejection of the null hypothesis means that the differences between the expected frequencies and the observed frequencies are not due to chance and there is a statistically significant difference between students' views from these geographical regions. If on the other hand the number is less than the tabular critical value, then it can be said that any differences are due to mere chance.

Unfortunately the results of this test could not give statistically significant analysis because as indicated underneath Table 4.21, more than 20% of all sub-tables had expected cell counts of less than 5. What is more, the minimum expected cell count was less than one i.e. zero. This can be easily seen in Appendix 7. Therefore, chi-square tests might be invalid. In this case, researchers would normally use the Fisher's Exact Test. However, according to Chan (2003c) the computation for the Fisher's Exact test is quite 'extensive' when it involves tables bigger than 2 x 2. For this test, the table is 13 x 5 and is considered extremely difficult if not impossible to do this calculation. Usually, "the only 'answer' we get from the Fisher's Exact test is 'Computer memory not enough!'" (p. 500). However, Chan (2003c) argues that if the p-value of the chi-square test is large or very small then we should not worry because the p-value of the Fisher's Exact test would not be so different. He continues that "the only time we have to worry is when this 'violated' Pearson's p-value is hovering around 0.04 to 0.06..." (p. 500).

It was decided to use the chi-square test and present its results with caution because the p-values are either very small or bigger than the critical 0.06. Assuming that there was no problem with the size of the sample, it was concluded that from all the 13 questions, and on a 95% confidence level, the null hypothesis in question C.2, C.3, C.4, C.6, C.7, C.8, C.9, D.12, D.13, and D.14 is rejected because the calculated chi-square values (92.369, 101.296..... respectively) are greater than the tabular ones. Hence, generalisations on the student's population irrespective of the geographical region they come from can be made. For the rest of the questions, (C.1, C.5, C.10 and D.11) the null hypothesis is not rejected and therefore generalisations on the whole of the population cannot be made.

However, since this research's student sample was not big enough (some cells had fewer than the required count of five) and since some of these tests may be invalid it was decided to do the following: collapse the 'Country of Origin' variable and make two bigger categories, namely 'South Asians' and 'Rest of Countries' in order to get a better cell count.

The null hypothesis, denoted by the symbol  $H_0$ , states that the two geographical groups of students' observed frequencies on Part C and D questions are not statistically significantly different and therefore any small differences in their responses might be due to chance alone. The alternative hypothesis, denoted by the symbol  $H_1$ , states that the mean of the two values are statistically significantly different from each other.

The results are shown in Table 4.23 with the corresponding chi-square critical values in Table 4.24. As can be seen, with the exemption of four questions (C.1, C.6, C.8 and D.11), it was concluded that on a 95% confidence level, the null hypothesis in all the rest of question (C.2, C.3, C.4, C.5, C.9, C.10, D.12, D.13, and D.14) is rejected because the calculated chi-square values are greater than the tabular ones. Because of the results of the chi-square test, it was decided to present the analysis for all the geographical regions together and not for each one of them separately. At least, it was certain that the results for the whole sample were statistically significant and that is what matters most. Anyway, analysing separately each geographical group was not one of the purposes of this research.

**Table 4.23: Chi-Square Tests for two geographical regions**

		South Asians – Rest of Countries
C.1	Chi-square	13.964
	Df	7
	Sig.	.052 <sup>a,b</sup>
C.2	Chi-square	13.279
	Df	5
	Sig.	.021 <sup>a,b,*</sup>
C.3	Chi-square	16.589
	Df	7
	Sig.	.020 <sup>*</sup>
C.4	Chi-square	29.606
	Df	8
	Sig.	.000 <sup>*</sup>
C.5	Chi-square	33.210
	Df	12
	Sig.	.001 <sup>*</sup>
C.6	Chi-square	7.937
	Df	8
	Sig.	.440 <sup>a</sup>
C.8	Chi-square	13.691
	Df	8
	Sig.	.090
C.9	Chi-square	29.118
	Df	13
	Sig.	.006 <sup>*</sup>
C.10	Chi-square	17.215
	Df	8
	Sig.	.028 <sup>*</sup>
D.11	Chi-square	13.010
	Df	8
	Sig.	.112
D.12	Chi-square	32.115
	Df	10
	Sig.	.000 <sup>*</sup>
D.13	Chi-square	37.213
	Df	10
	Sig.	.000 <sup>*</sup>
D.14	Chi-square	67.006
	Df	9
	Sig.	.000 <sup>*</sup>

**Table 4.24: Chi-square critical values**

Degrees of freedom	X <sup>2</sup> 5%
7	14.07
5	11.07
7	14.07
8	15.51
12	21.03
8	15.51
8	15.51
13	22.36
8	15.51
10	18.31
10	18.31
9	16.91

Results are based on nonempty rows and columns in each innermost subtable.

a. More than 20% of cells in this subtable have expected cell counts less than 5. Chi-square test may be invalid.

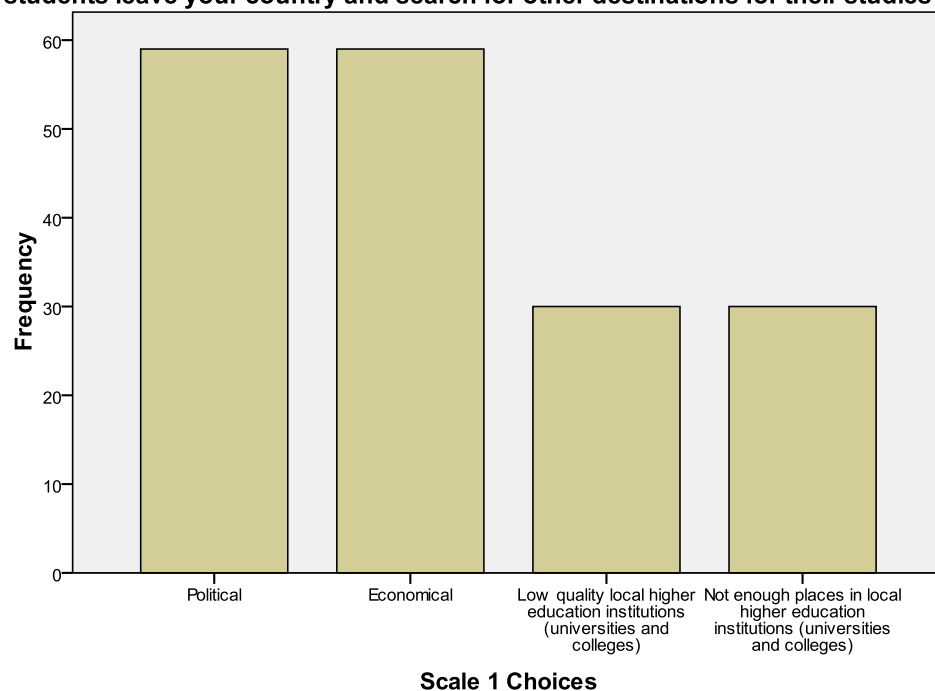
b. The minimum expected cell count in this subtable is less than one. Chi-square tests may be invalid.

\*. The Chi-square statistic is significant at the 0.05 level.

#### 4.3.4 Analysis of Part E of the questionnaire

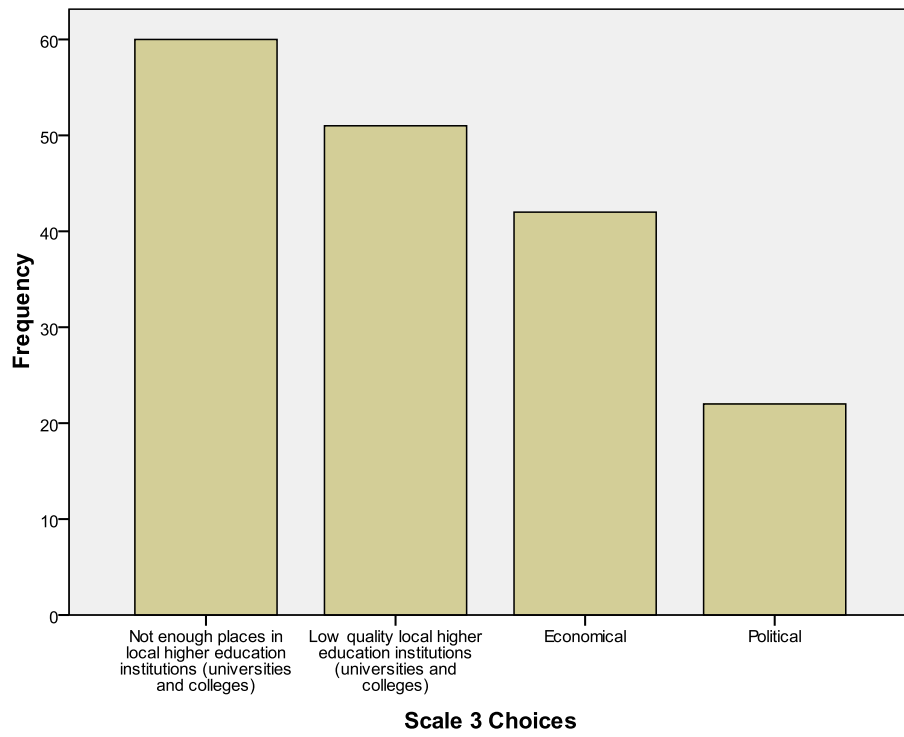
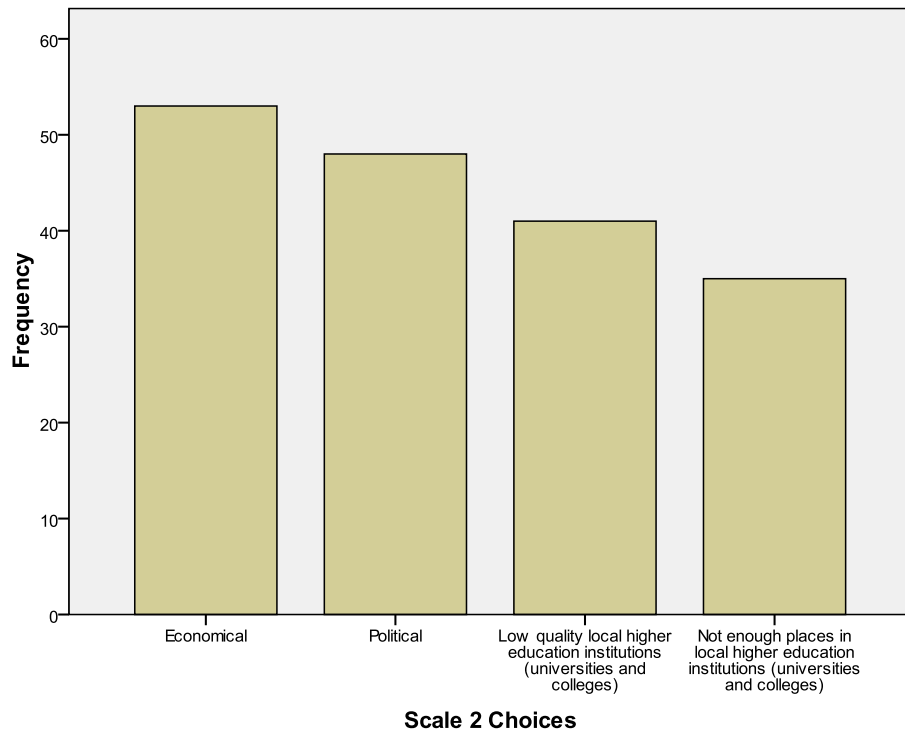
As seen from the piloting phase of the questionnaire and as expected, few students managed to answer the scaling section (E) correctly. Therefore a few of the most important findings of these scaling questions were presented with caution. These were chosen because of their relevance to the research questions. This section is followed by a discussion of these findings in section 4.5. However, the full SPSS output of this section's questions can be found in Appendix 7. Figure 4.25 below illustrates the results of the four scale choices of statement E.16<sup>1</sup>.

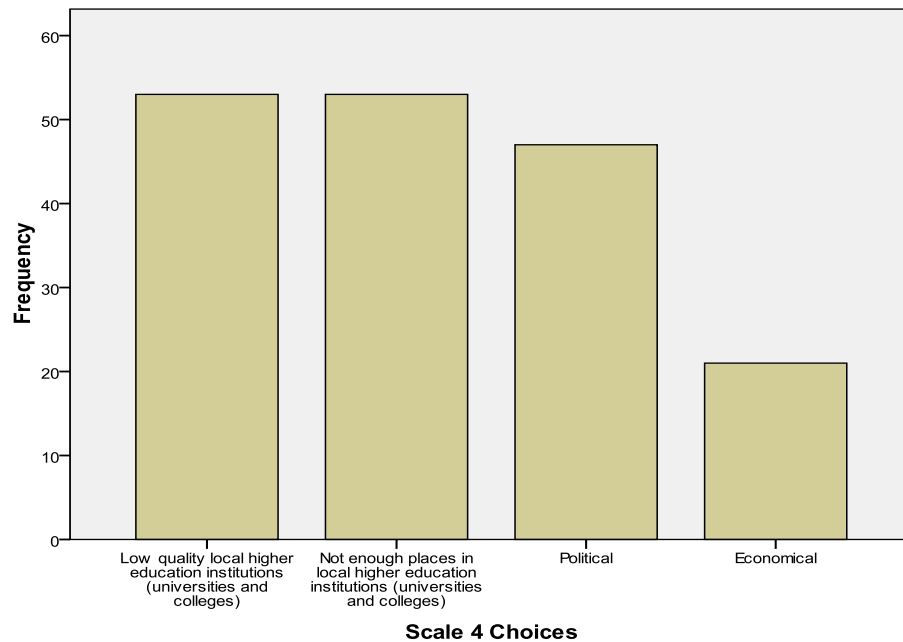
**Figure 4.25: On a scale of 1-4, please rank the following factors which make students leave your country and search for other destinations for their studies**



<sup>1</sup> E.16: On a scale of 1-4, please rank the following factors which make students leave your country and search for other destinations for their studies.



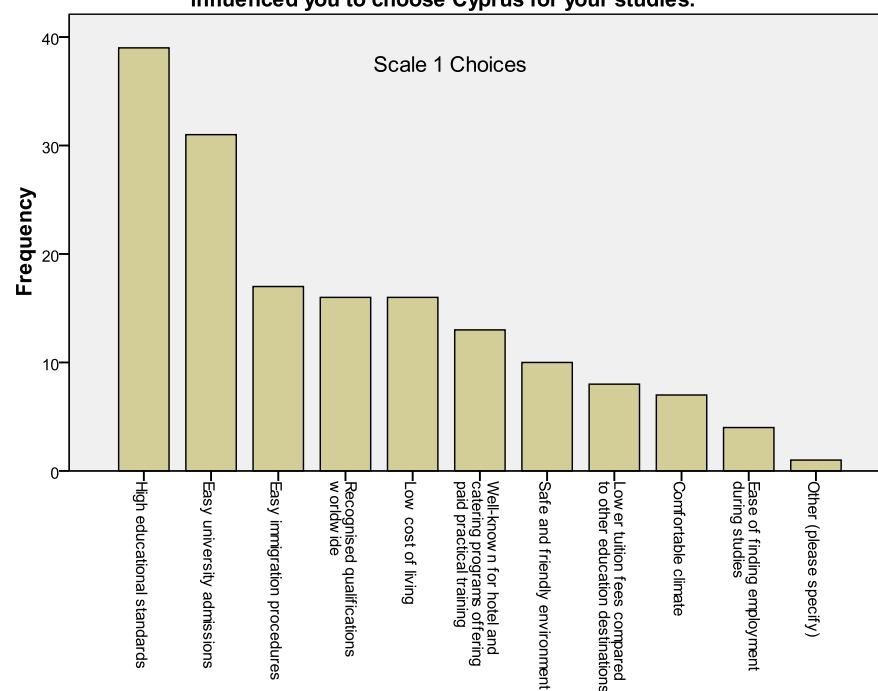




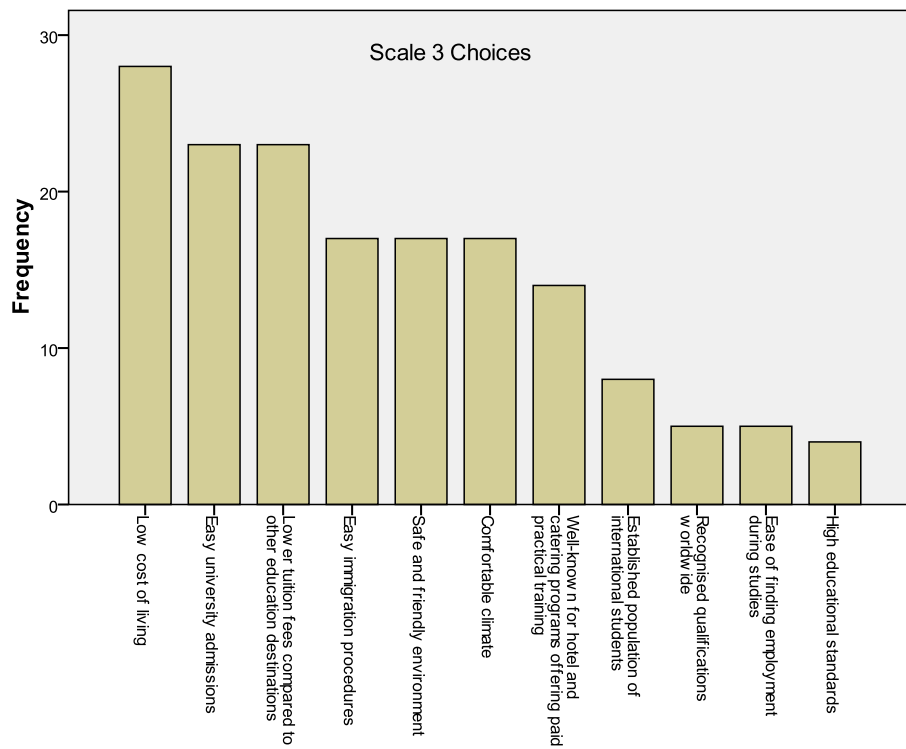
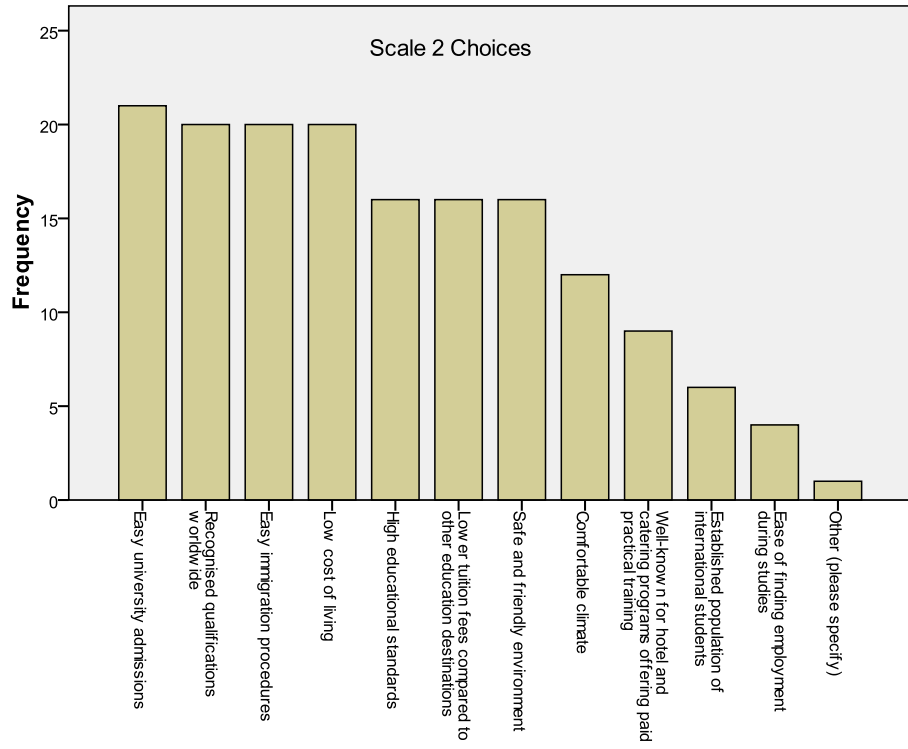
E.16 supported the importance of economical and then political ‘push’ factors that made students leave their country and search for other destinations for their studies. This finding is associated with the TF factor which attracted students to Cyprus and AC, that is better analysed when all the findings are triangulated.

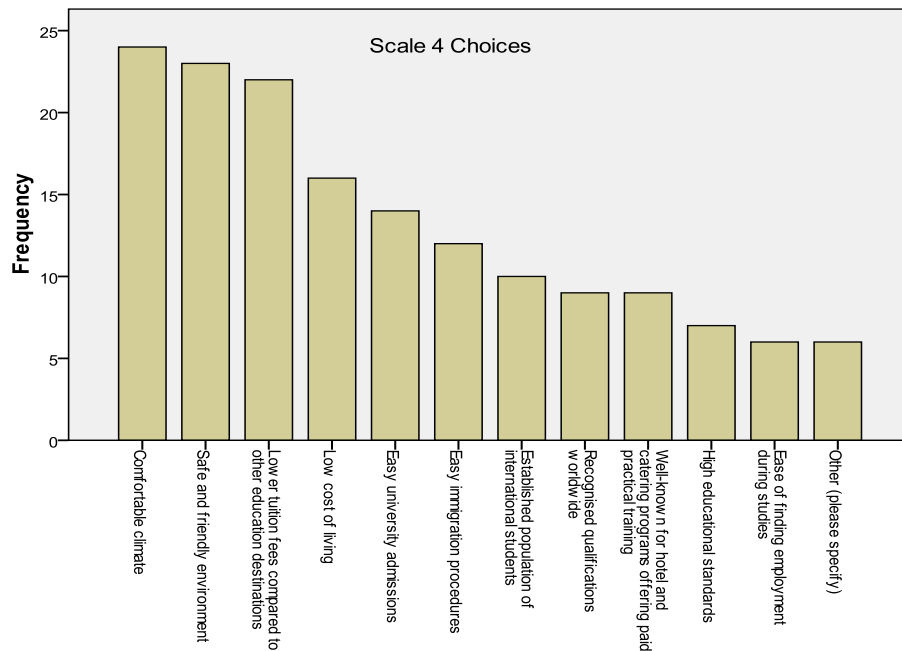
Figure 4.26 below shows the results of the scale choices of statement E.17<sup>2</sup>.

**Figure 4.26: On a scale of 1-4, please rank the 4 most important reasons which influenced you to choose Cyprus for your studies.**



<sup>2</sup> E.17: On a scale of 1-4, please rank the 4 most important reasons which influenced you to choose Cyprus for your studies.

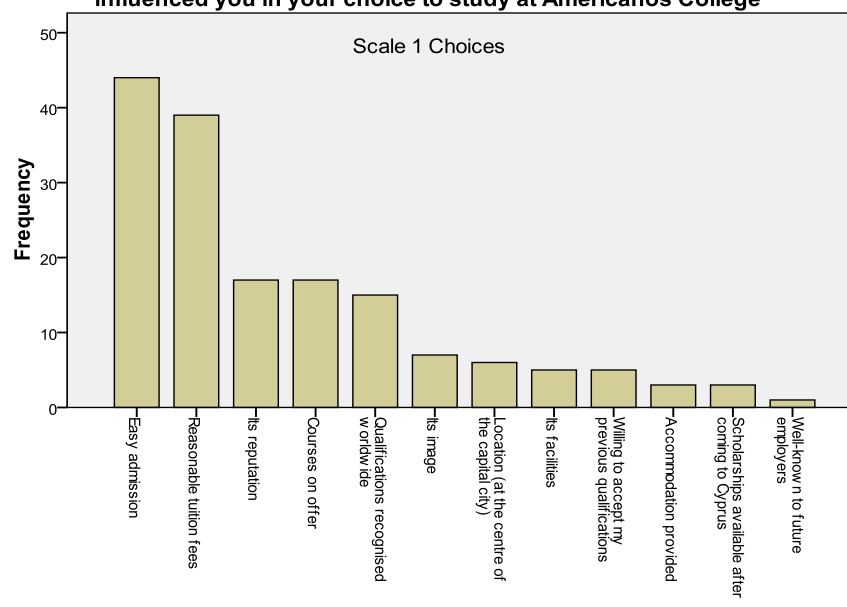




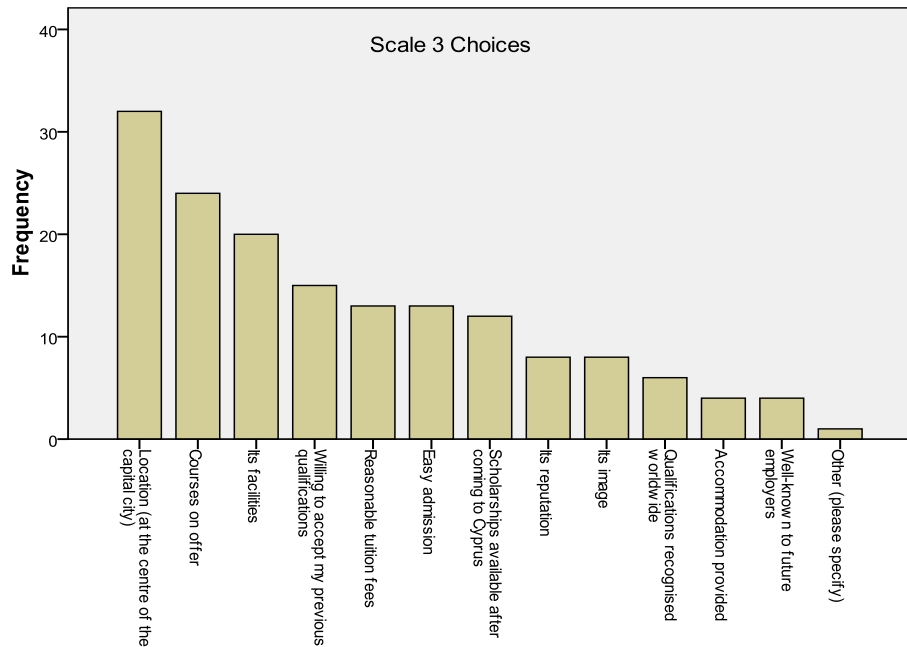
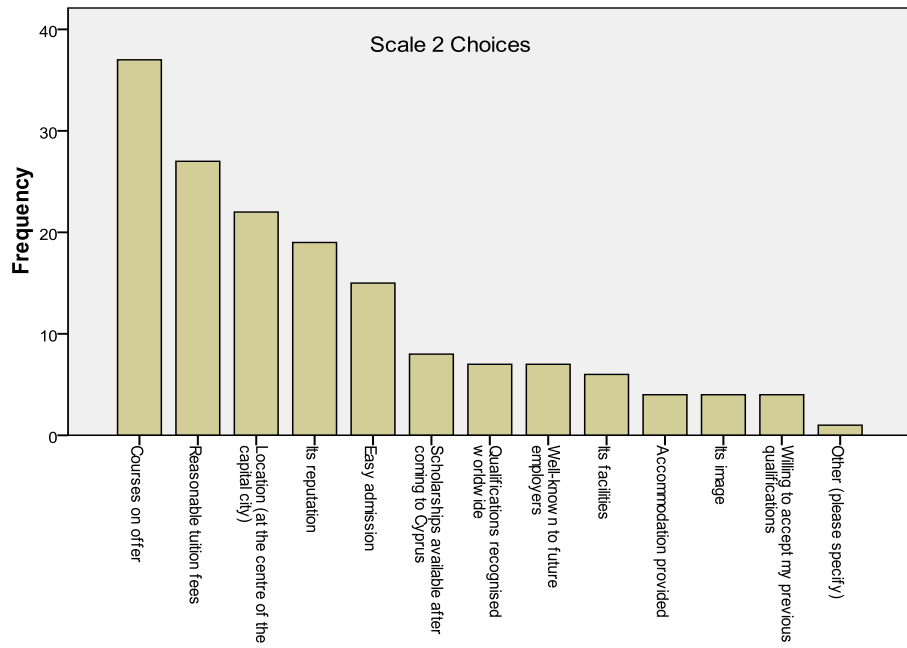
Here the predetermined answers given to students were not four as in the previous question and that is why different student scale choices were given. Even so, the importance of Cyprus’s HEIs high educational standards and the easy university and immigration procedures can be clearly seen.

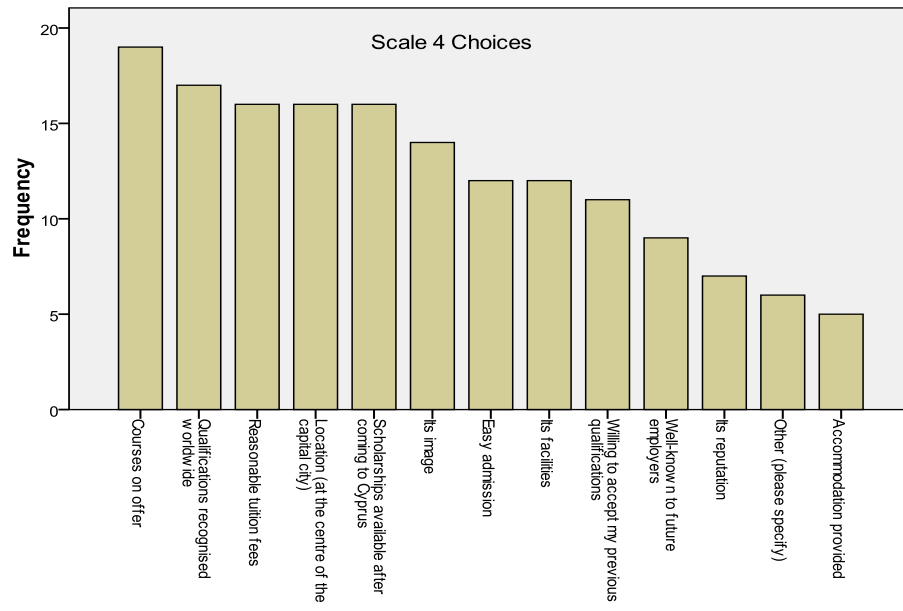
Figure 4.27 below shows the results of the scale choices of statement E.18<sup>3</sup>. The easy admissions and the reasonable TF are among the highest ranked by students. Moreover, the courses on offer and AC’s location are also high in the students’ rankings.

**Figure 4.27: On a scale of 1-4, please rank the 4 most important factors which influenced you in your choice to study at Americanos College**



<sup>3</sup> E.18: On a scale of 1-4 please rank the 4 most important factors which influenced you in your choice to study at Americanos College.





All these findings are discussed in more depth in section 4.5.

#### 4.3.5 Analysis of Part F of the questionnaire

Part F was characterised as the qualitative part of this questionnaire. Students were asked to give answers to two open-ended questions. Their analyses entailed reading each one of the 509 questionnaire answers and coding them in such a way as to make sense. This required a lot of time and effort. Nevertheless, the results provided some useful data, which could not be drawn from other questions. These data were necessary for fulfilling some research objectives. The first question was ‘How can AC improve its image and reputation abroad?’ Although some of the answers given to this question were not ‘expected’ by the researcher but were associated with student experiences, it was decided that all responses should be presented to the reader of this research. This is because these were the actual answers considered by students relevant in answering the question about image and reputation. Table 4.28 summarises all the answers given.

As the researcher expected, lowering the fee appeared as the first suggestion with 16.13%, although this is not an answer most people would expect on improving AC’s image and reputation. Furthermore, the fifth suggestion, that of ‘offer more scholarships’, is also closely related to the level of TF and in the author’s opinion it could be added to the first one because it has the same resulting effect. 76 students (12.77%) raised the issue of caring more for them as their second suggestion. 65 students (10.92%) suggested that the College should provide better facilities and this, as

they see it, will improve the image and reputation of the College. Importantly, only 10.08% of students suggested that the College should raise its educational standard. The other less important suggestions (since they were expressed by less than 5% of the students) are shown in Table 4.28.

**Table 4.28: Suggestions for improving AC's image and reputation**

Students' answers	Frequency	%
Lower the fees	96	16.13
Care more for your students, be more helpful	76	12.77
Provide better facilities	65	10.92
Raise the educational standard of the College	60	10.08
Offer more scholarships	42	7.06
Place more advertisements internationally	26	4.37
Provide precise information to students	25	4.20
Help students to find a job	20	3.36
Raise the international recognition of the College's courses	18	3.03
Attend more exhibitions	17	2.86
Design a better website and offer more information	15	2.52
Find better lecturers	14	2.35
Find better agents who do not give false/misleading information	12	2.02
Treat foreign students fair	10	1.68
Provide more accommodation	9	1.51
Find more agents abroad	9	1.51
Change the attitude of the receptionists	9	1.51
Expand College's building and students' capacity	9	1.51
Offer more programmes of study	8	1.34
Make admissions procedures easier and help with immigration matters	7	1.18
Sign more transfer agreements with other European Universities	7	1.18
Treat current students in the best possible way	7	1.18
Make the payment charges clear	5	0.84
Do more presentations abroad	5	0.84
Recruit students from countries other than Asia and Africa	4	0.67
Create a place for outdoor activities	4	0.67
Become a university	4	0.67
Send more transfer students to other countries	3	0.50
Offer more sport facilities	1	0.17
Reduce all the extra charges	1	0.17
Provide a student exchange programme with other HEI	1	0.17
Open branches	1	0.17
Offer more social life to students	1	0.17
The computers in the lab are not enough	1	0.17
Link AC's website to other educational websites	1	0.17
Improve the refund policy	1	0.17
Help MBA students to find jobs for training purposes	1	0.17
<b>Total</b>	<b>595</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The results of Part F's second question 'Which is AC biggest strength and weakness', which are shown on Table 4.29 were significant. Once again the price sensitivity of the

Cypriot market has emerged from the students' comments. 14.87% of the sample students believe that AC fees are reasonable, while 11.36% believe that its fees are high. The College attracts students from different economic backgrounds and that is why some find the fees high while others find them reasonable. In addition, 56 students (12.81%) think that AC's biggest strength is the good (high standard) lectures we offer to students and 53 (12.13%) students think that AC has good facilities. On the other hand, 21 (6.81%) students expressed the view that the lectures were not good while 27 students or 8.76% believe that the College has not enough facilities.

**Table 4.29: AC biggest strengths and weaknesses**

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Freq.</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Freq.</b>	<b>Weakness</b>
Reasonable Fees	65	14.87	17.86	55	Staff is not helpful, bad service at receipt.
Good lectures	56	12.81	14.61	45	Too many extra charges
Good facilities	53	12.13	11.36	35	High fees
Helpful, friendly staff	51	11.67	8.77	27	Not enough facilities
Good location	44	10.07	6.82	21	Lectures are not good
High education level	39	8.92	6.17	19	Hard to find a job for students
Good reputation	28	6.41	5.84	18	Low educational standard
Good programmes of study	22	5.03	4.87	15	College doesn't care for its students
Easy admissions procedures	21	4.81	3.90	12	Not enough space (Buildings are small)
Good education system	17	3.89	3.90	12	Accommodation (Absence of a hostel)
Recognised degrees	15	3.43	2.27	7	Computer Labs are not good
Flexibility	8	1.83	2.27	7	False information provided by staff
Good fee payment scheme	7	1.60	1.30	4	Not many local students
Scholarships offered	4	0.92	1.30	4	Master's Degree is not recognised
Good internat. community	3	0.69	1.30	4	Poor management
Examination system	3	0.69	1.30	4	No outdoor facilities
Practical training offered	1	0.23	0.97	3	Not enough social activities
	<b>437</b>	<b>100</b>	0.97	3	Strict payment method
			0.97	3	Absence of a parking place
			0.65	2	Lecture timetable is not flexible
			0.65	2	Some of the courses are not accredited
			0.32	1	No job placement after graduation
			0.32	1	Students are not trusted
			0.32	1	Web site not updated
			0.32	1	TF cannot be refundable
			0.32	1	Tough immigration procedures
			0.32	1	Not all credits can be transferred
			<b>100</b>	<b>308</b>	

It is interesting to see that students expressed contradictory views on a number of issues which are summarised on Table 4.30. However, it is important to note that altogether, there were 437 views on AC's strengths and only 308 views on AC's weaknesses. This supports the view that more students are satisfied with AC than not satisfied with it.



**Table 4.30: AC contradictory strengths and weaknesses**

Strengths	Freq.	%	%	Freq.	Weakness
Reasonable Fees	65	14.87	11.36	35	High fees
Good Lectures	56	12.81	6.81	21	Lectures are no good
Good facilities	53	12.13	8.76	27	Not enough facilities
Helpful, friendly staff	51	11.67	17.86	55	Staff are not helpful, bad service at rec.
High education level	39	8.92	5.84	18	Low educational standard
Recognised degree	15	3.43	0.64	2	Some of the courses are not accredited
Payment of fees by installments is good	7	1.60	0.974	3	Strict payment method

Table 4.31 summarises all the findings from the student's questionnaires along with an empirical support of the major findings associated with the research objectives.

**Table 4.31: Empirical support of the AC questionnaire findings**

AC Questionnaire	Major Findings	Empirical support
Reasons why students study abroad	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Social and cultural international experience</li> <li>2. Improve language skills</li> <li>3. Course not available in home country</li> <li>3. Work while studying</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mazzarol <i>et al.</i> (1997), Mazzarol <i>et al.</i> (2001a)</li> <li>3. Mazzarol <i>et al.</i> (1997), Mazzarol <i>et al.</i> (2001a)</li> <li>4. Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003), Maringe and Carter (2007)</li> </ol>
Factors influencing international students to study in Cyprus	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Easy university admission</li> <li>2. Low cost of living</li> <li>3. Easy immigration procedures</li> <li>4. Comfortable climate</li> <li>5. High Educational Standards</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003), Maringe and Carter (2007)</li> <li>2. Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003)</li> <li>3. Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003), Maringe and Carter (2007)</li> <li>5. Gray <i>et al.</i> (2003)</li> </ol>
The person(s) influencing students' decision to study in Cyprus and AC	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students themselves</li> <li>2. Agents/representatives of HEIs</li> <li>3. Friends and family members</li> <li>4. Parents</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Gray <i>et al.</i> (2003), Moogan and Baron (2003)</li> <li>2. Mazzarol <i>et al.</i> (1997), Mazzarol <i>et al.</i> (2001a), Mazzarol <i>et al.</i> (2001b), Gray <i>et al.</i> (2003), Konis (2009)</li> <li>3. Moogan and Baron (2003), Gray <i>et al.</i> (2003), Konis (2009)</li> <li>4. Mazzarol <i>et al.</i> (2001a), Mazzarol <i>et al.</i> (2001b), Moogan and Baron (2003), Gray <i>et al.</i> (2003)</li> </ol>
Factors influencing students in their choice to study at AC	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reasonable TF</li> <li>2. Easy Admission</li> <li>3. AC location</li> <li>4. Courses on offer</li> <li>5. Good reputation</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003), Gray <i>et al.</i> (2003), Maringe (2006)</li> <li>2. Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003), Maringe and Carter (2007)</li> <li>3. Moogan and Baron (2003)</li> <li>4. Pimpa (2003)</li> <li>5. Mazzarol <i>et al.</i> (1997), Mazzarol <i>et al.</i> (2000), Mazzarol <i>et al.</i> (2001a), Mazzarol <i>et al.</i> (2001b), Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003), Moogan and Baron (2003), Gray <i>et al.</i> (2003)</li> </ol>
The sources of information that students use before coming to AC	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Internet</li> <li>2. Information given by AC agent/representative.</li> <li>3. WOM</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Moogan and Baron (2003), Gray <i>et al.</i> (2003)</li> <li>2. Gray <i>et al.</i> (2003)</li> <li>3. Gray <i>et al.</i> (2003)</li> </ol>

#### 4.4 Interviews

Five SMs were interviewed for the purpose of this research. These were specifically chosen because of their direct and active involvement in the recruitment of international students. Therefore, their opinions regarding many aspects of this study were crucial to meeting its purpose. As was stated in the methodology section, the method of content analysis was used in analysing the interview data. This analysis attempts to analyse data in a systematic and quantitative way. In this analysis, the researcher counted the number of times particular answers were given to specific questions. The frequency of the answers revealed the various categories constructed based on the questions asked. This method of content analysis is suggested by Bell (2006) as counting the number of times particular items or recording units occur in a research sample. However, the views of more experienced SMs with years of travelling for promotion and recruitment, and consequently, more interaction with prospective students, parents and representatives, were given more weight than those of newer members of staff. Therefore, this experience differentiation is mentioned in some cases and where necessary. All the answers given are presented in Table 4.32.

In this analysis, the researcher used direct quotations where he believed that these would help enhance persuasiveness, help the point raised as well as support the analysis. Using direct quotations in research projects also helps the reader to understand the reality of the situation according to Middlesex University (2007/2008). However, although three of the SMs held the same position as that of the admissions officer and therefore writing their title on the quotations would not reveal their identity, it was intentionally not done so. This is because writing the title of the remaining two, namely the Director of International Office and the Assistant Director of Admissions, would immediately reveal their identity.

In some cases the interviewees' responses to the questions varied significantly, while in other cases they were, as expected, quite similar. When answering the questions of the interview protocol, each interviewee was obviously expressing his/her own views based on his/her knowledge and experience. In addition, interviewees were not restricted to giving only one answer to each question but were encouraged to give a range of answers. This was done in order to have a clearer picture of their views which might not

be expressed fully by giving just one reply. That is why the number of responses does not match the number of interviewees. However, after their categorisation, the frequency of each reply showed the researcher the importance of each point raised. The following content analysis follows the line of questions asked during the interviews.

#### **4.4.1 Reasons international students study abroad**

The question asked was ‘Why do students decide to study abroad in general?’ The interviewees’ wide-ranging responses were categorised according to the following four themes:

##### **1. The social and cultural international experience associated with studying abroad**

There was evidence from this analysis that this factor was among the most important ones. Four respondents acknowledged the students’ need of getting an international experience. That is, they want to change environment, meet other cultures, experience different living standards, meet more advanced ways of life and widen their views and ideas. All these different answers were grouped together under this more general category.

##### **2. Better than local international education**

Three SMs identified that the education abroad is considered better than the local one. Relevant to this point is the fact that because education abroad is considered better, it is more appreciated by local employers with all the advantages that this has. SMs experience this during their recruitment trips abroad.

##### **3. Work while study**

Three interviewees agreed that many students want to study abroad to have the chance of finding a part-time or full-time job while studying. In addition, two interviewees mentioned that some students want to study abroad in order to find a job which will help their families back home financially. Generally, based on the interviewees experience, the issue of working while studying was considered an important factor for most students. This issue is also connected to the financial capability of the applicants which, as was described, is low for most of them.

#### 4. Better future salaries

Another two interviewees mentioned the enhanced chances of students earning a better future salary because of their studies abroad. This factor involved employment after graduation, in Cyprus, in the student's home country or abroad. However, of particular interest to this category was the fact that SMs opinion was that students care more for their work while studying and less about their job after graduation. This is explained by the fact that without a part-time job while studying many students will not even graduate.

#### **4.4.2 Most popular countries for HE studies among students**

As expected, all interviewees identified the USA and the UK as the countries which are the most popular among students for HE studies. Moreover, these countries were mentioned first by all of them without much thinking. However, their views varied for the rest of the countries. Two interviewees identified other English speaking countries like Canada, Australia and Ireland as being popular among students. The other three identified a few non-English speaking countries like Switzerland, France, Germany and Japan as being popular among students. Only one interviewee named Cyprus as being popular.

#### **4.4.3 Factors influencing international students' decision to study in Cyprus**

Through the process of data analysis, this question created the following five categories of answers:

##### 1. Affordable TF

Nearly all interviewees (except one) identified the affordable TF of Cyprus's HEIs as one of the main reasons why students choose Cyprus for their studies. Their views were expressed with strength and certainty. However, this should be viewed together with the fact that the fees for most HEIs in Cyprus are lower compared to other well-known educational destinations.

## 2. Well-paid jobs while studying

Four out of five recognised the finding of jobs mainly in the tourist industry (part-time during studies and full-time during the holiday periods) as a very important factor among international students. According to this finding, the finding of jobs is associated with the good pay-rates that Cypriot employers give students especially during the summer months in order to cope with the increasing number of tourists visiting Cyprus. This category was also created for the previous question as to the reasons students study abroad. Also, SMs identified that prospective international students learn about the approximate job salaries they can earn while studying from current students. This also suggests that the WOM effect is very strong.

## 3. Easy visa requirements

Four interviewees identified the easier student visa requirements to enter Cyprus as an important factor. Associated with this is the students' need to leave their country and successfully get a visa for other destinations.

However, two of the most experienced SMs admitted that “although this was true a few semesters ago, it is not true anymore due to the tougher visa requirements which lead to a much higher visa rejection rate of many applicants”. The other one stated that:

“The visa obtaining procedure is getting tougher and tougher year after year for Cyprus, whereas it gets easier for more well-known destinations like the UK. This prevents prospective students from going through the difficult procedure to get a Cypriot visa and consequently are looking for other easier destinations as regards to obtaining a visa.”

Examples of tougher visa requirements are the need for more attestations on all application documents and the need for additional application documents e.g. student medical reports, etc.

## 4. Low cost of living

Three interviewees responded that the lower cost of living is a major reason influencing students to study in Cyprus. This can be analysed in relation to the question about the person(s) financing students' studies. Most students are expected to earn their living

while studying, through part time jobs and thus they cannot afford high cost of living countries. Generally, there was a strong view that the issues concerning the costs involved in studying abroad are very important for students studying in Cyprus.

#### 5. Weak control over the students’ actual versus allowed working hours

Two other responses emphasised the soft and moderate checks/inspections by the immigration officers on the actual number of hours students work, either part-time or full-time. This results in students being able to work more hours and thus earn more money.

Some other unique responses were:

- Easier admissions requirements for most HEIs.
- “Recognised degrees which add Cyprus to the international educational map.”  
“High educational level and quality-qualifications but not from all HEIs.”
- No English knowledge requirement by Cyprus’s HEIs. Students can be admitted to HEIs without prior knowledge of the language of instruction but they would need to complete an intensive English Language course.
- Cyprus is considered a stepping stone to other European countries such as the UK. Psychologically, by coming to Cyprus, international students feel closer to Europe.
- No racial, cultural, ethnic or religious issues which might cause barriers to students settling down.

#### **4.4.4 The person(s) influencing students’ decision to study in Cyprus**

The answers to this question created the following three clear categories. These answers matched, to a great extent, the students’ replies given to the same question in the questionnaire:

##### 1. Agents/representatives

All interviewees strongly identified the agents/representatives of the College as the persons having the biggest influencing power on students. These were some of their responses which support this view:

- “Cyprus is unknown to most people around the world. The student is mostly influenced and finally persuaded to apply to a Cyprus’s HEI because of his/her agent who stresses the fact that Cyprus is a cheaper alternative to all the well-known countries.”
- “In some third as well as developing countries (e.g. China, India, Nepal, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Cameroon, etc.) students have no other option but to visit an agent of a number of HEIs in order to be able to study abroad. This is done because either they do not know how to do it by themselves or because they believe that it is extremely difficult and requires special skills and knowledge. Agents influence students to study abroad according to a number of factors e.g. the commission they get from each HEI, the financial capability of the student, etc.”
- “Well-known and respected agents have a stronger persuasive power.”
- “Cyprus is among the smallest countries in the EU. It is true that many students, especially from Asia and Africa do not even know where Cyprus is and consequently they are reluctant to study here. They need to be strongly influenced by someone else. Surely, attending a fair, presentation or seeing an advertisement is not enough. Therefore, appointing agents is the best solution for all HEIs in Cyprus that want to increase their student intake.”

The agents’ influencing power is evident in many parts of this research project. However, the agent’s influence is not strong in every country. One admissions officer clarified that: “the agents are the biggest influencers in third and developing countries in Asia and Africa. This however does not apply to the students recruited from Europe.” However, since most students of AC come from other continents except Europe, the strong agent influence which was revealed by all interviewees is considered valid.

## 2. Friends and family members in Cyprus

Three interviewees responded that the second best influencers are students’ friends and family members who are already studying or have studied in Cyprus. Analysis of this reveals that students get information from friends and family members through the WOM on all sorts of issues concerning their studies abroad. This again shows their significance in attracting international students.

### 3. Family members back home

Only two of the respondents identified the students' family members back home as influencing their decisions to study in Cyprus.

However, one of them added that this depends on the country of the student. "In countries like India for example, where there is a strong family bond, parents play a significant role in their children's decision to study abroad. Although, they 'push' their children to study abroad, the decision as to the country will depend on the student and his/her agent as well." Therefore, although he mentioned the family members as being the third in significance student influencers, he clarified that this is true up to a certain level and the choice as to the country and the HEI depends on the person representing a specific HEI.

#### **4.4.5 The person(s) influencing students' decision to study at AC**

Overall, the analysis of the data revealed the following two categories of answers which matched the students' answers from the questionnaire:

##### 1. The agents/representatives of AC

Once again, the agents/representatives of AC were identified as the biggest influencers and all five respondents agreed on this. However, the answers slightly varied with the previous ones. There was a general sense that the HEIs in Cyprus depend on the agents for the recruitment of international students. The agents' role is therefore vital to the recruitment of new international students. The interviewees also added other important aspects related to the agents which are given below:

- "It largely depends on the commission each HEI pays to its agents. Higher commission means the agents have more incentive to 'sell' their product i.e. their institution."
- "Agents send the good students to good colleges and universities and the bad students to the not so good ones. If a student is really looking for a HEI to study and get a decent degree then the agent will explore his/her financial background. Most probably if the student cannot pay the higher fees of the UK or USA universities then the agent will suggest to him, among other HEIs, AC."



- “In less developed countries, agents have the power to easily manipulate students’ as well as parents’ minds about studying at a specific college.”

A more experienced interviewee on the other hand commented that “when a prospective student visits an agent and asks for a specific college (for example, because he/she has a friend studying there) the agent might first try to offer him another HEI which he/she represents. However, some students insist on their choice and the agent might back-down.”

The previous view is supported by another interviewee’s comment that: “Most agents in these countries represent many colleges and/or universities. This is because they want to minimise the risk of losing students who insist on applying to a specific HEI. Most, if not all HEIs, would appoint agents very easily. Even if a student walks in an agency and asks for a specific HEI which is not represented by that agent, then the agent can immediately ask to represent that institution and get a positive and fast reply.”

## 2. The friends and family members in Cyprus

Four interviewees identified friends or family members who are studying or graduated from AC as a very important influencing group. They based this on the fact that most students are happy with the academic standards, the facilities and the overall quality of the College and through the WOM they give this information out. Characteristically, two of their responses are given below:

- One admissions member was quoted saying: “The College enjoys a very good reputation both in Cyprus and abroad. Most students studying with us and alumni members talk to their friends back home with favourable comments about the College. The prospective students can easily double-check this by visiting a representative of the College.”
- Another SM importantly added that: “Even students from other colleges or universities acting as agents, promote AC as a serious HEI for studies in Cyprus. This is because, if a student not studying at AC has a friend or relative back home, that is seriously interested in his/her studies then he has two options. He can suggest him/her a private university in Cyprus where the TF are much higher than those of the colleges or he will suggest him/her a college with a

good level of studies. In this way he will feel confident that his friend or relative will be satisfied with the choice made by him and will not blame him for a wrong choice. The risks associated with doing this are obviously lower.”

#### **4.4.6 Current students’ role in the recruitment of new international students**

Three main themes were identified in the answers to this question. All interviewees agreed that the first one was the important role that current students play in the recruitment of new students. This is directly associated with the WOM effect which was pointed out by two SMs. Their responses were:

- “Feedback, both positive and negative travels through current students very quickly to their home countries.”
- “WOM is very strong among fellow students, relatives and friends in the student’s home country.”
- “Email/internet/online-chatting platforms enhance the best, fastest and above all free advertisement: that is the WOM.”
- “Current students are a much better advertisement than paid advertisements in newspapers and magazines.”

However, the other main theme was that there is both a positive and a negative influence on new students. More specifically, two interviewees warned that the WOM can lead to both positive and negative results and usually the negative WOM ‘travels’ fast. If the students are not happy with the quality, facilities or any aspect of their living and studying in Cyprus and AC, this will negatively affect recruitment. Therefore, all staff should have this in mind and service students in the best possible way to avoid the negative WOM.

Moreover, two SMs pointed out the big number of current students who introduce other students to AC and act as agents of the College. They do so because they are satisfied with the College and they feel confident to ‘bring’ their friends here. This last theme is associated with students acting as agents and receiving a financial reward for this. This theme shows the direct involvement that many students have in recruitment.

#### 4.4.7 Alumni's role in the recruitment of new international students

There was strong evidence from the five interviewees' responses that the alumni's role in the recruitment of new international students is very important. Some interesting points on this issue were raised:

- “Alumni students are a big asset for the College. They can easily influence other students in their home country to study at the College.”
- “Alumni provide an easier access to various student markets.”

However, none of the SMs raised the issue of the negative WOM which was correctly raised by two SMs while answering the question as to the current students' role in the recruitment of new international students. This can be explained by the fact that the chances of alumni who studied at a HEI for three or four years being happy are higher than those of current students who might not like the HEI or might not yet have adjusted to the environment. The latter might anyway move to another HEI (which is a common practice among many students in Cyprus) or drop-out before graduating.

The significance of the WOM was again raised by some interviewees. The different WOM effect of alumni as opposed to current students was further argued. This is what makes an alumni's view important to the recruitment.

- “Once again the WOM advertisement is the most influential. Prospective international students will undoubtedly believe what an alumnus says. This is because an alumnus has no financial incentives to send a student to Cyprus (which is not true in the case of the agent) and he/she has experienced living and studying in Cyprus. Therefore, he can realistically present Cyprus and AC and answer any questions the student might have.”
- “If they are happy, alumni students want to bring their friends and relatives to Cyprus.”
- “AC will always be written in their CV. Therefore, it is in their interest and ours to find a good job. The College will thus create a very good image of its graduates and this indirectly pushes students to us. The College should also

produce a promotional leaflet with some of its alumni students and the jobs they are currently holding. This will help our recruitment efforts.”

- “Some of the happy graduates of the College go back to their countries and open up educational consulting offices and they naturally ask to represent AC. At various presentations I give in the presence of alumni, I see the big influence they have on students.”

#### **4.4.8 Ways AC’s current and alumni students can be used in AC’s recruitment practice**

First of all, two interviewees importantly responded about using alumni that:

- “We do not have a good alumni association. We can only use our alumni if we can locate and contact them. Therefore, we need to explore ways we can rectify this.”
- “We do not keep contact with them on a regular basis and the contact details that we have are probably out of date.”

Therefore, there is a need to improve and if possible solve the above two problems in order to use alumni in AC’s recruitment practice.

Two main themes emerged from the answers to this question: the use of students in the actual promotion and recruitment of the college and the encouragement of more students to become recruiters of new students for AC. Four respondents argued that we can wisely use students in AC’s international promotion and marketing activities. All of them mentioned the need to have students with them in various recruitment trips, presentations, educational fairs, etc. This view ties in with the findings regarding the role of current students and alumni in the recruitment of new students. Some of their responses were:

- “Current, but more easily, alumni students can help us in educational fairs/exhibitions by giving information to prospective students who visit us. Taking advantage of alumni students to talk to prospective students in their own

language is very important, will make very good impression and will yield better results.”

- “The College can ask good students who are satisfied with us, to escort College officers to their country and talk to prospective students during various presentations organised by the College. This can be done more easily during the College’s holiday periods. The College must cover the travelling and living expenses of the student. Most, if not all students, would be glad to visit their home countries. It would also be a very good opportunity to see their families.”
- “We can offer a reward for current students interested in helping us with the recruitment of new students.”
- “We can contact some of our successful alumni and ask their permission to include their personal details as well as their progress after finishing AC in a booklet. This can be sent to all our agents and to prospective students.”
- “Our video presentation should change to include current students as well as graduates talking about their experience at the College.”

Three interviewees noted that many alumni but mostly current students act as agents of the College and this is supported by the review of the relevant AC recruitment statistics in section 2.2.3. This strengthens the view that they are satisfied with AC and/or its commission structure. Therefore, students can be informed that they can become AC’s representatives and be encouraged to recruit students for it. Additionally, one of them suggested that increasing the commission that AC gives to current students might be a good way to attract more students.

#### **4.4.9 Factors influencing students in their choice to study at AC**

Analysis of the various answers to this question created the following four categories:

##### 1. The level of TF in relation to the value for money

All interviewees agreed that one of the most important factors in the students’ choice of AC is the ‘low level of TF’. This can be viewed in connection with the factors influencing students to study in Cyprus where once again we see the affordable TF as one of the most if not the most important factor.

However, this factor is also associated with the value for money and that is why it was added together with the level of the TF. This important addition was raised by the most experienced employee who added that:

“Although most colleges in Cyprus more or less charge students similar TF, the level of TF in relation to the quality of the programmes of study is what makes us stand out in the competition. The students as well as the agents understand that colleges in Cyprus are inexpensive compared to other HEIs in more popular countries. However, they want to get the maximum in terms of quality and recognition and that is why they finally choose AC.”

## 2. Quality of education

Four out of five interviewees stated that the next influencing factor is associated with the quality of education. This is also in line with the above quotation regarding the TF by an experienced SM. Their responses were:

- “The quality of the offered education, as compared to other colleges, is much higher. The quality of some of our programmes of study is comparable with the ones of other universities in Cyprus.”
- “Our College maintains a number of accredited/recognised 4-year Bachelor degrees and 2-year Diplomas. Not many colleges offer accredited Bachelor degrees and this is what differentiates us from our competitors. Thus, many students prefer to pay more or less the same TF but choose the best they can get.”
- “The good quality of the College’s offered education brought about international recognition. Many universities around the world accept our students either for transfer of their credits or to start a master’s degree after successfully completing a Bachelor degree at AC.”

## 3. The good name and reputation

Two of the interviewees mentioned that the good name and reputation of AC is another important factor which influences students’ choice. This good name and reputation is also enhanced by the view of an experienced admissions officer who said that: “AC was one of the pioneers in international recruitment since it was the first HEI from Cyprus to

recruit students from other countries.” This factor is directly linked with the WOM since the good name and reputation of Cypriot HEIs is not measured or stated anywhere for prospective students to see. As can be seen from the ‘best source of information’ section, prospective students also get this kind of information from friends and family members who are studying in Cyprus.

#### 4. Location

Two other interviewees pointed out that the central location of the College is another important factor and this is something which was identified by the students as well. Their responses were:

- “Being in the town centre means easier access to accommodation and to the College hostel.”
- “Being right in the centre of the capital city of Nicosia (opposite the central square) means that students are in the centre of everything associated with their life. This also means that our students can find jobs more easily. Moreover, students can easily attend their classes and then go to their jobs.”

#### **4.4.10 The sources of information that students use before coming to AC**

Analysis of the replies to this question revealed the following three categories:

##### 1. Information given by the agents/representatives

Four out of five interviewees responded that the main source of information for students is the College representatives. Their comments about the role of the agent were on similar lines to the question regarding the influencer of students’ decision to study in Cyprus and specifically at AC. However, one SM added that:

“In some countries e.g. Nigeria, the students are reluctant to believe what the agent says. This is because there were incidents where agents received money from the student in order to pay the TF of a HEI and they ran away without ever sending these fees to the institution. The students can trust more an agent if a College officer visits the country and offers support to that agent. This might be a presentation or an interview session in

the agent's office endorsing his recruitment efforts. Therefore, there are sources of information which should be attached together to have the desirable effect.”

In addition, two of these four interviewees associated the use of agents and making presentations as a source of information which cannot be separated. They argued that:

- “If a College officer organises a presentation without the help and presence of an agent, then who is going to do the follow up?”
- “The presentations are an indirect source of information since without the use of the agent's database of students, very few will attend anyway. The direct source of information is the agent.”

## 2. Country visits by SMs

Altogether three interviewees (including the two above) responded that presentations/seminars and interview sessions are the sources that students get information from. Another interviewee responded that: “Always meeting the student directly is very important. That is why promotional trips for presentations are needed.” In summary, there was evidence that country visits by SMs were necessary in order to promote the College and give information to prospective students.

## 3. WOM

Three interviewees responded that another very important source of information is the WOM by friends and relatives who are studying or have graduated from AC. Surprisingly, the internet was only mentioned by one interviewee as an important source of information. Another one said that “the internet just supports the other sources of information and the recruiting efforts. Some students visit our website as a reassurance that we really exist. Anyway, many students cannot speak English and therefore they cannot get information from our website. Others do not have access to the WWW.” However, it is important to note that when SMs mention the internet, they actually mean the AC website. The various online chatting platforms and free internet calls (VOIP) e.g. MSN, Skype, Facebook, are not included in the term internet. These are the modern means by which students convey their WOM to their friends and relatives.



#### **4.4.11 Financing students' studies**

Analysis of the replies to this question were categorised according to the following two categories:

##### **1. Family members**

All interviewees agreed that initially (before coming to Cyprus) parents and/or other family members are paying the initial TF that need to be paid to the HEI for a semester or a year. They also pay for the students' living expenses of this initial period.

However, as was revealed, parents might be asked by students to contribute to the payment of TF at a later stage too. Two of the interviewees added that in a few cases, when the students cannot find enough finances for their stay and studies in Cyprus, they might ask and get financial support from their family.

##### **2. Students themselves**

However, the interviewees indicated that after they come to Cyprus, and after the end of this initial first period of a semester or a year, students are expected to cover most if not all the living expenses as well as the TF by themselves. This important finding is associated with the students' search for a low cost of living country emerging from the factors which influence students to come to Cyprus.

#### **4.4.12 Best source of information which would better promote AC**

This was a very important question which would help in answering objective seven and eight. The key aspects of analysing this question can be summarised in the following three categories:

##### **1. Agents/Representatives**

Three SMs admitted that the best source of information for the case of AC is its agents and representatives for the reasons already discussed in previous sections. Using the agents might mean visiting their offices, organising interview sessions, organising and giving presentations, etc. Some of their responses were:

- “It is not easy for College officers to go on visits by themselves since we are a small country, unknown to many students. Because of this, our HEIs are not very popular. Therefore, we need to be backed-up by a well-known agent if we want to have good results.”
- “If we do advertise by ourselves very few students and parents will attend the presentation or interview sessions. In Asia this is definitely the case.”

## 2. Country visits by SMs

Three interviewees replied that a source of information for students is generally attending presentations and interview sessions organised by officers visiting various countries for recruitment and promotion. This finding did not contradict with the previous point, that of organising visits with the help of an agent. However, country visits by SMs without the presence of the agent is considered by students as another source of information. It was evident that although most students use the services of agents, they do not trust them and have doubts about the information they give to them. Therefore, SMs believe that giving information to students directly through visits is a different category from the previous one.

## 3. Friends and relatives studying in Cyprus

Three responses stressed the students’ friends and relatives who are already studying in Cyprus as the second best source of information. The answers to this category are supported by other replies to previous questions as to the persons influencing their decision to study in Cyprus and AC. This clearly shows their importance in transmitting information to prospective students back in their home country. It is important to note that only one SM responded that participating in educational exhibitions is a good source of information to prospective students.

### **4.4.13 Changes that will help attract more international students**

This question yielded some interesting replies which varied significantly from each other. Their responses were grouped together according to their main theme and are listed below:

### 1. Authorise new agents/representatives

Three interviewees' comments were associated with changes/suggestions regarding the agents. This again was consistent with the agents' central role to the recruitment of new international students. Their specific responses were:

- “Since we all know that most students are coming to our College through agents and not directly, we should search for new agents on the web. Some universities even publicise them on their websites.”
- “We can speak to students from other colleges and ask them to reveal their agent who persuaded them to come and study in Cyprus. Afterwards, we can contact these agents and ask them to represent AC. We know that our commission rates are good so some of them might want to represent us. ”
- “Support our good agents when they are doing well in recruitment by offering bonuses, advertising budgets, etc. In a way it is like saying thank you to our good loyal agents. This is another way of giving them more financial incentives to work for us without increasing AC's commission rates.”

### 2. Recruitment visits abroad

Three responses targeted changes which had to do with their promotional/recruitment trips. Intensifying the trips was one suggestion that emerged from their replies. The other one was the use of current or alumni students during these visits. Specifically the interviewees pointed out that:

- “We should definitely increase the number of business trips we go on abroad. These trips should have the same duration over a period of 1-2 years even if the results are slow to come.”
- “We should intensify our recruitment trips. However, admissions officers should be able to switch countries of responsibility every now and then. If one admissions officer is usually travelling to China and another one to India and they both have very good knowledge of their markets, this does not mean that they should keep travelling to the same countries year after year. On the contrary they should be given the opportunity to travel to other places. This way the results might be even better.”

- “During some of the trips abroad, it would be better if we are escorted by either current or alumni students. Talking about their experiences with Cyprus and AC and how they ended up here (procedure, required documents, etc.) will have a positive effect on recruitment.”

Other responses which were unique were the following:

- “Changing the name of the College will help attract more international students. Anyway many students believe that we are an American College.”
- “We should change our video presentation and design a new webpage.”

One interviewee suggested that we should open local regional offices in some important for us countries. For example, the office in India and China might be responsible for other countries of the corresponding continent. “These offices would take the role of the admissions/marketing department of the College but in a much smaller scale. A serious advantage of establishing an office abroad is that we will not need to pay commission for students recruited through them.”

#### **4.4.14 Ways of improving AC’s image and reputation abroad**

All five interviewees responded that we already have a good image and reputation abroad. Some replied that this is because we were among the first Cyprus’s HEIs to recruit from abroad. Others said that the reason for this is that we pay a lot of attention to international students and others that student’s ‘value for money’ is among the highest in Cyprus. Four interviewees did not come up with ways we can achieve this improvement. Only one commented that: “The establishment of regional offices will help in building the image and reputation of a HEI. These offices help in building the trust between local societies and the institution. This trust is a vital ingredient of both image and reputation.”

#### **4.4.15 AC strengths**

This question and the next one were added to the interview protocol in order to get the views of the interviewees as to AC’s positive and negative points. The five interviewees

had a lot to say about the strengths of the College. Most of them raised similar points which were grouped together in four categories in the analysis below:

### 1. Good name and reputation

There was a universal view that one of AC's biggest strengths is its good name, image and reputation abroad. Two of the interviewees associated this point with the years of experience in recruiting and the year of establishment in 1975, thus showing that this reputation was created over a long period of time. Another interviewee explained that:

“We have always been telling the truth to our agents/students. We have created a very good image and agents/students believe what we say to them. This sometimes creates troubles to our recruitment but in the long-run it has positive results. For example, some of our competitors promise to students/agents that they can help them find part-time jobs when they come to Cyprus and register at their college. When this does not happen (and it usually does not happen) the students/agents feel they were cheated. We always tell the truth no matter how good or bad it might sound and this helped build our reputation.”

### 2. Reasonable TF

Four interviewees mentioned the reasonable TF as one of AC's strengths. Characteristically, one of them argued that: “Our TF are low if you compare our College with other much smaller colleges which have similar fees and do not offer the same quality and facilities.” The importance of the TF factor was also evident from the interviewees reply to a number of questions above. This clearly supports the view that it is an important element in the students' HEI decision-making process.

### 3. Quality of AC and its programmes of study

Three interviewees' responses were associated with the quality of the College and its programmes of studies. Some of their responses are given below:

- “The fact that most AC's courses are accredited by the Cyprus Accreditation Council is what distinguishes us from the competition. Unfortunately for Cyprus education and fortunately for us, many of the other colleges do not have any accredited courses at all.”

- “Our quality education is one of our strengths and this is what many students tell us. That is why we are among the best HEIs in terms of recruitment.”
- “The good quality of our programmes is also evident from the inclusion in the lists of recognised courses by other Ministries of Education in various countries.”

This category of answers can be viewed in association with the previous category. Combining the two means that students are interested in the HEI’s level of TF but they also have in mind its value for money. One element of value for money is clearly the level of TF as well as the quality of the offered education.

#### 4. Good commission structure

Two respondents raised the issue of the good commission structure that is offered to AC’s agents. Their view was that this is a good incentive for the agents and an important point in the success of the College. In general there was some evidence that the good commission structure enhances recruitment, although it was not very clear the exact correlation of the two.

#### 5. Good location

Two other responses raised the issue of the very good location of the College right in the centre of Nicosia. One of them added that: “our College is close to most students’ activities and more importantly close to most accommodation offerings.” The good location of AC has a number of advantages which are also evident by examining the students’ questionnaires.

The following single responses were also raised by the interviewees:

- “We have a very good refund policy for those students who do not succeed in getting a visa. We also pay the commission to the agents fast compared to others. Over the years, we built a financial trust between the agents and us. This is important if we think that other colleges are intentionally delaying paying the agents’ commission and refunding students’ fees if they do not get a visa.”
- “AC is well known for replying fast to the enquiries received. Moreover, we are fast with issuing the Certificate of Admission, which makes students feel more

secure by holding it in their hands. Generally the fact that we reply to the emails received within 48 hours is a very strong point that the agents and the students really appreciate. This is especially true of agents from countries which work seven days a week and all their enquiries are considered by them as needing urgent reply.”

#### **4.4.16 AC weaknesses**

Interviewees’ responses to this question were not on the same lines. No clear themes emerged from their replies. Each raised a different issue which is illustrated below:

- “We do not have the university status nevertheless we do offer accredited Bachelor degrees. This reduces our students’ intake.”
- “AC is considered by students as a university college which is somewhere in the middle of the rankings. This means that we lose some good and wealthy students who can afford to pay the TF of the three private universities and we also lose the poor students who want the cheapest option no matter of the quality.”
- “We need to design more publications and update the existing ones.”
- “AC’s officers keep visiting the same countries and the same places for recruiting. Although, it might be risky to visit new places we should dare and try recruiting from new markets.”
- “We are strict with our policies. We should be more flexible and put the regulations aside every now and then.”

#### **4.4.17 The role and influence of admissions staff in the students’ recruitment**

All five respondents agreed that the role of the admissions SMs is very important and greatly influences the recruitment of new international students. There was evidence that this is especially true during their trips abroad because they are solely representing the College and every action or decision (both professionally and personally) affects either the long-term or short-term intake of new students. Some of the interviewees’ responses are the following:

- “The character of each admissions officer matters in recruitment since we are directly in contact with the agents and the students. Sometime the agents want to

recruit for us (on a personal basis) because they believe they help us to succeed in our role at the College.”

- “We influence the decision of both agents and students. Students see us as a representative SM who they will be dealing with in their everyday student life when they come to study with us.”
- “Our role in the recruitment is great. Unfortunately some agents cannot see the differences between one HEI and the other clearly. That is why the right admissions officer can make a big difference.”
- “A trust and respect between us and the agents needs time to be created. This is enhanced by the many trips to the same country and the same agents. A friendship is created which matters a lot to some agents, some times more than the name of the College or the commission payments. That is why some admissions officers, switching between institutions, manage to take with them a few loyal agents they have good relationship with. It is like building your own portfolio of ‘customers’ which will follow you to your next job.”
- Native speaker admissions officers visiting their countries are a big advantage for a HEI. They can also influence their friends and family members to study at AC.

#### **4.4.18 Final remarks**

Two interviewees wanted to add some final remarks on further issues. The first one stated that: “Since this research is related to the recruitment of international students, it is good to point out that agents are the key issue not only for AC but for all HEIs in small and unknown countries like Cyprus. The numbers never lie and getting the 70-80% of our students through agents means a lot. Unfortunately, we are in the hands of the agents who decide by themselves, according to a number of factors, where to send their students and how many.” This response further supports the agents’ important role in the recruitment process and their influencing power on the students’ decisions which was seen in the previous sections. This view is also supported by the AC relevant recruitment statistics presented in Chapter 2.



#### **4.4.19 Summary of the findings**

Table 4.32 summarises the answers given from the interview sessions. These were categorised according to their frequency as was intended and analysed in the methodology section from using the content analysis method. Replies which were only given once were not included.

**Table 4.32 - Summary of the answers from the interview sessions  
(Number of views from interviewees / All 5 interviewees)**

<b>Interview Protocol Question</b>	<b>Answers</b>
Reasons why students study abroad	4/5: To get an international experience, change environment, meet other cultures and experience different living standards and ways of life 3/5: To acquire education abroad which is considered better and is more appreciated by local employers 3/5: To have the chance of finding a full-time/part-time job while studying 2/5: To have more chances to earn a better future salary 2/5: To find a job and help financially their families back home
Most popular countries for HE studies among students	5/5: USA and UK 2/5: Other English speaking countries like Canada, Australia and Ireland
Factors influencing international students to study in Cyprus	4/5: Affordable TF (lower than other popular destinations) 4/5: Finding well-paying jobs in the Tourist industry 4/5: Easier student visa requirements (2/5: although this is not true anymore) 3/5: Lower cost of living 2/5: Soft and moderate checks by immigration officers on the actual number of hours worked by students
The person(s) influencing students' decision to study in Cyprus	5/5: Agents/representatives of the HEIs 3/5: Friends and family members who are studying or have studied in Cyprus 2/5: Family members (but up to a certain level)
The person(s) influencing students' decision to study at AC	5/5: Agents/representatives of AC 4/5: Friends and family members studying or studied at AC who are happy with the College in general
Current students' role in the recruitment of new international students	5/5: Current students play a big role in the recruitment of new students. 2/5: WOM is very strong and has both positive and negative effects 2/5: Big number of students who act as agents and introduce their friends and relatives to AC
Alumni's role in the recruitment of new international students	5/5: Alumni's role is very important (Interviewees responses varied)
Ways we can use AC's current/alumni students in our recruitment practices	4/5: Use students in our international promotion and recruitment by asking them to escort us to trips abroad 3/5: Encourage more students to become our representatives.

Interview Protocol Question	Answers
Factors influencing students in their choice to study at AC	5/5: Low TF in connection with value for money 4/5: Quality of the offered education 2/5: AC's very good name and reputation 2/5: The central location of the College
The sources of information that students use before coming to AC	4/5: The main source of information is offered by the College agent/representative. 3/5: Visits to various countries by SMs for presentations and interview sessions (2/5: in cooperation with our agents) 3/5: WOM by friends/relatives who are studying or graduated from AC
Financing students' studies	5/5: Family members finance students' studies before they come to Cyprus 5/5: Students finance their studies after the money the family members sent initially has been consumed 2/5: Students might ask and get financial help from their families at a later stage in their studies.
Best source of information which would better promote AC	3/5: Agents/Representatives are considered the best 3/5: Presentations/Interview sessions by admissions staff (with agent's help) 3/5: Friends and relatives of students who are studying in Cyprus
Changes that will help attract more international students	3/5: Authorise new agents/representatives 3/5: Increase the number of trips abroad
Ways of improving AC's image and reputation abroad	5/5: AC enjoys a very good image and reputation abroad 4/5: No specific suggestions were made 1/5: Establish regional offices in some important countries
AC strengths	5/5: Very good name and reputation both in Cyprus and abroad with years of experience in international recruitment 4/5: Reasonable TF 3/5: The quality of our programmes of study 2/5: Very good location right in the centre of the capital city of Nicosia 2/5: Good commission structure that we give to our agents/representatives
AC weaknesses	All five interviewees had different views which could not be grouped together
The role and influence of admissions SMs in the students' recruitment	5/5: The role of the admissions staff is very important and greatly influences the recruitment of new international students. The interviewees' responses varied and were given above.

Furthermore, Table 4.33 presents the most important findings, specifically for each research objective.

**Table 4.33 – Findings from the interview sessions’ data analysis**

<b>Research Objective</b>	<b>Findings</b>
Factors influencing AC international students’ choices	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The level of TF in relation to the value for money</li> <li>2. Quality of education</li> <li>3. The good name and reputation</li> <li>4. The location</li> </ol>
People influencing AC international students’ choices	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Agents/representatives of AC</li> <li>2. Friends and family members in Cyprus through WOM (including students or alumni)</li> </ol>
Current students’ role in the recruitment and marketing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Their role is very important and is further supported by the strong WOM effect</li> <li>2. WOM can have both positive and negative effects and all staff should service students in the best possible way to avoid negative WOM.</li> <li>3. Big number of students who act as agents further strengthens their direct involvement in recruitment</li> </ol>
Alumni’s role in the recruitment and marketing	Alumni’s role is very important. Once again the importance of WOM emerged from the interviewees answers.
Determine how the behaviour by key members of the recruitment staff affects recruitment	The role of the recruitment staff is very important and greatly influences the recruitment of new international students.
AC strengths	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Good name and reputation</li> <li>2. Reasonable TF</li> <li>3. Quality of AC and its programmes of study</li> <li>4. Good commission structure</li> <li>5. Good location</li> </ol>
AC weaknesses	<p>All five interviewees had different views.</p> <p>No clear theme emerged.</p>

## **4.5 Observations**

As stated earlier, observations were not the main DCT of this research but were used as a casual data gathering activity. Nevertheless, they provided me with limited but objective data which were valuable to this research topic. The direct observations also helped me a lot in triangulating some of the findings of this study. The observations made over a period of two months were qualitative in nature, were categorised according to their relevance to some of the research objectives and are presented below. Some direct incidences, as well as direct quotations from students, agents and SMs were used to strengthen the point of each argument.

### **4.5.1 Identify the factors influencing AC international students' choice and decision-making**

The observations revealed little information regarding this research objective. This was simply because in their interaction with the admissions SMs, students did not start numbering the factors which influenced their choice and decision-making without being asked to do so. Yet, some of these factors could be indirectly extracted from various conversations regarding a wide range of issues. Summarising the observation notes, two main themes emerged: Most of the students mentioned their agent as the most influencing person/factor in their choice and decision-making although the main theme which emerged was their dissatisfaction above anything else. This was followed by the importance of the level of the TF charged and the price sensitivity of the market. One other important finding which emerged was the persuading power of the students' friends or relatives who are studying in Cyprus (something that is analysed in the next section).

#### **1. Students' dissatisfaction from AC's agents and their importance to recruitment**

Unfortunately, most of the students who were observed talking to the admissions SMs expressed their dissatisfaction about their agent. Students were actually complaining that they were deceived and misled on a number of issues. Their complaints, with the exception of one, were aimed at the agent and not at the College or at its SMs. More specifically, the students were complaining that the agents gave them misleading

information about a. Cyprus and Nicosia, b. the ease of finding a job, c. the College's supposed obligation to find students a job, d. the relevant law which prevents students from working for at least six months after coming to Cyprus, e. transferring to other European destinations and f. the level of TF of AC. Moreover, many students were not happy with the quality of service they received from the College's agents. One of these students was observed during a visit in the admissions department being very angry with his agent. He was quoted saying in a very strict manner: "Why do you work with such agents? Why can't you just check their work before you appoint them? You should immediately stop working with him. He is creating a very bad image for your College."

Many students admitted that before visiting the agent they knew nothing about Cyprus and AC. They explained to the admissions SM how they first found out about studying opportunities in Cyprus from their agent. This supports other findings of this research as to the little knowledge prospective students have of Cyprus and its HEIs and this additionally shows the importance of using agents (especially for HEIs which operate in relatively unknown countries) to recruit students.

Students added that although they were happy with the College facilities, the quality of education and the friendliness of the staff at AC, they felt that they were cheated by the agent who did not tell them the truth about a number of things. Some of these students admitted that they had even sent their relatives to express their complaints to the agent face-to-face. Others demanded from the College to stop working with specific agents because they took advantage of students. Moreover, many of them wanted to bring to the College's attention the big amount of money they paid to the agents for their educational consulting services which in some cases was equal to the level of AC TF for one semester or even one academic year.

## 2. The importance of the level of TF charged and the price sensitivity of the market

Some students of AC, but more importantly students of other colleges visiting the admissions department to find out about the transfer procedure, raised the issue of the level of the TF. Some students who came to Cyprus to study in any of the private universities realised that they could also earn a recognised and accredited degree from a college. One of them said:

“Of course it is better if the word ‘university’ is written on my Bachelor degree certificate. However, I prefer to study in a college I can afford and get a recognised degree which would be equivalent to a university degree rather than study at a university which I cannot afford and finally end up with no degree at all because of financial problems.”

Other students of AC frequently visit the admissions department to ask if they are allowed discounts on TF (since AC offers discounts to certain student nationalities) or if they are allowed to register without paying the full TF. The author understands that many students have financial difficulties. However, during these observations some students admitted that AC might not be the cheapest College in Cyprus, but, given what it offers, it could charge much more. Nevertheless, others still ask for lower TF because as one student characteristically said: “We have nothing to lose by asking for lower TF. Anyway, this is what we have been doing in our country for many years now.” That is, the mentality of some students ‘pushes’ them to request for a lot of things even though they most probably know the answer. Analysis of these observations revealed that although some students transfer from other HEIs to AC because the TF or the value for money is better, others (AC students) complain about the high TF charged. This discrepancy was also evident in the analysis of the student questionnaires. The market is price sensitive because the majority of the observed students have raised the issue of the TF.

#### **4.5.2 Identify the role of current students and alumni in recruitment and marketing**

Analysis of the observations categorised under this research objective yielded some very important results. **The main finding is that the role of current students and alumni in recruitment and marketing is very important.** However, the gathered information from current and alumni students was divided into different sections for better analysis.

First of all, a very small number of alumni contact the College after their graduation before returning to their countries. The main reason why some of them communicate with the College from their countries is to send an application for a new student, usually

asking, but sometimes without asking, for a commission payment. However, some of them take one step further and open up agencies to officially represent AC in their city/country. A visiting alumni who was working as a sales person in his home country and was casually recruiting some of his friends and relatives to AC stated that becoming an agent is the easiest thing international students can do, as a form of first and part-time employment, after they return to their country; that is talk to prospective students about their Cyprus's experience and persuade them to apply. Adding to this alumni's view, is the ease by which graduates of Cypriot HEIs are authorised to represent their HEIs. This fact helps them in getting involved with recruitment either from Cyprus or abroad.

Occasionally, it was observed that some graduates who either work in Cyprus or settle down here and create a family, visit the College, mainly for social purposes. They seem to have very good memories while studying at AC and feel like visiting the administrative staff, the faculty members and the more 'popular' SMs (e.g. Director of Student Affairs) rather than the admissions SMs. However, even those few alumni who visit the admissions office assure SMs that they give good comments to prospective students about AC. This positive WOM greatly assists the AC international recruitment.

From these observations, it was found out that the role of current students is much more important. First of all, many of the current students are acting as agents of the College and recruit their friends and relatives to us. The admissions SMs have a frequent interaction with agents/students since their number is increasing. Currently AC has nearly 100 active agents/students. The observations showed that prospective students trust current students who are acting as agents of the College because they are in Cyprus and close to the admissions department of AC. However, the author's observation notes revealed that in very few cases, prospective students request for an email, phonecall or any other form of communication from the College that would prove to them that their friend/agent who is studying at AC is really acting on their behalf to help them apply. Therefore, although their role in recruitment is important, receiving the College help in cases like the one described above further assists them in recruitment.

Current students were observed handing in the applications of prospective students. They were responsible for giving the application form, application fee and all the



necessary application documents to the admissions department until the application was completed and processed. Their interaction with the admissions department revealed that some students who recruited their close relatives for the College chose to give the commission they receive to the new student. However, in most cases, and especially when it involved friends and not relatives, current students decide to keep the commission for themselves. Furthermore, the observations showed that current students become agents of this College for a very simple reason: because they are happy with AC and their College life. Most of the students that interacted with the admissions SMs, talked to their friends with the best possible words about AC. One of them, very importantly said to one admissions officer:

“Even if you did not pay commission, I would still send my friend here. I am three years in Cyprus and I know which colleges are good and which are not. Since this is a good friend of mine, I prefer to bring him here (AC) and be sure that he will like the environment than risk sending him to another college.”

Another admissions officer asked a student whether he would want his friend to study here if he was not satisfied with the services he received and his clear answer was no. The student stated that:

“Why should I send my cousin to another college? This College has offered so many things to me so far and I have no reason at all to send my friend to another college or even university. It’s a way of showing my appreciation.”

Moreover, in addition to students acting as agents, current students visit the admissions department to either get student packs (College prospectus, application forms and other promotional materials) and send them to prospective students in their home country or give the address to us so that we can send the application pack directly. This again clearly shows that students are satisfied with AC otherwise they would not be sending (with no financial incentive) AC’s materials to prospective students in order to apply.

Furthermore, the observations illustrated that admissions officers prefer interacting with current students instead of students abroad since they can sit face to face with them, explain the procedure, check the application documents as they are being handed in and

ask students to send new ones in case these cannot be acceptable. One admissions officer was quoted saying to a student who was not sure if he could guide his brother to come here but wanted him to avoid going to the same local agent he had gone to before coming to Cyprus:

“We can guide you with the required admissions and visa procedures in order to bring your brother to AC. Usually the application documents can be more easily obtained since we will be in direct and frequent communication with you explaining whatever is needed. This helps avoid any mistakes or misunderstandings which are frequent in the case of applications received from abroad.”

#### **4.5.3 Determine how the behaviour/conduct of key members of the recruitment staff affects recruitment**

**It is clear from the analysis of the observations categorised under this research objective that the actions of all staff dealing with recruitment greatly affect the number of students recruited.** The following incidence with a visiting agent is indicative and clearly underlines this point. Among other things, this agent came to meet the researcher and was escorted by the SM responsible for this agent’s country. As they were going through the number of students recruited and when the agent was asked as to why the number of students recruited the previous semester was lower than usual, he told the researcher that during the last campaign, his staff did not inform him of a new requirement which was needed before applying for a visa at the consulate. Some students took the initiative, called the consulate directly and found out about this new requirement, but the agent did not know about this and he therefore did not inform the rest of his students who finally did not manage to get a visa. When the agent left, the researcher’s staff admitted that it was indeed a big mistake on his part. This incident clearly strengthens the view that, especially when a SM visits a country, even his/her smallest mistake can affect the recruitment of AC.

As was expected, the observations revealed that some students had preference to one admissions officer over the other. The image of each admissions officer is created over some period of time. Students talk to their friends about how good or bad each officer is. These views travel fast and reach the rest of the students. However, it is difficult to

determine and measure each officer's popularity and success rate of converting a student's interest firstly into a completed application and then into a registered student. Each of the admissions SMs is responsible for a few countries. The visits of these officers cannot be frequently observed. However, what can be observed is how good or bad a specific market is performing. Still, safe conclusions cannot be made since there are many other factors, beyond the recruitment officer's control, which are responsible for the recruitment of students from different markets.

An important element in the success of every admissions' SM is their relationship with the agents and prospective students of that country. By observing the email/phone communication of SMs with agents, and students it was seen that some have a more typical working relationship with them while others maintain a more friendly approach. This personal relationship depends on the character of each recruitment officer on the one hand and the agents/students on the other. Therefore, the character and personality of each recruitment officer affects one way or another his/her recruitment performance. Although it can be clearly seen that even if a recruitment officer is more out-going and with a more pleasant personality than another one, their performance cannot be easily compared and measured. This is because each market and its characteristics are different. Also, the other half (agent or student) of this relationship is also very important. Therefore, comparing two recruitment officers according to their performance is more theoretical in nature since they work in very different environments.

#### **4.5.4 Identify the strengths and weaknesses of AC**

Based on the observation notes it could be concluded that students and admissions SMs had different views on the strengths and weaknesses of AC. As was expected by observing different students who were visiting the admissions department, some of their views were contradictory. For example, some students expressed their satisfaction on the level of TF while others, their dissatisfaction. However, their views, as expressed in the questionnaire, were more reliable because of the big number of students participating and thus, triangulation shed more light into this research objective.

Students visiting the admissions department (students from other colleges who wanted to transfer to AC and current students of AC) identified **the level of TF as one of the weaknesses of AC**. Students clearly expect lower TF and they express their unhappiness because of this in every chance they have. All admissions officers have received requests regarding lowering the TF. In the eyes of students, **another weakness is the facilities of the College which need to be upgraded and increased**. Many of AC's students/agents are expressing these views when they interact with any admissions officer about a prospective student of theirs. Although they are generally happy with AC, they seize the opportunity to talk about the improvements needed in the cafeteria, the gym, the hostel, etc. with the belief that their comments will be passed on to the appropriate person. Moreover, the observations manifested that **the major strengths according to the students are the quality of education and the friendliness of staff**. The quality of studies is expressed by a number of students who either want to bring their friends or relatives here or who want to transfer from another Cyprus's HEI to AC.

Admissions SMs believe that the College's biggest strengths are the good name and reputation and the quality of studies. This was observed during SMs' interaction with agents, students and parents. Furthermore, the accredited courses are used as a selling point by a number of recruiters in order to strengthen their argument about AC's quality. Characteristically, the researcher noticed one admissions SM who was explaining to a parent of a student over the phone that we do not have rankings for the Cypriot HEIs or their courses. Nevertheless, there is the accreditation council which accredits only the courses which are of a good standard. These accredited courses are considered equivalent regardless of the fact that some are offered by the colleges and some by the universities. The accredited courses can be found on the internet under the MOEC website. Additionally, some visiting agents have proudly told members of staff that they recruit students for AC who are really interested in their studies, since they know that the College is among the few serious colleges in Cyprus offering high quality education.

Furthermore, the reasonable TF of AC are another strength that its SMs use as a selling argument. Moreover, this issue is frequently raised by students and agents. Some officers argue that the TF that we charge are much lower than what the universities charge, although the student can get the same accredited and recognised Bachelor

degree or Diploma. Some others point out that the TF should be higher if you compare what AC offers with what other colleges offer. Others are using the argument that there are some cheaper options available but students will have many complaints against agents for sending them there. Adding to this point, one admissions officer said to a student: “If you do not want to risk having any troubles you should take into consideration many more things apart from the TF.”

## **4.6 Triangulation**

This section discusses the meaning and significance of the major findings which emerged from all the DCT, separately for each research objective. This was done by triangulating the various findings i.e. putting together all the pieces of the puzzle in order to present a meaningful and well-substantiated result. Moreover, the findings of this research were examined to check whether they support or refute the literature. Although, the purpose of this study was to determine the factors that influence international students' decision in choosing a Cyprus's HEI, the study explored other related to this, issues. This helped develop the second part of the research objective, that of suggesting changes to the recruitment policy of the College. It is very important to emphasise that in all the stages of conducting this research, gathering the data, analysing them in order to come up with the findings and triangulating them, the limitations of this research were always taken into consideration especially the issue of the insider researcher's bias and objectivity that is analysed in section 3.5.

### **4.6.1 Research Objective 3 - The factors and the people influencing AC international students' choices**

From the research findings it could be concluded that the HE market in Cyprus is very price sensitive. The first factor according to the questionnaire which influenced international students in choosing Cyprus and AC is the level of TF. 15.1% of the students chose to study at AC because of the reasonable TF. This is followed by the easy admissions procedure (15%) and the scholarships which are available after students come to Cyprus (13.1%). All the factors and their percentages can be found in Appendix 7. It is very important to note that the third factor is also indirectly linked to the first one since it is also related to the level of TF that students pay every semester to the College. These findings are in line with the results of the SMs interviews. Four out of five interviewees expressed the view that students choose Cyprus's HEIs and AC in particular because the TF are affordable and lower than those of other popular destinations. Once again, a related factor which is worth mentioning is that of the cost of living, which was expressed as an important factor by three SMs.

It is important to note that although 89.1% of AC's sample students admitted that other countries are ideal HE destinations (Canada, UK, USA, Australia, etc.) and not Cyprus (in question D.14<sup>4</sup>), they still ended up studying at a Cyprus's HEI. Only 10.9% (or 117 students) believed that Cyprus is an ideal country for HE studies and this reinforces the importance of the TF and living expenses as Cyprus's 'pull' factors. Moreover, it can be seen from question C.3<sup>5</sup> that 491 out of the 509 sample students considered studying in other more well known countries but finally chose Cyprus.

The interviewees' views on the factors influencing the choice of AC were similar in many ways. All interviewees agreed that the most important factor influencing AC international students' choice and decision-making was the low TF and their value for money. This differentiation with the addition of value for money had to do with the quality of education, recognised programmes of study, available facilities, etc. Specifically, although other HEIs in Cyprus might charge the same TF, the students that have information about some HEIs will of course choose the best they can get for the same TF. This according to AC's staff is linked together with the TF factor.

In addition, analysing questionnaire's Part E scaling statements reinforced the importance of TF in the students' choice of AC. The issue of the reasonable TF was ranked second among scale 1 and scale 2 answers on the 4 most important reasons influencing their choice to study at AC. Moreover, the analysis of the qualitative part of the questionnaire (Part F) strengthens the view that the market for Cyprus's HEIs is very price sensitive and that the students' main concern is the TF above all other factors (which the reader might have expected). When replying to the open question F.20<sup>6</sup>, more than 16% of students expressed the view that the College should lower its fees. Importantly, this suggestion carried the highest percentage! In addition, the fifth ranked suggestion which was expressed by 7% of students, was that AC should offer more scholarships. The researcher did not expect to see those reasons for improving the image and reputation of the College. Nevertheless, even if this is the case, this question highlights the point of the market price sensitivity. Furthermore, it could be seen from the observations that after students come to Cyprus and particularly to AC, they seek scholarships to lower their TF.

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<sup>4</sup> D.14: Which according to you is the ideal country or countries for higher education studies?

<sup>5</sup> C.3: Which countries did you think of studying in before deciding to come to Cyprus?

<sup>6</sup> F.20: How can AC improve its image and reputation abroad?

**The above findings of this research showed that the TF are the most important influencing factor.** This finding is contradictory to the majority of other similar research on more advanced or well-known educational destinations. This statement can be explained by the fact that students studying in the UK or USA for example, come from better economic backgrounds than students coming to Cyprus, since the HEIs' TF, as well as the living expenses there are higher. Therefore, they choose these well-known educational destinations for different factors other than the price of the TF or the cost of living.

Nevertheless, the importance of the TF and price can be found in a few other studies. Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003) research investigation on the reasons for choosing a HEI indicated that the course fee was ranked second after the course on offer. Additionally, Maringe's (2006) research on the university choice factors concluded to similar results. Specifically, the most important group of factors (and their associated issues) have to do with the programme, the second with the price and the third with the place. Moreover, Maringe and Carter (2007) research findings on the 'fears and anxieties' factor of African students studying in the UK proved that their main concern was the huge direct costs followed by the failure to meet study costs, factors which are indirectly associated with this finding. Additionally, the empirical study of Shah *et al.* (1999), concluded that students make the decision to attend a university on attributes other than their perception of the university's quality, price (tuition) being one of them.

A number of other studies examine the price/TF factor in attracting new students and this shows its importance for a number of HEIs. For example, the empirical study of Ivy (2001) concluded that South African HEIs are more fee conscious than their UK counterparts, indicating that 'lower fees' are an important aspect in the student recruitment. In addition, Shah *et al.* (1999) state that scholars like Leslie and Brinkman (1987), St. John (1990a, 1990b), St. John, Oescher, and Andrieu (1992), and Somers (1992) report the influence of price on the decision to attend.

The importance of the TF as a determinant of study decisions which is suggested in this study has another dimension which is linked with what students get by paying higher or lower levels of TF. The issue of 'pay more and get more out of it' is addressed by Maringe *et al.* (2009) who state that "students generally felt that increased fees should



be used to benefit them primarily both directly or indirectly” (p. 152). It should be noted that the students’ suggestions of lowering the TF expressed in both questions of the questionnaire’s part F are in contradiction with the student voices on providing better facilities, raising the educational standards of AC, expanding the buildings, etc. which are clearly evident in the qualitative part of the questionnaire.

Moreover, although the sample students admitted that other destinations like the UK or the USA are more popular than Cyprus, they ended-up studying here even though Cyprus was not their first choice for HE studies. Throughout the study, it seems that the fees of HEIs were the most important determinant of the students’ choice before coming to Cyprus. However, many students after coming to Cyprus and to AC would like to see both in their favour i.e. pay less and get more. Having said that, it might be the case that when the TF difference is not big (like in the case of Cypriot colleges) then students might act rationally (i.e. choose the best value for money HEI and not the cheapest) and this is partly supported by the numbers recruited for AC as opposed to other cheaper HEIs in Cyprus. Maringe *et al.’s* (2009) research supported this view that students “were more likely to be rational in their decisions, as long as the increased fees would add value to their HE experience” (p. 145).

**The low cost of living is also an important factor which pushes international students to study in Cyprus.** The low cost of living optional answer to the question C.4<sup>7</sup> was chosen by 12.3%. Similarly, in the question D.12<sup>8</sup> this factor was ranked second with an even higher percentage (14.5%). Although this involves Cyprus and not specifically its HEIs, it was worth mentioning that the international market for HE studies in Cyprus is very price sensitive and this sensitivity is also seen in the search for low cost of living destinations in addition to low TF. The importance of the low cost of living factor is also supported by analysing the questionnaire’s scaling statements in Part E. This factor was ranked fourth among scale 1 and scale 2 answers and first among scale 3 answers on the four most important reasons which influence students to choose Cyprus for their studies.

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<sup>7</sup> C.4: Why did you choose Cyprus for your studies?

<sup>8</sup> D.12: What are the factors which influence other students to come to Cyprus for their studies?

**The second most important factor according to the student questionnaire is the easy admissions and immigration procedures.** Although in questions C.8<sup>9</sup> the only available option given was the easy admissions, in question C.4<sup>10</sup> the easy immigration procedures were ranked third and that is why they are attached together for this research purposes. Additionally, the ‘easy admissions procedures’ were considered by 21 students as one of AC’s strengths in the questionnaire’s qualitative Part F. What is more, four out of five staff interviewees ranked the easier visa requirements as the third most important factor. From the questionnaire’s part E it can be seen that the easy university admissions and the easy immigration procedures were ranked second and third among scale 1 answers and first and third among scale 2 answers on the four most important reasons which influence students to study in Cyprus. Additionally, the ‘easy admissions’ was ranked first among scale 1 answers on the four most important factors which influence students in choosing to study at AC.

The research by Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003) on the reasons students choose UK for their HE studies placed the ease of university admissions and immigration procedures in the second place, which supports this research finding on this factor. Additionally, the research by Maringe and Carter (2007) showed that the second highest ‘pull’ factor drawing African students to British HE is the straight forward and easy application process with a high percentage of 82%. Although, their research was specifically directed towards British education, the importance of this factor can be clearly seen.

**The third factor according to students (13.1% from question C.8<sup>9</sup>) is the location of AC in the centre of the capital city.** This issue was also raised by two SMs as being important in influencing students’ decision to study at AC. This factor is considered important for students because of a number of other significant reasons which are attached to it. Some of these are the big range of accommodation options in the centre of Nicosia as opposed to the outskirts, the on-foot proximity of every facility students need, the absence of a need for public or private transportation and, last but not least, the close distance from available jobs. The importance of location is further boosted if the Cyprus’s weak public transportation system is taken into consideration. Adding to this point, Koni’s (2008) research shows that nearly 65% of students are either not satisfied or disappointed with Cyprus’s transportation system.

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<sup>9</sup> C.8: Which factors influenced you in your choice to study at AC?

<sup>10</sup> C.4: Why did you choose Cyprus for your studies?

Furthermore, in this research the location of the College at the centre of the city was ranked first among scale 3 answers on the four most important factors which influence students to study at AC, thus supporting this finding. In addition, analysing the questionnaire's Part E scaling statements reinforced the importance of TF in the students' choice of AC.

Moreover, AC's good location was preferred by 44 students (10.07%) as one of College's strengths in question F.21<sup>11</sup> (see table 4.29). In addition, on the question C.4<sup>12</sup>, 115 students (10.84%) chose Cyprus because of the comfortable climate while 107 (10.08%) because of the safe and friendly environment. Although this answer involved the reasons for choosing Cyprus for their studies, in general it proved that the location factor of the country, the city and the HEI are all important for students. While Pimpa's (2003) work on the most important choice relating to international education placed the choice of the academic programme in the first place, it also ranked the choice of country and city in the second and fourth place respectively. This strengthens the importance of a HEI's location in the choice and decision-making process.

As was shown above, Pimpa's (2003) work ranked the choice of the academic programme in the first place. **The results of this research showed that the courses on offer were ranked fourth according to students, with 12.4%.** With the help of Part F's analysis, this is translated as a good range of courses and good (quality) programmes of study. Unfortunately, the quality of education was not given as an optional answer to students but with the help of question C.4<sup>12</sup> and D.12<sup>13</sup> (where 10.2% and 12.9% of students respectively chose a Cyprus's HEI because of their high educational standards) it can be understood that this is among the five most important factors. Moreover, the high educational standards were ranked first among scale 1 answers and fifth among scale 2 answers on the four most important reasons which influenced students to choose Cyprus for their studies. However, for the interviewees, this was the second most important reason and four out of five of them agreed on this. It should also be mentioned that for students, the quality of the offered education is also

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<sup>11</sup> F.21: Which is AC biggest strength and weakness?

<sup>12</sup> C.4: Why did you choose Cyprus for your studies?

<sup>13</sup> D.12: What in your opinion are the factors which influence other students to come to Cyprus for their studies?

strengthened by the data from the observations and by the number of students acting as agents of the College, even if other HEIs offer higher commission.

Furthermore, Part F's question on AC biggest strength reveals that the quality of education in general, the good lectures, good facilities, etc. are considered by students among AC's biggest strengths. As is analysed further down, these views are passed on to prospective students by their friends and relatives studying at AC and therefore play a direct, as well as an indirect role in the decision of prospective students. Also, this finding is enhanced by Part E of the questionnaire. The courses on offer were ranked fourth among scale 1 answers, first among scale 2 answers and second among scale 3 answers on the four most important factors which influenced students in their choice of AC.

It is important to note that, the College's SMs considered AC's very good name and reputation the third most important factor. While 5.2% and 8% of students chose the image and reputation as factors which influenced their decision in question C.8<sup>14</sup>, **had these two factors been put together then they would have been the third most important factor and this would have backed-up AC's staff view.** What is more, the reputation was ranked third among scale 1 answers and fourth among scale 2 answers, while image was ranked sixth among scale 1 answers on the four most important factors which influenced students in their choice to study at AC. While this factor was not in the first place of this research, Mazzarol *et al.*'s (2001a, 2001b, 1997) research findings ranked the reputation of the institution in the first place of the influencing factors motivating student destination choice in Indonesia, Taiwan, India and China. Furthermore, Nguyen and LeBlanc's (2001) study on the effects of image and reputation on customer loyalty uncovered that both these variables on customer loyalty are strongly significant. Customer (student) loyalty is indirectly linked with the role of current and alumni students which is examined in the next section.

In order to give a more spherical view of this research objective, it was considered important and therefore the author analysed the factor of people influencing students' decision to study in Cyprus and AC. What's more, this analysis was needed for completing the recommendations Chapter. For the purposes of this research project, the

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<sup>14</sup> C.8: Which factors influenced you in your choice to study at AC?

factors other than people and the people were considered as two different areas of influence. Some researchers follow this pattern while others mix the two on the same formula to find the influencing factor. The research participants were not instructed to split the two since the idea was to get their unbiased views without the researcher's involvement. Hence, from the interview protocol question regarding the factors influencing student's choice, all interviewees raised the issue of agents as being the most important factor (or the most influential people). Additionally, during the observations students did not separate people from the other factors influencing their choice of AC.

**The literature review, the gathered observations, the interviews and the questionnaire strongly proved that the greatest students' influencer in choosing AC for their studies was the College's agent/representative.** In question C.6<sup>15</sup>, nearly 29.6% of AC's sample students identified the agent as the biggest influence, other than the students themselves, which was chosen by 33.9% of the students. Although the agents were the second most preferred answer after the students themselves, all the other gathered data suggest that the agent is the biggest influence. The third most chosen influence was 'friends and relatives' with 17.96% followed by students' parents with 8.9%. All interviewees expressed a strong view that the persons influencing students in choosing Cyprus and AC in particular are the agents/representatives of that institution. AC's student statistics on data for the years 2008 and 2009 reinforces this finding.

Moreover, Table 2.5 in the literature review section reinforces the previous finding. It illustrates that approximately 73% of students are recruited by AC's agents/representatives worldwide and only 4.5% of them apply without the help of an agent. The agents' big influence was also convincingly backed-up by the gathered observation data. However, it emerged that many students had serious complaints about their agents (AC's agents/representatives) and this is something which was taken seriously into consideration and is further analysed in the last Chapter.

This very interesting finding was in line with Koni's (2008) study since his research involved international students from other HEIs in Cyprus (please refer to page 81).

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<sup>15</sup> C.6: Who influenced your decision to study at AC?

Specifically, his findings showed that 31.6% of students ‘were convinced by an agent in their country’ to come and study in Cyprus. This was the predetermined option with the highest percentage. However, this unique for Cyprus finding contradicts most research studies for other countries or foreign HEIs. Mazzarol *et al.*'s (2001a, 2001b, 1997) studies on the influencing factor motivating students' destination choice in Indonesia, Taiwan, India and China placed the ‘agents recommendation’ in the third place with 62%, 47%, 30%, 35% respectively. Although it cannot be proved in this research, it seems that the agents' influence is linked with the level of the country's development and standard of living. The higher the development, the lower the influence of the agents since students have the means to get information by themselves (e.g. by having access to the internet).

#### **4.6.2 Research Objective 4 - Identify the current students and alumni's role in recruitment and marketing**

All interviewees expressed their belief that the role of current and alumni students in the recruitment and marketing is very important. The research findings suggested that the role of current students is however more important than that of alumni. Although one might expect that the WOM might not work between current students of AC and prospective students in their home countries because of the long distance between Cyprus and the student's home countries, the analysis suggests the opposite. This might be due to the technological means available to students nowadays, such as the email and the internet, very cheap voice-over IP (VOIP) calls on the internet (e.g. Skype), internet messaging platforms (MSN, Facebook), etc. Analysis of the WOM in section 2.5.4.4.1 revealed that the WOM is mostly associated with the service quality of HEIs. Since the objective of this research does not include the service quality of AC or the student experiences, this report dealt only with the significance of the WOM (as an influencing factor for HEI choice based on this research's findings and from other empirical studies). What is more, in section 5.4, some of the recommendations for implementation deal with how to best communicate the WOM (to prospective students) rather than generating the positive WOM which was not a research objective.

The WOM was also identified as important in the work by Gray *et al.* (2003) on the extent of influence on the choice of overseas tertiary institution. On a scale of 1 (little

influence) – 6 (great influence), students from Malaysia, Hong-Kong and Singapore had mean scores of 4.35, 4.17 and 4.37 respectively.

Two SMs identified the WOM between current and prospective students as playing a very important role in the recruitment of students. The WOM effect was also identified by 13.04% of the sample students in answering question C.9<sup>16</sup>. More importantly, 17.96% of the students admitted in question C.6<sup>17</sup> that they were influenced by their friends or relatives in their decision to study at AC and another 3.46% by AC alumni. These percentages are in line with the answers to question C.5<sup>18</sup> on the people influencing the decision of students to study in Cyprus (18.1% and 2.65% respectively), further strengthening their active role in the promotion and recruitment. The percentage of students influenced by their friends or relatives (most possibly other students studying in Cyprus, since not many people abroad know about the country and its HEIs) moves on the same lines as Koni's (2008) research. His research showed that 24.8% of students come to study in Cyprus because they have friends or relatives here.

Furthermore, the observations showed that many students visit the admissions department, because they want to start the application process on behalf of their friends and relatives back home who are interested in studying at AC. They do this because they admit they are happy with the College environment and they want to bring their friends and relatives to a risk-free HEI instead of sending them to another college that might be a little bit cheaper but unknown to them. The big number of current (the literature review showed that they were approximately 100 active ones) and ex-students acting as agents supports the view that not only AC's students influence other students to study at the College, but some of them play the role of the agent and actively recruit students directly. Table 2.6 shows that approximately 7% of students are recruited by other students studying at AC or other HEIs in Cyprus. AC needs to take into consideration the number of direct students (see Table 2.5) who are not recruited but are influenced by students. The observations also showed that although some students do not want to act as agents of AC, they still visit the admissions department and ask for application packs to be sent to different people back home, who expressed an interest in studying at AC. One reason for this is that they are not interested, they do not have the

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<sup>16</sup> C.9: Which of the following sources of information did you use before coming to study at AC?

<sup>17</sup> C.6: Who influenced your decision to study at AC?

<sup>18</sup> C.5: Who influenced your decision to study in Cyprus?

time or do not want the responsibility of acting as agents for their friends or relatives. Others simply do not want to cover the cost of postages since the College is willing to pay for it.

Maringe's (2006) study on the factors influencing subject choice showed that 28% of male students and 32% of female students believe that 'friends on the course' have a very strong influence on their course choice. While this is not the same as making a HEI choice, it still strengthens the view that friends already studying at a university/college have some sort of influence on the decisions of some of their friends, especially their close ones. This is especially true and makes the HEI choice and decision-making influence stronger, if the student currently studying at a HEI is overall happy with the institution. What is more, according to the research by Moogan and Baron (2003), "mature students did not refer to parents as a source of reference/information, but would use friends or ex-colleagues" (p. 279). Although it did not specify whether these friends or ex-colleagues were current students or graduates, it is logical to assume that at least some of them were current students or graduates of various HEIs. The parents' limited influence is also shown in this research (question C.6<sup>19</sup>) with only 54 students (8.90%) acknowledging that they were influenced by them in their choice of AC.

#### **4.6.3 Research objective 5 - Determine how the behaviour/conduct by key members of the recruitment staff affects recruitment**

All admissions staff interviewees acting as recruiters agreed that their role is very important and greatly influences the number of students recruited. However, it was very interesting to find out that their roles were mostly associated with visiting the College's agents and representatives and supporting them in their promotion and recruitment and not in the direct recruitment of students. Moreover, interviewees did not give emphasis on the direct contact with students or their parents as most people might expect. One explanation is the fact that as a College, we have not been regularly attending many educational fairs/exhibitions, organising school visits, etc. Therefore, the College officers are not in direct contact with students. In addition, most admissions officers do not promote the College or start recruiting in a country without the help of an agent. In other words, very rarely will a College student recruiter place adverts, interview

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<sup>19</sup> C.6: Who influenced your decision to study at AC?



students or organise a presentation by himself/herself. Consequently, in most cases, the agent is the middleman between AC and prospective students and that is why most interviewees have placed more emphasis on their relationship with agents/College representatives and on how this influences the recruitment.

The fact that the admissions officers depend, to a great extent, on the agent is also seen by the number of applications received by agents, as opposed to student direct applications (Table 2.5). In addition, from question C.9<sup>20</sup>, it can be seen that only 7.02% of AC's sample students attended a presentation by a College admissions officer, while the rest received no information from College staff. On the other hand, as the observations clearly showed, this dependence on agents comes at a cost. It leads to many students complaining about the service and quality of agents, but most importantly to the wrong and misleading information that many students claim they got from their agents.

The students on the other hand have expressed their need to meet the College's admissions officers before choosing a college/university. On question D.13<sup>21</sup>, 35.41% (278) chose the internet, 15.16% (119) chose the agent/representative and 14.27% (112) chose 'Meet a College admissions officer'. In other words, students have almost equally expressed the view that the agents are as important in providing information about a HEI as the admissions officers. This finding was taken seriously into consideration and is furthered discussed in the final Chapter.

The interviews and the observations showed that the admissions SMs' character, personality and actions, both personal and professional, play an important role in the recruitment of students. However, this is even more crucial since the recruiting results usually depend on the good or bad working relationship or cooperation between two people: the admissions SM who visits a specific country on the one hand, and the agent and owner of the recruiting company on the other hand. The relationship between these two people plays an important role, and in some cases the most important one in recruitment. Interviewees mentioned strong friendships being created between agents and themselves. Although no interviewee mentioned it for obvious reasons, the

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<sup>20</sup> C.9: Which of the following sources of information did you use before coming to study at AC?

<sup>21</sup> D.13: Which is the most important source of information which would better work for you before choosing a college/university?

researcher believes that there might also be problems in these relationships simply because these two people may not like each other. This relationship can be characterised as putting all the eggs in one basket. Therefore diversification (rotating SMs to recruit from different countries) is needed to minimise the risk of these relationships being unproductive. This is further explored in the last Chapter.

Admissions SMs seem not only to know that agents are the key players in recruitment, but seem to want this to continue, arguing that although it is not ideal to base most of AC's recruitment on agents it is necessary to continue this. Otherwise, agents will simply recruit students for other HEIs in Cyprus. In answering the question as to the best source of information that would better promote AC, their views were equally divided into the following: a. agents, b. presentations/interview sessions by admissions SMs but with the agent's help and c. friends or relatives of students who are studying in Cyprus. The results were similar when interviewees were asked as to the source of information that students actually use before coming to AC (Table 4.32).

#### **4.6.4 Research Objective 6 - Identify the strengths and weaknesses of AC**

The importance of the level of TF for the international students studying in Cyprus was encountered once again in the analysis of the findings for this research objective. It should be emphasised that all student replies which are summarised in Table 4.29 were not chosen from a predetermined range of answers because the researcher wanted to get the unbiased views of the sample students. When answering Part F's qualitative open-ended questions on the strengths of AC, 65 students (out of 437) or 14.87% identified that AC's strength is the reasonable TF. In the second and third position students chose the good lectures (12.81%) and the good facilities (12.13%) with an almost equal percentage. The fourth most preferred reply on AC's strengths was the helpful and friendly staff with 11.67%. The good location came in the fifth place with 10.07% followed by the high education level with 8.92%.

On the other hand, the staff interviewees placed the reasonable TF as the second best strength of the College. The first one according to all of them was the very good name and reputation that AC enjoys both in Cyprus and abroad, with years of experience in international recruitment. The third most chosen strength was the quality of its

programmes of study and the fourth the good location of the College right in the centre of Nicosia. Lastly, AC's staff identified the good commission structure that we give to College's agents as one of the College's strengths. Moreover, the observations strengthened the view that the College's good name and reputation, as a result of its good quality education, is known to students, is taken into consideration by them and is considered one of AC's strengths. In addition, students have a strong interest in the College's developments like the accreditation of more programmes of study which supports the view that the quality of education and its recognition in Cyprus and abroad is important for them.

Putting together all these views on all three DCTs, it could be concluded that AC possesses the following strengths which were not necessarily ranked according to their importance:

1. Reasonable TF which are considered very good value for money (good facilities, accredited programmes of study, etc.);
2. Quality education which is considered by both students and SMs equivalent to the level of education offered by other universities in Cyprus;
3. A good name and reputation, both in Cyprus but especially abroad, which was created after years of successful recruitment practice abroad;
4. A good location for international students because of its proximity to available accommodation, offered jobs, etc.;
5. A good commission structure for agents and students of AC.

In terms of weaknesses, fewer students (308) identified any weaknesses as compared to the number of students (437) who identified AC's strengths and this by itself is considered an advantage. According to 55 out of 308 of AC students (17.86%), the staff of AC are not helpful and do not pay attention to international students. Some expressed complaints about the service they received from the College reception. This negative point about the College can also be drawn from the suggestions for improvement section of the questionnaire. According to 76 students (12.77%), the second most preferred suggestion was 'care more for your students and be more helpful'. The second weakness according to its frequency was the fact that AC has too many extra charges, other than the TF. These include charges for the issue of transcripts, recommendation

letters, late returning of library books, etc. The third weakness expressed by 35 students (11.36%) was that AC fees are high (although lowering the fees was students' first suggestion for improvement from the relevant section of the questionnaire and not the third) and the fourth weakness (8.77%) that AC does not have enough facilities.

Each interviewee raised different weaknesses. For example, the fact that AC does not possess the university status or that some students considered AC to be in the middle between private universities and small colleges has some negative effects in the recruitment, according to some interviewees. However, these weaknesses and others raised by interviewees were not shared by the students' themselves.

Nevertheless, the observations revealed one serious weakness which is the quality of AC's agents worldwide and the better selection and control of them. This was also raised in the suggestions for improvement section where 12 students suggested that AC should 'find better agents who do not give false or misleading information'.

Below is a summary of AC's weaknesses gathered from all three DCT:

1. It seems that some of AC's SMs behaved to students in an inappropriate manner. They do not genuinely care for them and do not really help them solve their problems.
2. Although some students found AC's fees reasonable with an overall good value for money, others found them high. This can be explained by the fact that some students came from more wealthy families and found the College fees reasonable as compared to the universities in Cyprus or abroad, while others might compare its fees with the fees of smaller colleges in Cyprus and found them high. It is important to note that 65 students believed the fees are reasonable as opposed to 45 who believed they are high. The extra charges are also one of AC's weaknesses according to students something which other, smaller in size and number of students Colleges do not charge.
3. The agents of the College would do anything just to recruit a student for AC. This means that in doing this, some are misleading students about possible jobs, misinforming them about Cyprus, etc. The College does not have a quality monitoring mechanism and is not strict as to authorising new agents.

4. The facilities of the College satisfied 53 students while 27 complained that these were not enough. It is true that AC's facilities cannot be compared to those of other universities in Cyprus but these are directly associated with a higher level of TF.

**Table 4.34 – Main triangulated findings and empirical support**

Research Objective	Main Triangulated Findings	Empirical Support (where applicable)				
1. Identify from the relevant literature current trends in the international HE setting affecting HEIs and transforming the education world as we know it today	1. Marketisation and Government Intervention, 2. Globalisation, 3. Internationalisation 4. Europeanisation	The analysis of the literature in meeting this research objective was carried out in section 2.4				
2. Identify from other relevant empirical studies the factors influencing international students' decisions with specific reference to the factors infl. their mob. around the globe	The main findings of these studies could not be briefly summarised here. These were presented in Table 2.18.	The analysis of the major empirical research studies was carried out in section 2.5.4.				
3a. Factors influencing AC international students' choices	1. Affordable TF 2. Easy admissions and immigration procedures 3. Location 4. Good range of courses and good quality of the programmes of study 5. Image and Reputation	1. Leslie and Brinkman (1987), St. John (1990a, 1990b), St. John, Oescher, and Andrieu (1992), and Somers (1992), Shah <i>et al.</i> (1999), Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003), Gray <i>et al.</i> (2003), Maringe (2006) 2. Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003), Maringe and Carter (2007) 3. Moogan and Baron (2003), Pimpa (2003), Maringe (2006) 4. Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003), Pimpa (2003), Gray <i>et al.</i> (2003), Maringe (2006) 5. Mazzarol <i>et al.</i> (1997), Mazzarol <i>et al.</i> (2000), Mazzarol <i>et al.</i> (2001a), Mazzarol <i>et al.</i> (2001b), Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003), Moogan and Baron (2003), Gray <i>et al.</i> (2003)				
3b. People influencing AC international students' choices	1. Agents/representatives 2. Students themselves 3. Friends and relatives (mainly in Cyprus) 4. Parents	1. Mazzarol <i>et al.</i> (1997), Mazzarol <i>et al.</i> (2001a), Mazzarol <i>et al.</i> (2001b), Gray <i>et al.</i> (2003), Konis (2009) 2. Moogan and Baron (2003), Gray <i>et al.</i> (2003) 3. Moogan and Baron (2003), Gray <i>et al.</i> (2003), Konis (2009) 4. Mazzarol <i>et al.</i> (1997), Mazzarol <i>et al.</i> (2001a), Mazzarol <i>et al.</i> (2001b), Moogan and Baron (2003), Gray <i>et al.</i> (2003)				
4. Current students and alumni's role in recruitment and marketing	1. Current students and alumni's role is very important and is further supported by the WOM strong effect. 2. WOM can have both positive and negative effects 3. Big number of students who act as agents further strengthens their important role					
5. Determine how the behaviour by key members of the recruitment staff affects recruitment	The behaviour by key members of staff greatly influences the number of students recruited. This is because most recruiters' performance is associated and in some cases depended on the good or bad relationship with AC's agents.					
6. AC strengths and weaknesses	<table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center; width: 50%;">Strengths</td> <td style="text-align: center; width: 50%;">Weaknesses</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1. Reasonable TF 2. Quality education 4. Good name and reputation 5. Good location 6. Good commission structure</td> <td>1. Some SM do not behave to students in the most appropriate manner 2. Some students consider AC's TF high 3. Absence of a quality monitoring mechanism for agents 4. Unsuitable and limited facilities</td> </tr> </table>	Strengths	Weaknesses	1. Reasonable TF 2. Quality education 4. Good name and reputation 5. Good location 6. Good commission structure	1. Some SM do not behave to students in the most appropriate manner 2. Some students consider AC's TF high 3. Absence of a quality monitoring mechanism for agents 4. Unsuitable and limited facilities	
Strengths	Weaknesses					
1. Reasonable TF 2. Quality education 4. Good name and reputation 5. Good location 6. Good commission structure	1. Some SM do not behave to students in the most appropriate manner 2. Some students consider AC's TF high 3. Absence of a quality monitoring mechanism for agents 4. Unsuitable and limited facilities					

#### **4.7 Research conclusions and recommendations for changes in the marketing and recruitment practices**

The ultimate aim of this research project was to find out the reasons students choose Cyprus and AC for their studies and propose necessary changes that would induce an increase in AC's international student intake. This will inevitably increase the chances for survival within the highly competitive environment of the private HEIs in Cyprus.

The existing practices of the admissions department as well as environmental factors of the higher educational setting in Cyprus (which were analysed in Chapter 1 and 2) were blended together with the findings of this project before arriving at specific as well as practical recommendations. The changes suggested were carefully considered in order to make a real impact in the admissions department's results. Moreover, these changes are both realistic and easily applied to AC's admissions environment. All the conclusions of this research and the recommendations for changes in the marketing and recruitment practices of AC are included in the last Chapter. The last Chapter includes the answers to the last two research objectives as they are laid down in section 1.6.

## CHAPTER 5

### LIMITATIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Review of Study

The aim of this CS research was to determine and study the factors influencing international students' decisions in choosing a Cyprus's HEI, namely AC, and based on them suggest changes in its recruitment and marketing practices. The first part of the aim of this study was accomplished by reviewing the available relevant literature, distributing a questionnaire to all AC international students, interviewing AC SMs who are responsible for the recruitment of students and acting as a participant observer in the admissions department. Each one of these four means of gathering information, which were both qualitative and quantitative in nature, helped the author view this study from a different angle, answer his research questions and fulfil the first part of his research goal.

The significance of this research study lies in the fact that it was the first of its kind to be carried out for any Cyprus's HEI. It therefore established and contributed to the understanding of the factors that 'pull' students to Cyprus and its academic institutions. What was attempted by this study was not only to identify these factors but to study them. Assessing these factors helped AC develop more effective international student recruitment and marketing strategies and techniques that could increase its students' intake which was the second part of the aim of this research study. In order for this to be achieved, environmental and external factors of the HE setting in Cyprus, as well as the students' views which influence their decisions in choosing a HEI had to be taken into consideration.

What follows are the limitations of this project which were somehow expected by the researcher. This is followed by the main conclusions of this study which are matched with the research objectives. The next section presents the recommendations which provide answers to the research question as to the ways AC can change its marketing and recruitment policy in order to increase its student intake. Lastly, the author gives a brief reflection of his personal learning by undertaking this research journey as a professional in this field.



## 5.2 Limitations

Certain limitations were evident even at the initial stage of this research study. Firstly, although the number of the sample students participating in the questionnaire was quite big, they were all AC students and not students of any other HEI in Cyprus. International students from other HEIs would have added to the validity of some of the questions (other than the ones specifically involving AC). However, the researcher was unable to distribute the questionnaire to other institutions. A written permission from the Directors of these HEIs was hard to get, as some of the information extracted from this research would reveal information that they would not like to share with a competing HEI. In spite of this, the validity of the research was not affected since the number of students who filled out the questionnaire was quite big and the sample was statistically significant (see Table 4.1 and section 4.3).

Secondly, although the number of students participating in this research was sufficient, the same cannot be said about the number of interviewed SMs. Altogether, five admissions SMs were interviewed. In spite of the fact that this number was relatively small, it included the views of all the AC SMs who travel abroad for recruitment purposes. It was not considered necessary to get the views of other members of staff simply because they had no experience on the research topic and they were not actively recruiting for AC. Therefore, the only ones who could provide valuable information about the purpose of this research were the five chosen ones.

Thirdly, the possibility of researcher bias is always present when conducting studies where there is an insider researcher/worker. Some might say that there may be bias in many stages of this research that may arise from either the researcher or the other participants of this research (students, SMs). In order to safeguard the objectivity of this study, reflexivity (Cohen *et al.*, 2007) was applied in every step of this work-based research (see section 3.5). More specifically, in creating the questionnaire, the researcher examined the literature on other research studies (see Table 2.18) conducted by various authors on the same topic. This helped him in gathering all the identified factors which influence choice and decision-making. Thus, possible factors and questions were added that the researcher did not have in mind before this literature review. Furthermore, after structuring the questionnaire and the interview protocol, he

asked other AC senior SMs, as well as academics and people who knew the subject of the research to critically comment on the objectivity of his work.

The difficult part of the research was to make sure that the participants would provide as valid and unbiased answers as possible. Knowing that the students would feel obliged to give favourable answers if they were interviewed, it was decided to distribute a questionnaire instead, in order to get more accurate answers to the research questions. Also, the researcher made sure that the students' anonymity and confidentiality (Bell, 2006) would not be at risk in any way if they decided optionally to write their name and student number. Now, regarding SMs who were interviewed, there was an effort by the researcher to cover the whole range of questions relevant to the research topic in the interviews and not only the ones which supported the researchers' point of view. Moreover, the interviewees were uninfluenced and their answers were not led in any way. Most important was the fact that the interviews were conducted in the friendliest and most relaxed way so that the interviewees would not try to provide any favourable answers. This is closely related to the way the researcher manages the admissions department in which people are made to feel free to talk to him honestly about every aspect of their work. Therefore, the author believes that people were unbiased in their replies regarding the topic of the research. Overall, his dual role as an insider researcher did not affect the bias of the research. On the contrary, he made use of his experience in this field in order to conduct this work-based research project in the best possible way and meet his research objectives.

In addition, although it would be better to do the research on prospective students and not current students already studying at AC, this was not possible. This is because the researcher could not travel to many countries, meet with prospective students of AC and distribute questionnaires. This would have been very difficult, time-consuming and the number of prospective students participating would have been very small to be considered a statistically significant sample. Also, there would be an issue of validity if the researcher asked prospective students to complete the questionnaire at his presence. Moreover, it would be difficult to distribute a questionnaire through AC agents' network. This is because very few would bother asking their 'customers' to complete it and send it back to the College. Additionally, as this research suggests, many students are complaining about the quality of the agents and would like to see a more direct

contact with the College. Therefore, even if the agents would manage to get some completed questionnaires, the researcher would question their validity.

Lastly, the researcher understands that conducting personal interviews with all students would probably reveal more accurate data, thus avoiding mistakes, confusion and misunderstanding (e.g. like in the case of the scale questions). However, this would require considerably more time and resources to arrange and conduct the interviews. Furthermore, the students' replies would not have been as valid as they are now since students would feel less comfortable to answer all the questions in the way they wanted. Therefore, since the validity of the students' opinions was vital to the success of this study it was decided to avoid the interviews with students and proceed with the questionnaire.

### **5.3 Conclusions**

This research study had seven research objectives as they were laid down in section 1.6. A brief account of the conclusions from the major findings drawn from this research study is listed below. The recommendations section which follows is based on these major conclusions and gives answers to the last two research objectives.

**Research objective 1 - Identify from the relevant literature current trends in the international HE setting affecting HEIs and transforming the education world as we know it today;**

The analysis of the literature in meeting this research objective was carried out in section 2.4. The examination of the literature revealed four important trends in the international HE setting which are directly linked with the main purpose of this research. These four trends which were identified and analysed in the literature review section are the following: Marketisation and government intervention, Globalisation, Internationalisation and Europeanisation.

**Research objective 2 - Identify from other relevant empirical studies the factors influencing international students' decisions with specific reference to the factors influencing their mobility around the globe;**

The analysis of the major empirical research studies on the factors influencing international students' decisions was carried out in section 2.5.4. The main findings of these studies (which could not be briefly summarised here) were presented in Table 2.18.

**Research Objective 3 - Identify the factors and the people influencing AC international students' choices;**

Based on this research, the factors that influence international students' decisions in choosing AC (and Cyprus) are the following:

1. The TF charged, which are much lower compared to the TF charged by other HEIs based in more popular educational destinations e.g. UK and USA;
2. The easy admissions and immigration procedures, which result in a bigger percentage of prospective students studying in Cyprus as opposed to other more well-known destinations;
3. The location of the HEI, which is directly associated with the walking distance available accommodation and part-time jobs for students. This is particularly important since most students cannot afford to buy a car or a motorcycle and the public transportation system in Cyprus is very weak;
4. The good range of courses offered and the good quality of the programmes of study;
5. The image and reputation of the institution.

Furthermore, the people that influence international students' decisions in choosing AC are the following:

1. The agents (by far the most influential people regarding students' decisions);
2. The students themselves;

3. The friends and relatives of prospective students, and especially the ones that are living and studying in Cyprus;
4. The students' parents.

**Research objective 4 - Identify the current students and alumni's role in recruitment and marketing;**

This research showed that the role of the alumni and especially of the current students is very important and is increasing in importance, as the technological means available to students are improving. The big number of current AC students acting as agents (7% of students are recruited by other students) is one of the points which supports their important role. Moreover, the WOM effect (either from people in Cyprus or in the students' home country), which was chosen by 13.04% of AC's students, as a source of information for AC, as well as the students' friends and relatives (in Cyprus) which was chosen by 17.96% of its sample students, as the people who influence them to choose AC, adds to the importance of their role. The observations also shed some light to the number of current students who sent information about Cyprus and AC to their friends and relatives in their home countries. Moreover, some alumni represent the College and recruit students for AC, some on a more casual and others on a more professional basis.

**Research objective 5 - Determine how the behaviour/conduct by key members of the recruitment staff affects recruitment**

This study indicated that the behaviour of key members of staff who are responsible for the recruitment of students at AC greatly affects the number of students recruited. The interviews, as well as the observations illustrated that their character, personality and actions, both personal and professional, affects AC's recruitment. This is even more important when these members of staff travel abroad for recruitment and represent AC exclusively. Their role is even more significant, as the College depends more on its agents than on the direct student recruitment. Therefore, the good or bad relationships between the admissions SM in a specific country and AC's local agent/representative are directly linked with the number of students recruited.

### **Research objective 6 - Identify the strengths and weaknesses of AC**

The analysis of mainly the student questionnaire and the staff interviews revealed that AC biggest strengths are the following:

1. The reasonable TF and their good value for money;
2. The quality of the offered education;
3. The good name and reputation both in Cyprus but especially abroad;
4. The good location right in the centre of the city and its proximity to available accommodation, part-time jobs and various social events around the city;
5. The good commission structure offered to agents.

In terms of weaknesses, students and SMs identified the following:

1. The SMs' behaviour (some students complain that some SMs do not behave to students in the most appropriate manner);
2. High TF (some students find AC's TF high compared to other smaller HEIs in Cyprus);
3. Absence of a quality monitoring mechanism for agents (the agents give wrong and misleading information in order to recruit students for AC. The College does nothing to prevent or stop the agents who act unprofessionally);
4. Unsuitable and limited facilities (some students expressed dissatisfaction with the facilities offered by the College).

### **5.4 Recommendations for implementation**

The findings of this research clearly demonstrate that the market for Cyprus's HEIs is very price sensitive. However, this does not simply mean that AC should lower its fees in order to attract more students. As Maringe *et al.* (2009) advocate "The future of HE lies not so much in increasing or decreasing fees, but in encouraging young people to acquire level 3 qualifications" (p. 157). Below you will find eight practical recommendations which emerged from this research study which can be easily implemented at AC. These will directly or indirectly increase the international student recruitment. Therefore AC's management/shareholders, as one of the signed parties of the learning agreement, will be directly benefited from these changes. In the last section,

a brief reflection of the researcher's personal learning is presented, as the other signed party of this agreement.

### **1. Advertise the availability of scholarships to prospective students abroad after registering at AC**

The admissions department does not promote to international prospective students the scholarships that are available to them after registering at AC. One explanation for this is that these scholarships are under the responsibility of a different department (Administration and Finance Department) and the admissions SMs are not instructed to advertise these abroad. For example, a prospective student gets a discount on the TF if he/she pays in advance for two semesters instead of one. The student knows about this 'early payment' discount since it is written on the relevant pricelist that is distributed by the admissions department. However, after his/her first academic year, this student is also eligible for another scholarship based on his/her nationality. AC offers these scholarships to old students in order to keep them financially happy and help them complete their course (Diploma or Bachelor) and not quit because of financial problems. In addition, these scholarships help AC attract new students from other colleges, who want to pay less than the TF of the private universities and study in an accredited course.

However, although these scholarships are a big selling point for the College, they are not known to new students during the application stage. If these were known to students they might favourably alter their decisions of studying at a HEI which offers lower fees. Since the 'price' factor is the most important one for choosing a HEI, AC should promote these scholarships. The existing pricelist which mentions nothing about these very important scholarships gives a false picture about the total TF students will be asked to pay for the whole duration of their course as compared to other HEIs in Cyprus. Therefore, the relevant department should prepare a leaflet with all available scholarships for different nationalities after students come to Cyprus and ask the admissions department to distribute it to all the markets internationally. Prospective students would then be able to estimate correctly how much their Diploma or Bachelor degree would cost in a two or four year period. Even if the initial AC TF might seem

higher than those of the other private colleges, promoting the discounted TF for the subsequent years will help AC become more competitive.

## **2. Advertise to prospective international students the percentage of students from previous semesters who earned admission at AC and got a visa for Cyprus**

The second factor that influences students to come to Cyprus and its HEIs is the easy admissions and immigration procedures. Students from third or developing countries consider applying successfully to a HEI, as well as succeeding in the application for obtaining a visa, very hard to achieve. Both these procedures make students feel anxious and stressed out. During their recruitment trips abroad, AC's admissions staff should give emphasis on the fact that the application procedures for a HEI admissions and for a Cypriot visa are much easier than what students might have in their minds. Moreover, in order to support this, the admissions department should prepare a statistical table, for each country separately, illustrating the percentage of successful candidates of both procedures. This will make students feel more relaxed. This is even more important if it is taken into consideration that many students are being rejected for a student visa from other countries or do not earn admission to HEIs based in more well-known destinations. These students are eager to study abroad. Promoting this statistical table mentioned above will encourage them to apply, even if Cyprus and its HEIs are not their number one choice.

## **3. Use alumni or current students in trips abroad**

It is clear from the findings that students trust other students more easily than admissions officers and especially agents. Moreover, according to the literature, prospective students are influenced by the positive WOM coming from current students. Also, admissions officers admitted that having alumni or current students talking to prospective students about their experiences from Cyprus and AC is very important and would enhance the recruitment. Furthermore, many current students are acting as recruiting agents for AC. Based on the findings of this research, AC admissions officers should use the services of alumni or current students in their recruitment trips. With the help of the student affairs office, each admissions officer should find a few good students from each nationality who are satisfied with AC and who might be already acting as agents of the College (therefore will know the relevant procedures better) and



ask them to escort them in their trip to the student's home country. Alternatively, admissions officers should check the alumni database, find and contact suitable graduates who would be willing to take part in a recruiting trip to their home country. In the case of current students, they will be benefited from this by getting a free return ticket to their country. In the case now of both alumni and current students they will earn a fee for their services.

The students (alumni or current) will talk to prospective students during presentations about life in Cyprus and AC and clearly explain the relevant procedures, as well as the different rules and regulations. What is more, these students will answer the questions prospective students have. Using the services of students during trips abroad will also help reduce the number of complaints students make about their agents who give them misleading information.

#### **4. Promote the College to current students internally**

AC has never in the past promoted its programmes of study and the College in general to existing students. However, as it was shown in Table 2.6, an average of 7% of students are recruited by AC's existing students and by students studying at other HEIs in Cyprus. Also, given the fact that this research findings showed that the WOM is very important among students, the College should introduce this internal promotion. Eventually, some of the information given to current AC students will be 'transmitted' to prospective students abroad and to students of other HEIs in Cyprus, since the latter visit AC to see their friends or get information in order to transfer to AC. Therefore, the College should take advantage of these AC's ambassadors (i.e. the current students) for the promotion of the College abroad.

More specifically, the College should do the following:

1. Prepare posters which will be placed in various key places of AC promoting the reasons why students should choose AC;
2. Set-up one or two informational kiosks (specially formulated furniture) which will have all of AC's promotional materials. AC students and students of other HEIs can get the information they want faster, easier and without any problem. This is needed because some students come to the admissions department to get

informational packs, however others might feel shy to come or they do not know how to get this information or might want promotional material when the office is closed;

3. Prepare a leaflet which will specifically address the financial benefits students have for recruiting students for AC;
4. Advertise the accredited courses and their benefits on the notice boards;
5. Advertise the various cooperation programmes AC has with other HEIs at various levels e.g. Erasmus exchange, transfer agreements, etc. on the notice boards;
6. Prepare posters on the recognition AC has acquired from accrediting bodies (e.g. CEEA) and other Ministries of Education abroad.

### **5. Increase direct student recruitment**

The admissions department has been counting heavily on the recruiting power of its agents. That is why the percentage recruited through them is so high. However, the College should not continue putting all its eggs in the same basket but it should become more diversified in order to reduce its risk. It should increase its participation in a number of educational exhibitions, which take place in the countries it is mostly interested in (based on the quality of students who are interested in studying abroad, the presence of a Cyprus diplomatic mission and the tradition Cyprus's HEIs have in that country). These exhibitions should be carefully chosen in order to maximise its return, which in this case would be to meet as many students interested in overseas studies. Moreover, we should advertise the College in a few foreign educational websites specialised in promoting studies abroad.

Furthermore, AC should contact foreign schools, colleges and universities in order to visit and give presentations about Cyprus's HE, the College and its programmes of study. During these visits, AC can also distribute its promotional leaflets and posters. Additionally, it can arrange meetings with the Directors and/or careers counsellors and analyse the advantages of their students studying in Cyprus and AC. It should also set up transfer agreements with some of these HEIs where their students would be transferred to the second or third year at AC after completing the course at their HEI successfully.

## **6. Achieve better selection of agents**

Although recruiting agents are AC's biggest strength in terms of their influencing power, this comes at a cost. The observations indicated that many students have serious complaints about AC's agents/representatives and express their dissatisfaction with the quality of the services they receive. Moreover, many of the emails AC receives from prospective students criticise the College's choice of agents. Therefore, AC should try to solve this problem by doing the following:

Firstly, agents should successfully complete the Agents' Questionnaire which can be found in Appendix 8. Based on this information, AC should introduce a better selection of agents based on certain criteria. These will be the following:

1. Years of experience in the educational field;
2. Number of students recruited in the past;
3. Countries the agent sends students to, as well as the HEIs he/she works with;
4. Experience working with other Cyprus's HEIs.

Additionally, the admissions department should verify the agent's credentials before authorising him/her to represent and recruit for AC. This can be done by contacting other HEIs abroad, who work with this agent, and ask for a reference letter or ask for answers to specific questions. In this way we can check from the agent's partner institution their performance, loyalty, honesty, etc.

## **7. Contact students directly**

Almost no one of AC's agents/representatives provides the prospective students' correspondence address on the application for admissions form but the one of their office. The same happens in the case of the email address. This prevents the College from contacting prospective students to inform them about their admission status and the registration procedure, or sending to them the 'Student's Handbook' publication (which is given out during the registration period). This publication provides a lot of information about all aspects of their student life, that is:

- a. travelling to Cyprus;
- b. on arrival at Larnaca airport;
- c. housing and accommodation;
- d. first steps at AC;
- e. the rules and regulations of the Migration Department and the College;
- f. life in Cyprus; and
- g. student services and activities.

The researcher's project research realised that students have a need to be informed by the College either through visits of its officers or through receiving informational materials and publications in order to 'learn the truth'. That is why more than 14% of AC's students want to meet a College admissions officer and more than 12% claim that receiving a College publication would help in their decision to choose a HEI. This need is even more important since the observations indicated that many prospective students know that most of the agents are providing them with misleading information. Therefore, getting an official publication or receiving any form of communication directly from AC is imperative to them and will influence their HEI study decision.

The admissions department should request that agents give them the students' home addresses, something which is not done today. AC should explain to the agents that although it needs these addresses, it will continue to send most of the important certificates to them directly (e.g. Certificate of Admission, Certificate of Account) so that these do not get lost. Also, the College needs to reassure them that it will not in any way try to change their role as the 'middle man' between the College and its customers. However, and if necessary AC needs to be able to communicate with the students through email and to send some materials to them directly. In this way it will reduce the complaints from its students that AC's agents mislead them since they will have all the important information in their hands.

### **8. Distribute the 'What's on near AC' promotional leaflet**

Since the location of AC right in the centre of the capital city of Cyprus is considered one of its advantages and influences the international students' decision as to the choice of a HEI, the College should take advantage of this. The marketing department should prepare a promotional leaflet highlighting the location advantage of the College. This

publication can also list and map the many facilities for students, which are located within walking distance from the College and the location of the College hostel. This publication can also briefly mention the many advantages of living and studying in the centre of Nicosia. The marketing department can also try to find a sponsor for this publication and some companies that would like to be advertised in this ‘What’s on near AC’ leaflet.

### **5.5 The importance of these findings and recommendations**

Tuition-dependent private HEIs like AC expect to recruit a higher number of new students in order to secure their growth financially. The importance of this research is that, based on the findings of this research project, AC will have to change its recruitment and marketing policy, to accommodate the students’ views on a number of important issues. This practically means that AC can now adopt a more targeted approach in recruiting international students, something which was never done before in its history. The recommendations proposed in this project will bring immediate and noticeable change in the college and this will eventually lead to the ultimate goal which is to increase the international students’ intake.

Although this research concerns the international students of AC, many of the factors analysed and the methodology used is applicable to other academic institutions in Cyprus, and to a lesser extent, abroad. Also, other institutions may benefit from the findings of this study by identifying, comparing and evaluating their strengths and weaknesses in their recruitment and marketing actions. The researcher is positive that since the first step has been made and as the competition for international students gets tougher, other studies will follow.

## **5.6 The researcher's development in this research journey**

Beyond the impact this research project had and will have on AC and other HEIs in Cyprus and abroad, it also had a great impact on my own development, at a personal and professional level. Throughout the course of this project, I developed and improved a number of valuable skills. Most importantly for me, this research taught me a great deal about learning to think and search for practical solutions to problems or improvements that are needed in an organisation.

This research study made me improve my skills on how to develop a research strategy and methodology and locate different information resources. I understood better how to investigate and find the necessary information and data from primary and secondary sources of information, and evaluate different types of collected information in terms of their qualitative and quantitative characteristics. I also improved my ability to identify, use and analyse only relevant information and data for my project. Many times during the course of this research project I refined and re-synthesized the information I collected in order to get better and clearer results that would be meaningful to all interested parties. Moreover, I became more critical and analytical about the research results, something that I was encouraged to do throughout the course of this journey. Additionally, this research journey raised my awareness as to the importance of being ethical in the everyday business world. Furthermore, this research project for the doctorate in professional studies equipped me with a high level of motivation and management thinking in order to find answers to the research questions and eventually have an impact on the admissions department recruitment and marketing practices.

The many participants of this research, my doctoral degree supervisors, the university faculty and administration SMs, as well as others who, in one way or another, were involved in this research made me improve at an early stage my people's management skills, which helped me deal with the pressure of this study. Additionally, this study entailed constant interaction with a number of people commenting on this research which helped me improve my communication skills and was a valuable addition to my doctoral experience. The discussions with my peers throughout this research study helped me understand my own behaviour, how I influence others and how others influence me. These interactions also helped me study and understand many different

kinds of characters and personalities. This essential knowledge of understanding better different people's behaviour as well as mine proved to be very useful and remains a valuable asset for my future career.

This research journey made me understand the importance of obtaining the interested peoples' views in solving a problem. In many occasions while interacting with participants in this research I understood that they had different views from mine and that I could actually learn a lot by listening and then filtering different or opposing views. Moreover, this interaction taught me to avoid dominating discussions and allow students and SMs to present their points of view freely. This improved my ability to accept diversity and become a better listener. Moreover, this research improved my writing, as well as presentation skills which helped me present the results of my project in the best possible and meaningful way. Additionally, this research made me improve my language skills.

The experience I gained from this research project was invaluable and definitely unforgettable. The course provided me with many new skills, tools and frameworks which I am regularly using. Most importantly, it changed my way of thinking. I found the doctorate degree quite intensive, challenging and above all beneficial. With work-based learning I gained a completely new experience compared to my previous studies. Each one of them served its purpose but the latter made me understand that life is a constant on-going learning process which never ends. By undertaking this research I had a first-hand knowledge of the value behind the term **lifelong learning**<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup>...lifelong, voluntary, and self motivated pursuit of knowledge for either personal or professional reasons. As such, it not only enhances social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development, but also competitiveness and employability (Wikipedia ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lifelong\\_learning](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lifelong_learning))).

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Appendix 1 – Students' Questionnaire

**Questionnaire for international  
students studying at  
Americanos College, Cyprus**



**Complete this questionnaire and  
earn a FREE drink!**

**In order to get your drink, please hand in your completed questionnaire to Americanos College Admissions Department (situated on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor of the Blue Building) and get a coupon for a FREE drink (soft drink or juice) which you can get from the cafeteria.**

**Part A – Please complete/answer the following:**

1. When did you first come to Americanos College?

.....  
Month.....  
Year2. How many semesters did you study at Americanos College?  
(e.g. 0 if you are a new student, 1, 2 etc.)0  5-6 1-2  7-8 3-4  8+ 

3. Did you transfer from another college in Cyprus?

Yes

No



4. If yes, which one: .....

5. What is your programme of study?

Business Administration

International Business

Marketing

Human Resource Management

Computer Science

Management Information Systems

Hotel Management

Travel and Tourism Management

Culinary Arts

MBA

6. What level are you studying at?

Diploma

Higher Diploma

Bachelor Degree

Masters Degree

7. Which country do you come from? .....

8. Gender:

Male

Female

9. Age:

17-20

25-28

21-24

29+



**Part B – Please state your level of agreement or disagreement to these statements by ticking ✓ the most appropriate box using a 5-point Likert scale as follows:**

- 1 = Strongly disagree  
 2 = Disagree  
 3 = Neither agree nor disagree  
 4 = Agree  
 5 = Strongly agree

Please tick ✓ only one box for each statement.

	1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neither agree nor disagree	4 Agree	5 Strongly agree
Generally, I am satisfied with my overall experience in Cyprus					
I am satisfied with the social life in Cyprus					
I am satisfied with my overall experience at Americanos College?					
I am satisfied with the academic standards of Americanos College					
I am satisfied with the tuition fees charged for my programme of study					
Cypriots are friendly and hospitable					
Cypriots are racist					
Americanos College was the right choice for me					
Americanos College tuition fees are reasonable					
My studies in Cyprus will affect my future career					

**Part C - Please tick  $\sqrt$  only the answers to each question which apply to you:**  
**You can tick more than one answer**

1. Did you have any information about Cyprus before coming here?

	No
	Yes, but not much
	Yes, I got the information from:
	the internet (www)
	a travel and tourism exhibition/fair
	friends and relatives
	a television programme or a newspaper/magazine advert
	a representative of college/university in Cyprus

2. Why did you decide to study abroad? You can tick more than one answer

	The level of education in my country is low
	The course I wanted was not available in my country
	I had difficulty in gaining access to higher education in my country
	I want to get international experience in education
	I want to improve my English language skills
	I want to earn some money while studying and this would not have been possible if I had stayed in my country
	Other (please specify)

3. Which other countries did you think of studying in before deciding to come to Cyprus?

	USA
	UK
	Australia
	Canada
	New Zealand
	Ireland
	My country
	Other (please specify)

4. Why did you choose Cyprus for your studies? You can tick more than one answer  
**Because of Cyprus's**

	High educational standards
	Recognised qualifications worldwide
	Easy university admissions
	Easy immigration procedures
	Low cost of living
	Lower tuition fees compared to other education destinations
	Established population of international students
	Ease of finding employment during studies
	Well-known for hotel and catering programmes offering paid practical training
	Safe and friendly environment
	Comfortable climate
	Other (please specify)

5. Who influenced your decision to study in Cyprus? You can tick more than one answer

<input type="checkbox"/>	My agent
<input type="checkbox"/>	My teachers
<input type="checkbox"/>	My parents
<input type="checkbox"/>	My friends and relatives
<input type="checkbox"/>	My career advisor
<input type="checkbox"/>	Alumni (ex-students) of Americanos College
<input type="checkbox"/>	Myself
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (please specify)

6. Who influenced your decision to study at Americanos College?  
You can tick more than one answer

<input type="checkbox"/>	My agent
<input type="checkbox"/>	My teachers
<input type="checkbox"/>	My parents
<input type="checkbox"/>	My friends and relatives
<input type="checkbox"/>	My Career Advisor
<input type="checkbox"/>	Alumni (ex-students) of Americanos College
<input type="checkbox"/>	Myself
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (please specify)

7. Did you consider any other colleges/universities in Cyprus before deciding to study at Americanos College?

<input type="checkbox"/>	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes – if yes which college/university?

8. Which factors influenced you in your choice to study at Americanos College?  
You can tick more than one answer

<input type="checkbox"/>	Reasonable Tuition Fees
<input type="checkbox"/>	Easy admission
<input type="checkbox"/>	Its reputation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Accommodation provided
<input type="checkbox"/>	Courses on offer
<input type="checkbox"/>	Location (at the centre of the capital city)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Scholarships available after coming to Cyprus
<input type="checkbox"/>	Its image
<input type="checkbox"/>	Its facilities
<input type="checkbox"/>	Willing to accept my previous qualifications
<input type="checkbox"/>	Qualifications recognised worldwide
<input type="checkbox"/>	Well-known to future employers
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (please specify)

9. Which of the following sources of information did you use before coming to study at Americanos College? You can tick more than one answer

	Received a college publication (bulletin, International students guide etc)
	Searched the internet (WWW)
	Attended a fair/exhibition and got information about the College
	Saw an advertisement
	Attended a presentation by Americanos College admissions officer
	Word-of-mouth (friends, alumni etc)
	Promoted by Agent/Representative of the College in my country
	Other (please specify)

10. Who is financing your studies in Cyprus? Tick one or more if applicable

	Myself
	My parents
	My Relatives
	I took a loan from a bank
	I am sponsored by my company

**Part D - Please tick  $\surd$  only the answers to each question which apply to you.**

**You can tick more than one answer**

11. Which is the most important source of information which would better work for you before choosing a college/university? You can tick more than one answer

	College publications (bulletin, Students guide etc.)
	Internet (WWW)
	Meet a college/university admissions officer and learn more about that institution
	Fairs and exhibitions
	Print media (Newspapers and Magazines)
	Broadcast media (Television and radio)
	Agent/Representative office
	Other (please specify)

12. What in your opinion are the factors which influence other students to come to Cyprus for their studies? You can tick more than one answer

	High Educational standards
	Recognised qualifications worldwide
	Easy university admissions
	Easy Immigration procedures
	Low Cost of Living
	Ease of finding employment
	Well-known for hotel and catering programmes offering paid practical training during summer
	Safe and friendly environment
	Nice weather
	Other (please specify)

13. According to you, what is the best way for a higher education institution (college or university) to attract more international students? You can tick more than one answer

<input type="checkbox"/>	Offer lower tuition fees
<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide more scholarships
<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide better services
<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide better facilities
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have lower admission requirements
<input type="checkbox"/>	Better promotion and marketing
<input type="checkbox"/>	Attend fairs and exhibitions abroad
<input type="checkbox"/>	Authorise more agents and representatives
<input type="checkbox"/>	Visit schools and other higher education institutions and give presentations
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (Please specify)

14. Which according to you is the ideal country or countries for higher education studies?

You can tick more than one answer

<input type="checkbox"/>	Cyprus
<input type="checkbox"/>	USA
<input type="checkbox"/>	UK
<input type="checkbox"/>	Australia
<input type="checkbox"/>	Canada
<input type="checkbox"/>	New Zealand
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ireland
<input type="checkbox"/>	My country
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (please specify)

**Part E – Using a scale of 1-4 please complete the following statements:**

**Do not tick  $\surd$  next to the answers. Instead use the numbers 1 – 4 as follows:**

**(1) = The most important → (2) → (3) → (4) = Less important**

15. **On a scale of 1 - 4**, please rank the following factors which influence your decision to study abroad.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Choice of country
<input type="checkbox"/>	Choice of city
<input type="checkbox"/>	Choice of Higher Education Institution (College or University)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Choice of Programme of study

16. **On a scale of 1 - 4**, please rank the following factors which make students leave your country and search for other destinations for their studies.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Political
<input type="checkbox"/>	Economical
<input type="checkbox"/>	Low quality local higher education institutions (universities and colleges)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Not enough places in local higher education institutions (universities and colleges)

17. **On a scale of 1 - 4**, please rank the 4 most important reasons which influenced you to choose **Cyprus** for your studies.

**Because of Cyprus’s**

	High educational standards
	Recognised qualifications worldwide
	Easy university admissions
	Easy immigration procedures
	Low cost of living
	Lower tuition fees compared to other education destinations
	Established population of international students
	Ease of finding employment during studies
	Well-known for hotel and catering programmes offering paid practical training
	Safe and friendly environment
	Comfortable climate
	Other (please specify)

18. **On a scale of 1 - 4**, please rank the 4 most important factors which influenced you in your choice to study at **Americanos College**.

	Reasonable Tuition Fees
	Easy admission
	Its reputation
	Accommodation provided
	Courses on offer
	Location (at the centre of the capital city)
	Scholarships available after coming to Cyprus
	Its image
	Its facilities
	Willing to accept my previous qualifications
	Qualifications recognised worldwide
	Well-known to future employers
	Other (please specify)

19. **On a scale of 1 - 4**, please rank the 4 sources of information which would better work for you in choosing a college/university.

	College publications (bulletin, Students guide etc.)
	Internet (WWW)
	Meet a college/university admissions officer and learn more about that institution
	Fairs and exhibitions
	Print media (Newspapers and Magazines)
	Broadcast media (Television and radio)
	Agent/Representative office
	Other (please specify)

**Remember**

**Do not tick ✓ next to the answers. Instead use the numbers 1 – 4 as follows:**

**(1) = The most important → (2) → (3) → (4) = Less important**

**Part F – Please answer the following questions:**

20. How can Americanos College improve its image and reputation abroad?

.....

.....

.....

21. Which is Americanos College biggest strength and weakness?

Strength:

.....

.....

Weakness:

.....

.....

## Appendix 2 – Informed Consent Form (Students’ Questionnaire)

# PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH INFORMED CONSENT FORM

This questionnaire is part of a research project conducted by the Director of Admissions Mr. Adonis Americanos. Its purpose is to identify the factors which influenced your decision to choose Cyprus and Americanos College for your studies.

The answers to this questionnaire are strictly confidential. Your anonymity and non-traceability will not be at risk in any way. Therefore, we urge you to be as honest as possible. Your answers will help us improve Americanos College marketing and recruitment practices.

Tick one of the boxes below, complete the rest of the required information and return the form to the Admissions Department mailbox found in the admissions reception.

I have read the above carefully and:

I would like to participate in this research. I agree to complete the questionnaire.

I do not want to participate in this research.

.....  
Name  
(Optional)

.....  
Student No.  
(Optional)

.....  
Date

.....  
Signature



**Appendix 3 – Staff Informative Memo****INTERNAL MEMO**

**TO:** Admissions Department      **FROM:** Adonis Americanos  
Faculty Members

**DATE:** 9 October 2009      **RESPOND BY:** 15 October 2009

**SUBJECT:** Participation in Research – Informed Consent Form

---

Dear colleague

I would like to inform you that I will be carrying out a research project in order to find the factors which influence the international students' decision to study in Cyprus and Americanos College. This will help the college improve its recruitment and marketing policies and ultimately increase the number of students recruited.

**Participation**

In order to implement this research, I request the participation of a number of staff members of the college. Participation in this research means that participants will be asked to grant one or more interviews of up to one hour. During the interviews you will be free to decline to answer any question, to terminate the interview at any time and to require that any section or the whole of the notes taken to be deleted.

For the purpose of this research I will also take the role of a participant-as-observer. This simply means that I will observe the work at the Admissions department in order to get additional information that would help me in better answering my research questions. More specifically, the observations will cover your phone call communication as well as the emails exchanged with agents, students and their parents. Also, I will observe your everyday interaction with visiting students.

**Use of data**

The aim will be to eventually present the findings of the research along with the data collected. If requested so, I will refrain from using data, provided by you, if you consider it to be sensitive. You will be also given copies of any publications based on this research.

**Confidentiality and anonymity of participants**

All information acquired will be treated as confidential. Unless agreed otherwise, references in publications, talks, presentations etc will be anonymised and features which might make easy identification will be removed.

I would like to make it clear that you DO NOT have to participate in the above research if you do not wish to do so. If you decide not to participate in the above research, this will have NO negative implications on your job.

I would appreciate if you complete the enclosed form and return it to my mailbox by 15 October 2009.

## Appendix 4 – Informed Consent Form (Staff Interviews)

# PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH INFORMED CONSENT FORM

This interview is part of a research project conducted by the Director of Admissions Mr. Adonis Amerikanos. Its purpose is to identify the factors which influenced international students' decision to choose Cyprus and Amerikanos College for their studies.

This interview will be audio-recorded for better analysing what will be said. However feel free to request not to use the audio-recording device if for any reason you do not feel comfortable with it.

The answers to this interview are strictly confidential. Therefore, we urge you to be as honest as possible. Your answers will help us improve Amerikanos College marketing and recruitment practices.

Also, Mr. Adonis Amerikanos will take the role of the observer in the Admissions Department as explained in the internal memo of 9 October 2009. This will take place in the most discreet way.

Please tick one of the boxes below.

I have read the above carefully and:

- I would like to participate in this research. I agree to be interviewed.
- I agree to be observed.
- I do not want to participate in this research.

.....  
Name

.....  
Position

.....  
Signature

.....  
Date

## Appendix 5 – Protocol for Staff Interview Questions

### Protocol for Staff Interview Questions

Ask the interviewees for permission to use an audio recorder during the interview. Explain again what this research is about and why they are being interviewed.

- Please state your level of agreement or disagreement to these statements by ticking  $\surd$  the most appropriate box using a 5-point Likert scale as follows:

	1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neither agree nor disagree	4 Agree	5 Strongly agree
Generally, students are satisfied with their overall experience in Cyprus					
Students are satisfied with the social life in Cyprus					
Students are satisfied with their overall experience at Americanos College					
Students are satisfied with the academic standards of Americanos College					
Students are satisfied with the tuition fees charged for their programme of study					

- Why do students decide to study abroad in general?
- Which are for you the most popular countries among students for HE studies?
- Why do students choose Cyprus for their studies then?
- Who influences students' decision to study in Cyprus?
- Who influences their decision to study at Americanos College?

7. What is the role of current students and alumni in the recruitment of new international students?
8. In your opinion, can we use them in anyway for increasing our students' intake?
9. Which factors influence students in their choice to study at Americanos College?
10. Which sources of information do students use before coming to study at Americanos College?
11. Who is financing their studies in Cyprus?
12. Which is the most important source of information which would better promote Americanos College?
13. According to you, what changes in AC procedures or practices will help to attract more international students?
14. How can Americanos College improve its image and reputation abroad?
15. Which are Americanos College strengths and weaknesses?  
  
Strengths:  
  
Weaknesses:
16. Are there any final remarks you would like to add?

**Thank you for your time. I will present to you the findings of this research when it is over.**

## Appendix 6 - Sample Size Calculator Terms: Confidence Interval & Confidence Level

The **confidence interval** is the plus-or-minus figure usually reported in newspaper or television opinion poll results. For example, if you use a confidence interval of 4 and 47% percent of your sample picks an answer you can be "sure" that if you had asked the question of the entire relevant population between 43% ( $47-4$ ) and 51% ( $47+4$ ) would have picked that answer.

The **confidence level** tells you how sure you can be. It is expressed as a percentage and represents how often the true percentage of the population who would pick an answer lies within the confidence interval. The 95% confidence level means you can be 95% certain; the 99% confidence level means you can be 99% certain. Most researchers use the 95% confidence level.

When you put the confidence level and the confidence interval together, you can say that you are 95% sure that the true percentage of the population is between 43% and 51%. The wider the confidence interval you are willing to accept, the more certain you can be that the whole population answers would be within that range.

For example, if you asked a sample of 1000 people in a city which brand of cola they preferred, and 60% said Brand A, you can be very certain that between 40 and 80% of all the people in the city actually do prefer that brand, but you cannot be so sure that between 59 and 61% of the people in the city prefer the brand.

### Factors that Affect Confidence Intervals

There are three factors that determine the size of the confidence interval for a given confidence level:

- Sample size
- Percentage
- Population size

#### Sample Size

The larger your sample size, the more sure you can be that their answers truly reflect the population. This indicates that for a given confidence level, the larger your sample size, the smaller your confidence interval. However, the relationship is not linear (i.e., doubling the sample size does not halve the confidence interval).

#### Percentage

Your accuracy also depends on the percentage of your sample that picks a particular answer. If 99% of your sample said "Yes" and 1% said "No," the chances of error are remote, irrespective of sample size. However, if the percentages are 51% and 49% the chances of error are much greater. It is easier to be sure of extreme answers than of middle-of-the-road ones.

When determining the sample size needed for a given level of accuracy you must use the worst case percentage (50%). You should also use this percentage if you want to determine a general level of accuracy for a sample you already have. To determine the confidence interval for a specific answer your sample has given, you can use the percentage picking that answer and get a smaller interval.

### Population Size

How many people are there in the group your sample represents? This may be the number of people in a city you are studying, the number of people who buy new cars, etc. Often you may not know the exact population size. This is not a problem. The mathematics of probability proves the size of the population is irrelevant unless the size of the sample exceeds a few percent of the total population you are examining. This means that a sample of 500 people is equally useful in examining the opinions of a state of 15,000,000 as it would a city of 100,000. For this reason, The Survey System ignores the population size when it is "large" or unknown. Population size is only likely to be a factor when you work with a relatively small and known group of people (e.g., the members of an association).

The confidence interval calculations assume you have a genuine random sample of the relevant population. If your sample is not truly random, you cannot rely on the intervals. Non-random samples usually result from some flaw in the sampling procedure. An example of such a flaw is to only call people during the day and miss almost everyone who works. For most purposes, the non-working population cannot be assumed to accurately represent the entire (working and non-working) population.

**Source:** Creative Research Systems at <http://www.surveysystem.com/ssca>

## Appendix 7 - SPSS Output

### Part A – Demographics

**Semester student was registered at AC**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Spring	205	40.3	41.1	41.1
	Summer	109	21.4	21.8	62.9
	Fall	185	36.3	37.1	100.0
	Total	499	98.0	100.0	
Missing	System	10	2.0		
Total		509	100.0		

**Year student was registered at AC**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2002	1	.2	.2	.2
	2003	7	1.4	1.4	1.6
	2004	9	1.8	1.8	3.4
	2005	27	5.3	5.4	8.8
	2006	53	10.4	10.6	19.4
	2007	53	10.4	10.6	29.9
	2008	167	32.8	33.3	63.3
	2009	184	36.1	36.7	100.0
	Total	501	98.4	100.0	
Missing	System	8	1.6		
Total		509	100.0		

**Semesters studied at AC**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	61	12.0	12.1	12.1
	1-2	191	37.5	38.0	50.1
	3-4	130	25.5	25.8	75.9
	5-6	60	11.8	11.9	87.9
	7-8	27	5.3	5.4	93.2
	8+	34	6.7	6.8	100.0
	Total	503	98.8	100.0	
Missing	System	6	1.2		
Total		509	100.0		

**Transferred from another college**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	81	15.9	16.3	16.3
	NO	417	81.9	83.7	100.0
	Total	498	97.8	100.0	
Missing	System	11	2.2		
Total		509	100.0		

**Programme of Study**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Business Administration	54	10.6	10.6	10.6
	Marketing	5	1.0	1.0	11.6
	Computer Science	27	5.3	5.3	16.9
	Hotel Management	188	36.9	37.0	53.9
	Culinary Arts	5	1.0	1.0	54.9
	International Business	6	1.2	1.2	56.1
	Human Resource Management	2	.4	.4	56.5
	Management Information Systems	7	1.4	1.4	57.9
	Travel and Tourism Management	187	36.7	36.8	94.7
	MBA	27	5.3	5.3	100.0
	Total	508	99.8	100.0	
	Missing	System	1	.2	
Total		509	100.0		

**Level Studying at**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Diploma	92	18.1	18.3	18.3
	Higher Diploma	20	3.9	4.0	22.2
	Bachelor Degree	362	71.1	71.8	94.0
	Masters Degree	30	5.9	6.0	100.0
	Total	504	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	5	1.0		
Total		509	100.0		



**Country of Origin**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	East Asia	32	6.3	6.3	6.3
	South Asia	385	75.6	76.1	82.4
	Middle East	6	1.2	1.2	83.6
	Africa	73	14.3	14.4	98.0
	Europe	10	2.0	2.0	100.0
	Total	506	99.4	100.0	
Missing	System	3	.6		
Total		509	100.0		

**Gender**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	457	89.8	90.0	90.0
	Female	51	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	508	99.8	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.2		
Total		509	100.0		

**Age**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	17-20	50	9.8	9.8	9.8
	21-24	249	48.9	49.0	58.9
	25-28	162	31.8	31.9	90.7
	29+	47	9.2	9.3	100.0
	Total	508	99.8	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.2		
Total		509	100.0		

**Part B – Level of agreement or disagreement to a number of statements****Satisfied with overall experience in Cyprus**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum. Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	55	10.8	11.4	11.4
	Disagree	72	14.1	14.9	26.2
	Neither agree nor disagree	96	18.9	19.8	46.1
	Agree	220	43.2	45.5	91.5
	Strongly agree	41	8.1	8.5	100.0
	Total	484	95.1	100.0	
Missing	System	25	4.9		
Total		509	100.0		

**Satisfied with the social life in Cyprus**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum. Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	50	9.8	10.4	10.4
	Disagree	78	15.3	16.3	26.7
	Neither agree nor disagree	103	20.2	21.5	48.1
	Agree	209	41.1	43.5	91.7
	Strongly agree	40	7.9	8.3	100.0
	Total	480	94.3	100.0	
Missing	System	29	5.7		
Total		509	100.0		

**Satisfied with overall experience at AC**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum. Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	21	4.1	4.4	4.4
	Disagree	54	10.6	11.4	15.8
	Neither agree nor disagree	94	18.5	19.8	35.6
	Agree	223	43.8	46.9	82.5
	Strongly agree	83	16.3	17.5	100.0
	Total	475	93.3	100.0	
Missing	System	34	6.7		
Total		509	100.0		

**Satisfied with the academic standards of AC**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum. Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	24	4.7	5.0	5.0
	Disagree	38	7.5	7.9	12.9
	Neither agree nor disagree	77	15.1	16.0	28.9
	Agree	262	51.5	54.5	83.4
	Strongly agree	80	15.7	16.6	100.0
	Total	481	94.5	100.0	
Missing	System	28	5.5		
Total		509	100.0		

**Satisfied with the Tuition Fees of the programme of study**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum. Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	53	10.4	11.0	11.0
	Disagree	94	18.5	19.5	30.5
	Neither agree nor disagree	112	22.0	23.2	53.7
	Agree	183	36.0	38.0	91.7
	Strongly agree	40	7.9	8.3	100.0
	Total	482	94.7	100.0	
Missing	System	27	5.3		
Total		509	100.0		

**Cypriots are friendly and hospitable**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum. Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	73	14.3	15.4	15.4
	Disagree	81	15.9	17.1	32.4
	Neither agree nor disagree	108	21.2	22.7	55.2
	Agree	148	29.1	31.2	86.3
	Strongly agree	65	12.8	13.7	100.0
	Total	475	93.3	100.0	
Missing	System	34	6.7		
Total		509	100.0		

**Cypriots are racist**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum. Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	40	7.9	9.2	9.2
	Disagree	68	13.4	15.6	24.8
	Neither agree nor disagree	139	27.3	32.0	56.8
	Agree	135	26.5	31.0	87.8
	Strongly agree	53	10.4	12.2	100.0
	Total	435	85.5	100.0	
Missing	System	74	14.5		
Total		509	100.0		

**Americanos College was the right choice for me**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum. Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	20	3.9	4.1	4.1
	Disagree	29	5.7	6.0	10.1
	Neither agree nor disagree	89	17.5	18.4	28.6
	Agree	229	45.0	47.4	76.0
	Strongly agree	116	22.8	24.0	100.0
	Total	483	94.9	100.0	
Missing	System	26	5.1		
Total		509	100.0		

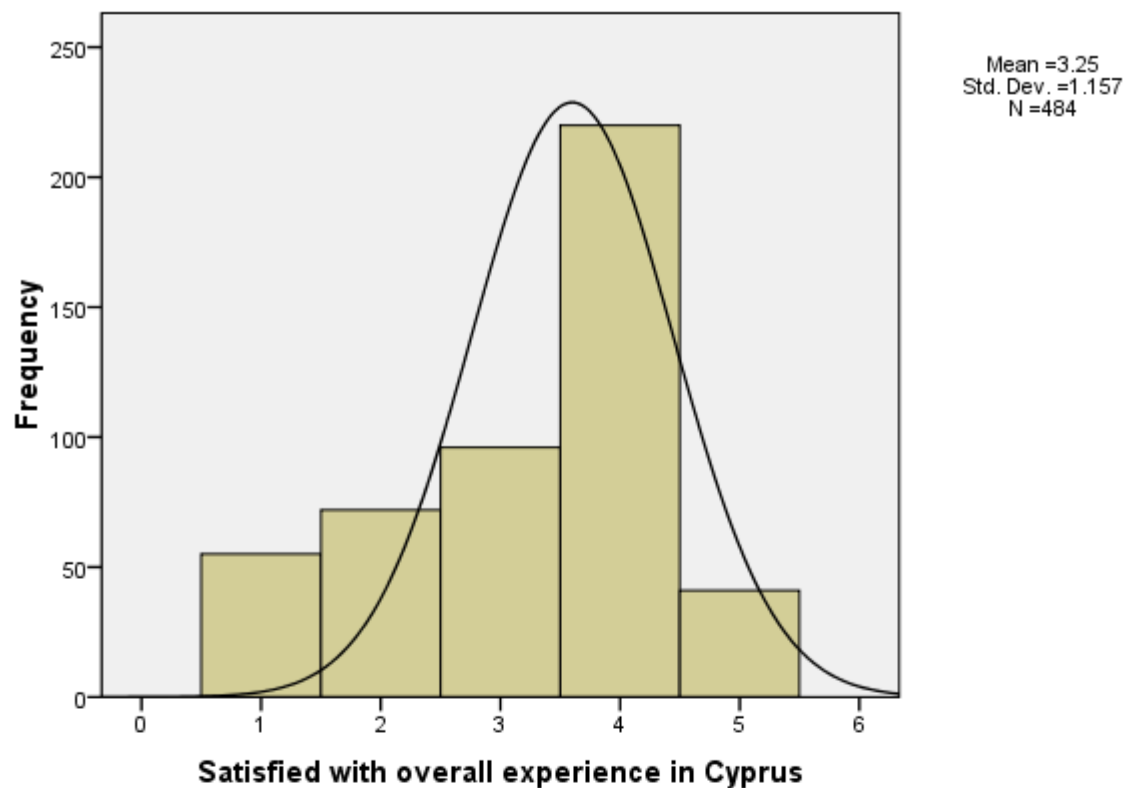
**Americanos College Tuition Fees are reasonable**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum. Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	35	6.9	7.2	7.2
	Disagree	87	17.1	18.0	25.2
	Neither agree nor disagree	100	19.6	20.7	45.9
	Agree	209	41.1	43.2	89.0
	Strongly agree	53	10.4	11.0	100.0
	Total	484	95.1	100.0	
Missing	System	25	4.9		
Total		509	100.0		

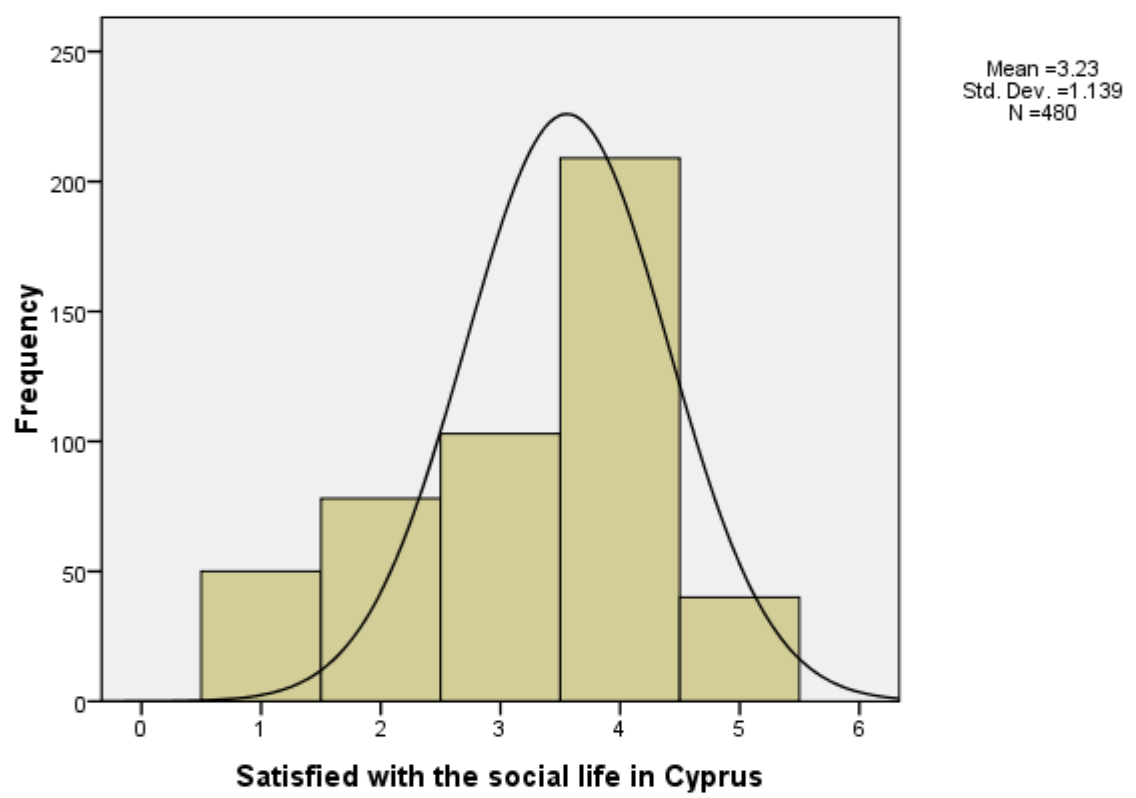
**Studies in Cyprus will Affect future career**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum. Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	37	7.3	7.7	7.7
	Disagree	33	6.5	6.9	14.6
	Neither agree nor disagree	92	18.1	19.1	33.7
	Agree	211	41.5	43.9	77.5
	Strongly agree	108	21.2	22.5	100.0
	Total	481	94.5	100.0	
Missing	System	28	5.5		
Total		509	100.0		

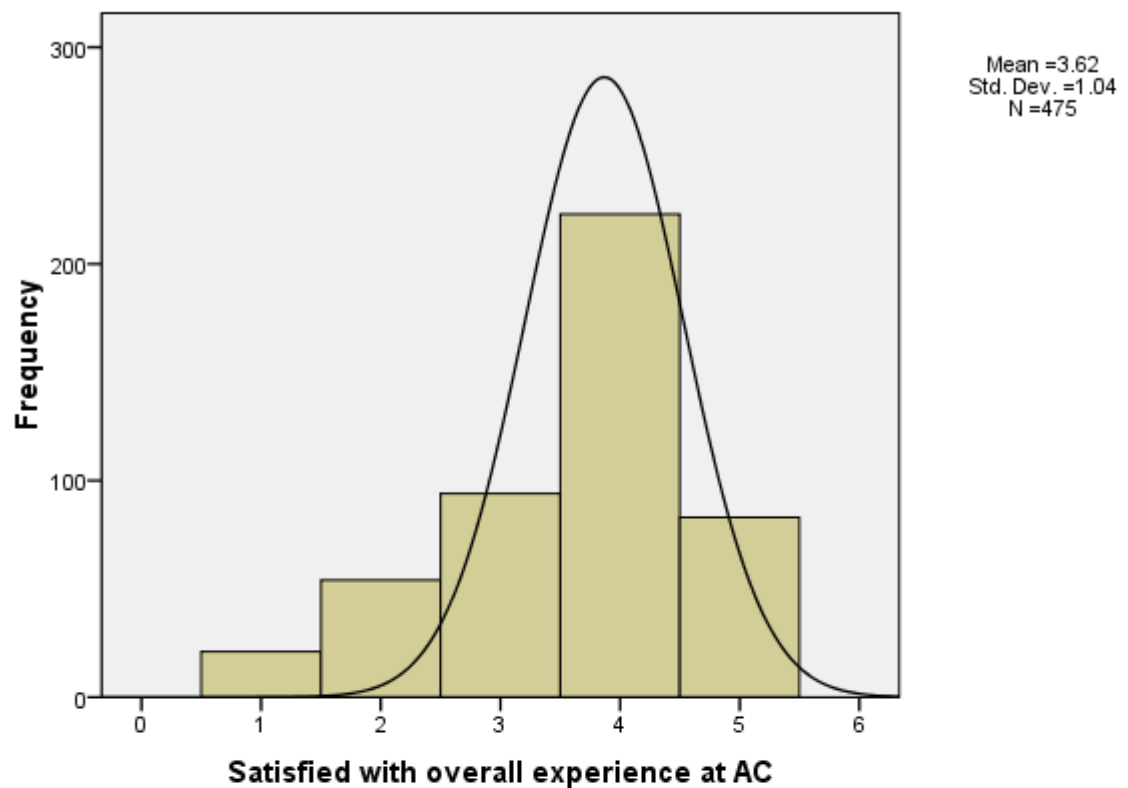
### Satisfied with overall experience in Cyprus



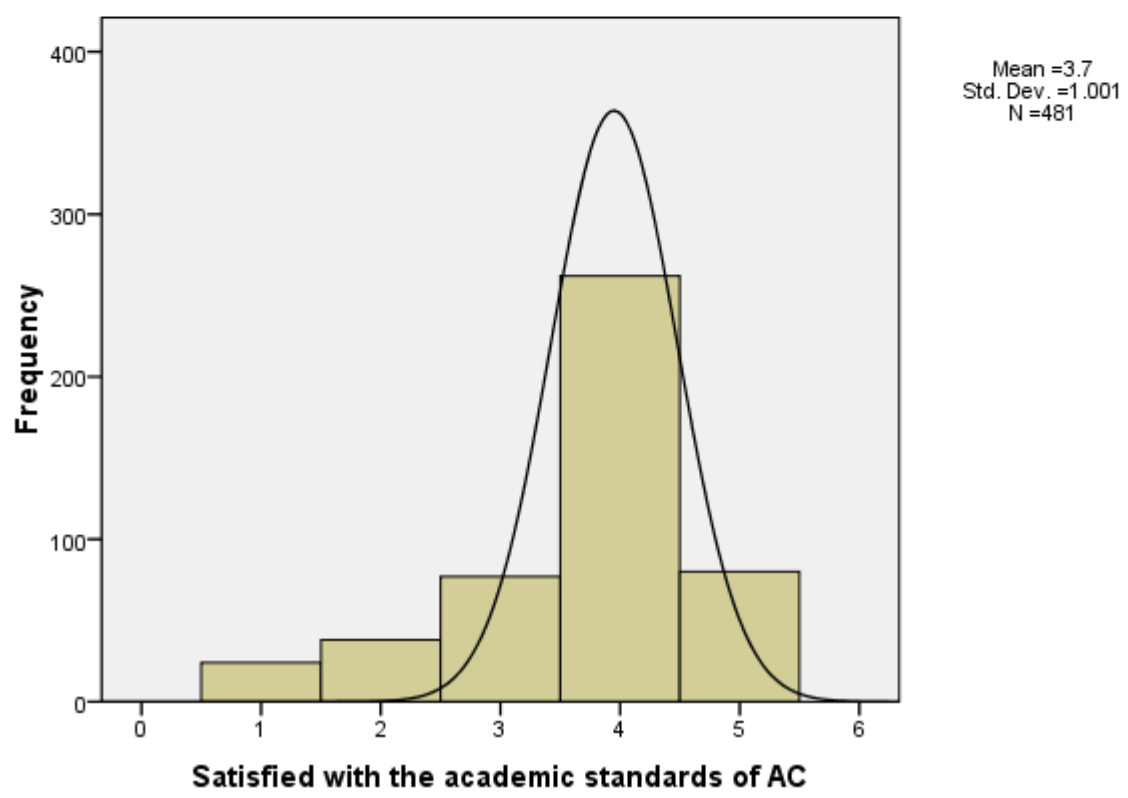
### Satisfied with the social life in Cyprus



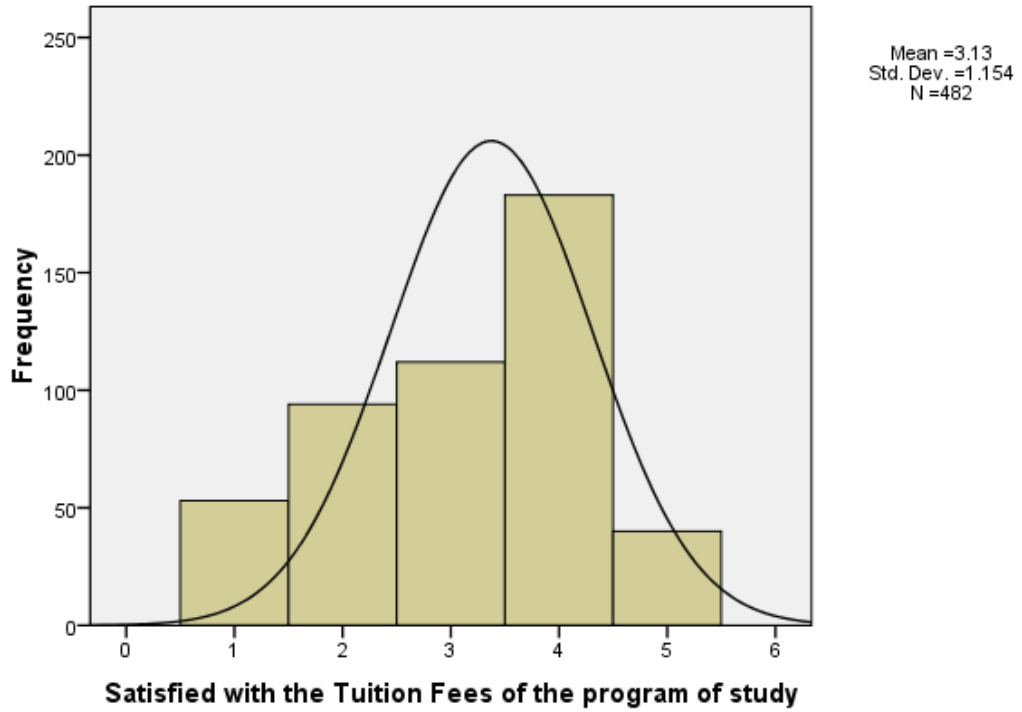
### Satisfied with overall experience at AC



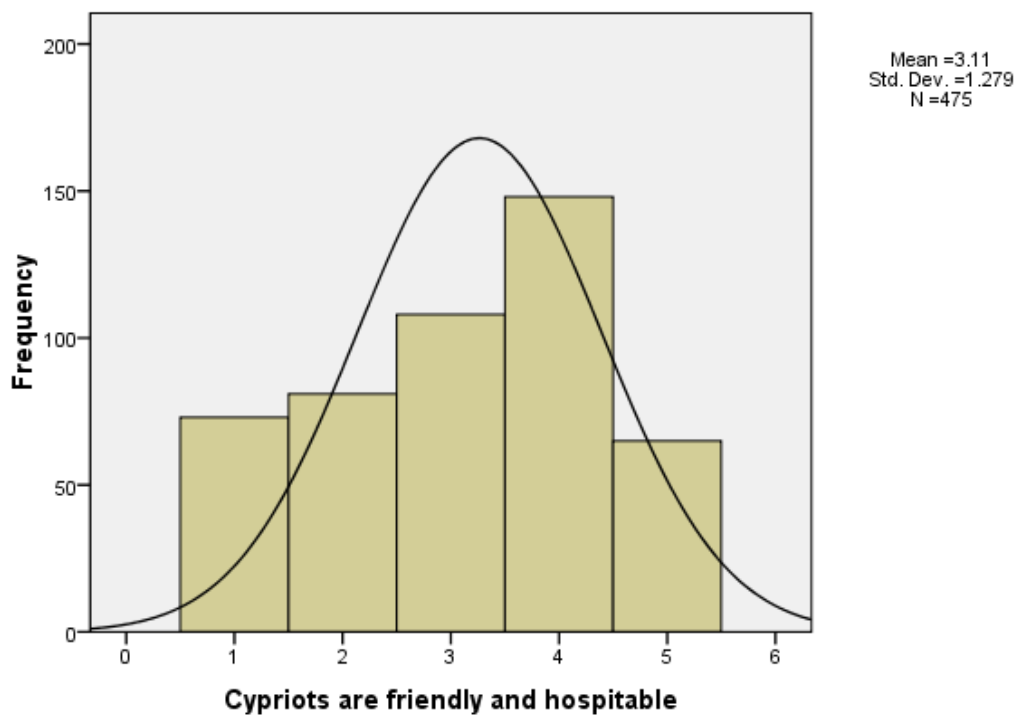
### Satisfied with the academic standards of AC



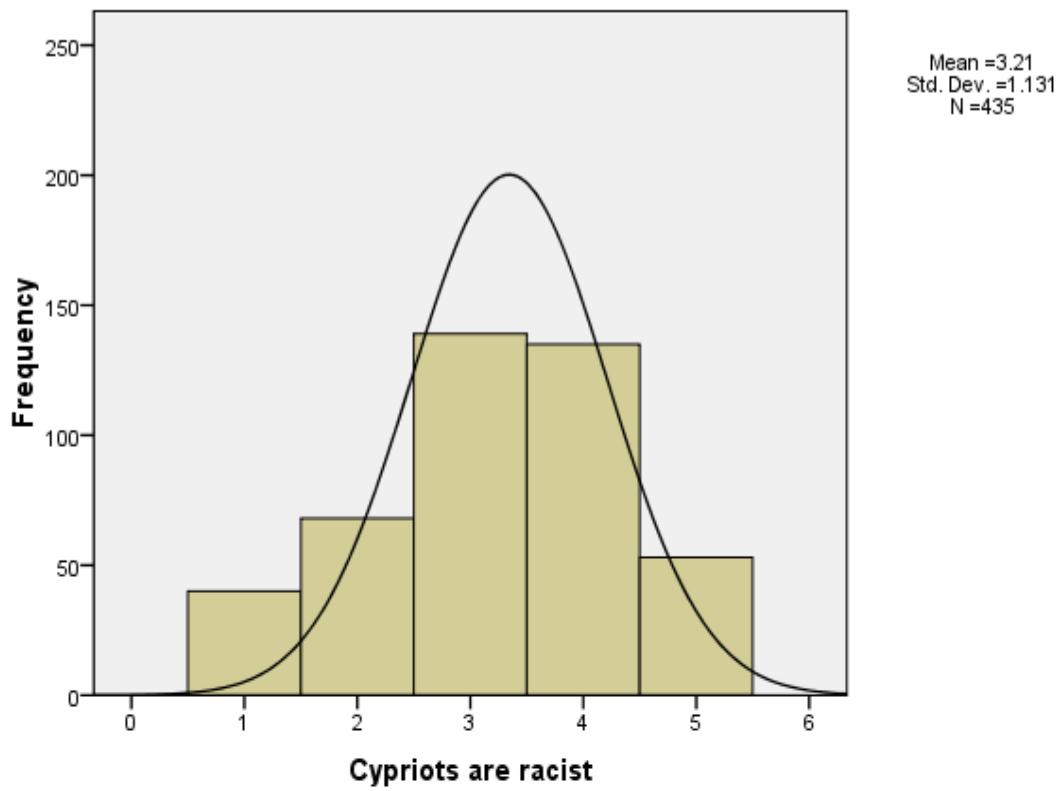
### Satisfied with the Tuition Fees of the program of study



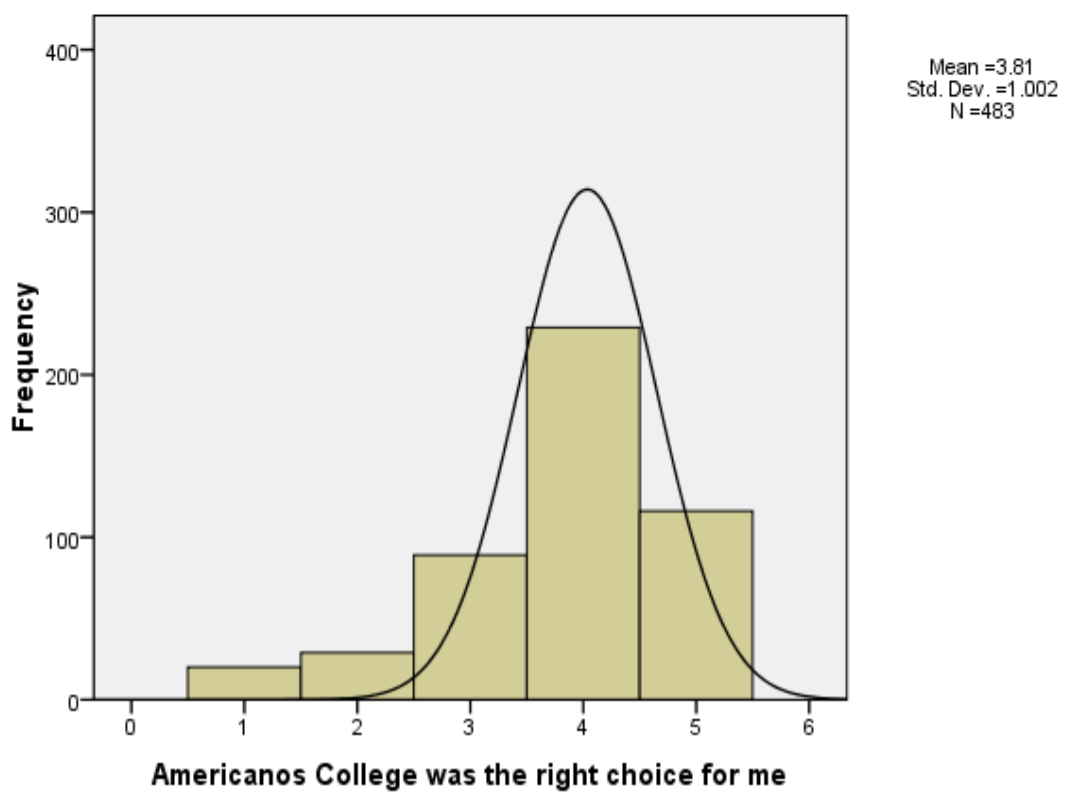
### Cypriots are friendly and hospitable



### Cypriots are racist

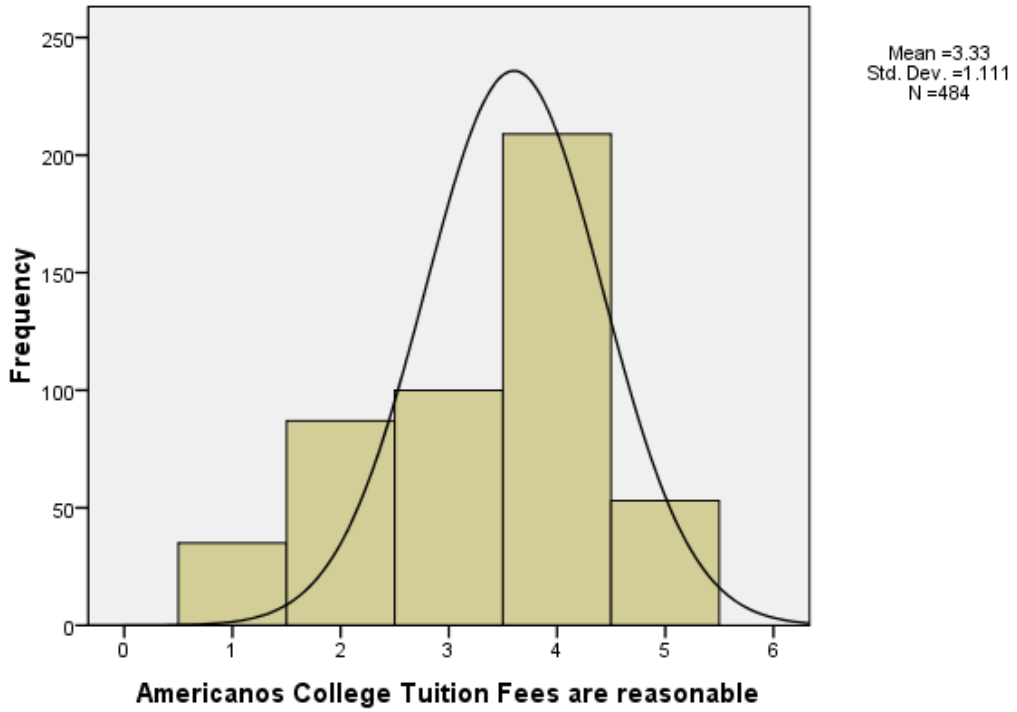


### Americanos College was the right choice for me

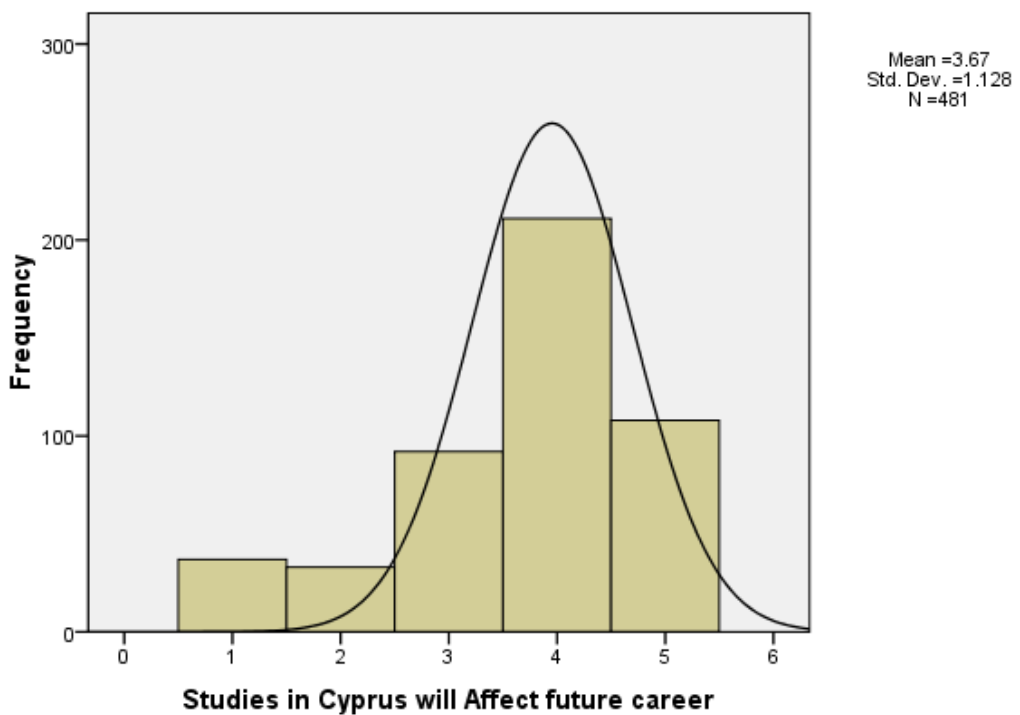




### Americanos College Tuition Fees are reasonable



### Studies in Cyprus will Affect future career



**Part C and D – Tick the answer(s) which apply to you**

- C.1 Did you have any information about Cyprus before coming here?
- C.2 Why did you decide to study abroad? You can tick more than one answer
- C.3 Which other countries did you think of studying in before deciding to come to Cyprus?
- C.4 Why did you choose Cyprus for your studies? You can tick more than one answer
- C.5 Who influenced your decision to study in Cyprus? You can tick more than one answer
- C.6 Who influenced your decision to study at Americanos College?  
You can tick more than one answer
- C.7 Did you consider any other colleges/universities in Cyprus before deciding to study at Americanos College?
- C.8 Which factors influenced you in your choice to study at Americanos College?  
You can tick more than one answer
- C.9 Which of the following sources of information did you use before coming to study at Americanos College? You can tick more than one answer
- C.10 Who is financing your studies in Cyprus? Tick one or more if applicable
- D.11 Which is the most important source of information which would better work for you before choosing a college/university? You can tick more than one answer
- D.12 What in your opinion are the factors which influence other students to come to Cyprus for their studies? You can tick more than one answer
- D.13 According to you, what is the best way for a higher education institution (college or university) to attract more international students? You can tick more than one answer
- D.14 Which according to you is the ideal country or countries for higher education studies?

## Questionnaire's Part C and D findings

Question	Multiple Answers	Count	Table Responses %
Did you have information about Cypurs before coming here?	Yes but not much	243	48.21%
	No	112	22.22%
	Yes I got the information from the internet	79	15.67%
	Yes I got the information from firends and relatives	42	8.33%
	Yes I got the information from a representative of a college/university in Cyprus	16	3.17%
	Yes I got the information from a television programme or a newspaper/magazine advert	9	1.79%
	Yes I got the information from a travel and tourism exhibition/fair	3	.60%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>504</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
Who is financing your studies in Cyprus?	My parents	385	59.97%
	Myself	182	28.35%
	I took a loan from a bank	37	5.76%
	My relatives	35	5.45%
	I am sponsored by my company	3	.47%
<b>Total</b>	<b>642</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	
Why did you decide to study abroad?	I want to get international experience in education	373	51.31%
	I want to improve my English language skills	119	16.37%
	The course I wanted was not available in my country	73	10.04%
	I want to earn some money while studying and this would not have been possible if I had stayed in my country	69	9.49%
	The level of education in my country is low	44	6.05%
	I had difficulty in gaining access to higher education in my country	26	3.58%
	Other	23	3.16%
<b>Total</b>	<b>727</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	
Which countries did you think of studying in before deciding to come to Cyprus?	UK	171	23.46%
	Canada	136	18.66%
	Australia	105	14.40%
	USA	105	14.40%
	My country	94	12.89%
	Other	48	6.58%
	Ireland	40	5.49%
	New Zealand	30	4.12%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>729</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
Why did you choose Cypurs for your studies?	Easy university admission	160	15.08%
	Low cost of living	130	12.25%
	Comfortable climate	115	10.84%
	Easy immigration procedures	115	10.84%
	High educational standards	108	10.18%
	Safe and friendly environment	107	10.08%
	Lower tuition fees compared to other education destinations	96	9.05%
	Well-known for hotel and catering programmes offering paid practical training	75	7.07%
	Recognised qualifications worldwide	63	5.94%
	Other	36	3.39%
	Established population of international students	33	3.11%
	Ease of finding employment during studies	23	2.17%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1061</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	

Question	Multiple Answers	Count	Table Responses %
Who influenced your decision to study in Cyprus?	Myself	205	31.98%
	My agent	168	26.21%
	My friends and relatives	116	18.10%
	My parents	92	14.35%
	Alumni (ex-students) of Americanos College	17	2.65%
	My career advisor	15	2.34%
	My teachers	15	2.34%
	Other	13	2.03%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>641</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
Who influenced your decision to study at AC?	Myself	206	33.94%
	My agent	180	29.65%
	My friends and relatives	109	17.96%
	My parents	54	8.90%
	Alumni (ex-students) of Americanos College	21	3.46%
	My teachers	17	2.80%
	My career advisor	11	1.81%
	Other	9	1.48%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>607</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
Which factors influenced you in your choice to study at AC?	Reasonable Tuition Fees	161	15.12%
	Easy Admission	160	15.02%
	Location (at the centre of the capital city)	139	13.05%
	Courses on offer	132	12.39%
	Its Reputation	85	7.98%
	Its facilities	76	7.14%
	Qualifications recognised worldwide	69	6.48%
	Willing to accept my previous qualifications	57	5.35%
	Its image	55	5.16%
	Scholarships available after coming to Cyprus	46	4.32%
	Well-known to future employers	35	3.29%
	Other (please specify)	29	2.72%
	Accommodation provided	21	1.97%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1065</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
Which of the following sources of information did you use before coming to study at AC?	Searched the internet (WWW)	225	32.23%
	Promoted by Agent/Representative of the College in my country	125	17.91%
	Word-of-mouth (friends, alumni etc)	91	13.04%
	Received a college publication (bulletin, Intern. Stud. guide etc)	80	11.46%
	Attended a fair/exhibition and got information about the College	55	7.88%
	Saw an advertisement	52	7.45%
	Attended a presentation by Americanos College admissions officer	49	7.02%
	Other (please specify)	21	3.01%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>698</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
Which is the most important source of information which would better work for you before choosing a college/university?	Internet (WWW)	278	35.41%
	Agent/Representative office	119	15.16%
	Meet a college/university admissions officer and learn more about that institution	112	14.27%
	College publications (bulletin, Students guide etc)	98	12.48%
	Fairs and exhibitions	86	10.96%
	Print media (Newspapers and Magazines)	38	4.84%
	Other (please specify)	27	3.44%
	Broadcast media (Television and radio)	27	3.44%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>785</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Question	Multiple Answers	Count	Table Responses %
What in your opinion are the factors which influence other students to come to Cyprus for their studies?	Easy university admissions	158	14.96%
	Low Cost of Living	153	14.49%
	High Educational standards	136	12.88%
	Safe and friendly environment	135	12.78%
	Nice weather	115	10.89%
	Easy Immigration procedures	111	10.51%
	Recognised qualifications worldwide	95	9.00%
	Well-known for hotel and catering programmes offering paid practical training during summer	79	7.48%
	Ease of finding employment	39	3.69%
	Other (please specify)	35	3.31%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1056</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
According to you, what is the best way for a higher education institution to attract more international students?	Offer lower tuition fees	244	19.74%
	Provide better facilities	210	16.99%
	Provide better services	196	15.86%
	Provide more scholarships	189	15.29%
	Have lower admission requirements	91	7.36%
	Visit schools and other higher education institutions and give presentations	87	7.04%
	Better promotion and marketing	85	6.88%
	Attend fairs and exhibitions abroad	74	5.99%
	Authorise more agents and representatives	41	3.32%
	Other (please specify)	19	1.54%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1236</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
Which according to you is the ideal country or countries for higher education studies?	Canada	220	20.50%
	UK	197	18.36%
	USA	178	16.59%
	Australia	159	14.82%
	Cyprus	117	10.90%
	Ireland	57	5.31%
	New Zealand	55	5.13%
	My country	54	5.03%
	Other (please specify)	36	3.36%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1073</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	

## Responses to Part C and D from each geographical region

		Country of Origin											
		East Asia		South Asia		Middle East		Africa		Europe		Total	
		Count	Table N %	Count	Table N %	Count	Table N %	Count	Table N %	Count	Table N %	Count	Table N %
C.1	No	7	1.4%	90	18.3%	2	.4%	12	2.4%	0	.0%	111	22.5%
	Yes but not much	16	3.2%	174	35.3%	2	.4%	45	9.1%	5	1.0%	242	49.1%
	Yes I got the information from the internet	5	1.0%	66	13.4%	0	.0%	6	1.2%	2	.4%	79	16.0%
	Yes I got the information from a travel and tourism exhibition/fair	0	.0%	2	.4%	0	.0%	1	.2%	0	.0%	3	.6%
	Yes I got the information from friends and relatives	3	.6%	34	6.9%	1	.2%	3	.6%	1	.2%	42	8.5%
	Yes I got the information from a television programme or a newspaper/magazine advert	0	.0%	6	1.2%	1	.2%	2	.4%	0	.0%	9	1.8%
	Yes I got the information from a representative of a college/university in Cyprus	1	.2%	9	1.8%	0	.0%	5	1.0%	1	.2%	16	3.2%
	Total	32	6.5%	374	75.9%	6	1.2%	72	14.6%	9	1.8%	493	100.0%
C.2	The level of education in my country is low	1	.2%	31	6.3%	2	.4%	7	1.4%	1	.2%	42	8.5%
	The course I wanted was not available in my country	7	1.4%	55	11.2%	0	.0%	9	1.8%	2	.4%	73	14.8%
	I had difficulty in gaining access to higher education in my country	1	.2%	20	4.1%	0	.0%	4	.8%	1	.2%	26	5.3%
	I want to get international experience in education	21	4.3%	280	56.8%	2	.4%	63	12.8%	7	1.4%	373	75.7%
	I want to improve my English language skills	24	4.9%	74	15.0%	3	.6%	16	3.2%	1	.2%	118	23.9%
	I want to earn some money while studying and this would not have been possible if I had stayed in my country	2	.4%	54	11.0%	3	.6%	9	1.8%	0	.0%	68	13.8%
	Other	3	.6%	16	3.2%	0	.0%	2	.4%	1	.2%	22	4.5%
	Total	32	6.5%	375	76.1%	5	1.0%	72	14.6%	9	1.8%	493	100.0%
C.3	USA	3	.6%	63	12.9%	5	1.0%	31	6.3%	3	.6%	105	21.5%
	UK	7	1.4%	128	26.2%	2	.4%	28	5.7%	4	.8%	169	34.6%
	Australia	12	2.5%	78	16.0%	2	.4%	12	2.5%	1	.2%	105	21.5%
	Canada	3	.6%	103	21.1%	2	.4%	27	5.5%	0	.0%	135	27.6%
	New Zealand	1	.2%	23	4.7%	2	.4%	4	.8%	0	.0%	30	6.1%
	Ireland	0	.0%	34	7.0%	2	.4%	3	.6%	1	.2%	40	8.2%
	My country	10	2.0%	68	13.9%	2	.4%	12	2.5%	2	.4%	94	19.2%
	Other	5	1.0%	29	5.9%	0	.0%	14	2.9%	0	.0%	48	9.8%
Total	32	6.5%	372	76.1%	6	1.2%	71	14.5%	8	1.6%	489	100.0%	
C.4	High educational standards	8	1.6%	86	17.5%	2	.4%	11	2.2%	1	.2%	108	22.0%
	Recognised qualifications worldwide	4	.8%	48	9.8%	1	.2%	9	1.8%	1	.2%	63	12.8%
	Easy university admission	8	1.6%	120	24.4%	2	.4%	28	5.7%	1	.2%	159	32.3%
	Easy immigration procedures	12	2.4%	84	17.1%	0	.0%	19	3.9%	0	.0%	115	23.4%
	Low cost of living	9	1.8%	112	22.8%	1	.2%	7	1.4%	0	.0%	129	26.2%
	Lower tuition fees compared to other education destinations	9	1.8%	70	14.2%	1	.2%	13	2.6%	2	.4%	95	19.3%
	Established population of international students	4	.8%	21	4.3%	1	.2%	6	1.2%	1	.2%	33	6.7%

	Ease of finding employment during studies	1	.2%	19	3.9%	0	.0%	1	.2%	1	.2%	22	4.5%
	Well-known for hotel and catering programmes offering paid practical training	7	1.4%	50	10.2%	1	.2%	16	3.3%	1	.2%	75	15.2%
	Safe and friendly environment	10	2.0%	76	15.4%	3	.6%	14	2.8%	4	.8%	107	21.7%
	Comfortable climate	7	1.4%	80	16.3%	0	.0%	21	4.3%	7	1.4%	115	23.4%
	Other	5	1.0%	22	4.5%	0	.0%	8	1.6%	1	.2%	36	7.3%
	Total	31	6.3%	375	76.2%	6	1.2%	71	14.4%	9	1.8%	492	100.0%
C.5	My agent	0	.0%	0	.0%	0	.0%	0	.0%	0	.0%	0	.0%
	My teachers	0	.0%	2	1.8%	0	.0%	0	.0%	0	.0%	2	1.8%
	My parents	1	.9%	9	8.2%	0	.0%	3	2.7%	0	.0%	13	11.8%
	My friends and relatives	7	6.4%	22	20.0%	0	.0%	7	6.4%	0	.0%	36	32.7%
	My career advisor	0	.0%	6	5.5%	0	.0%	1	.9%	0	.0%	7	6.4%
	Alumni (ex-students) of Americanos College	0	.0%	6	5.5%	0	.0%	2	1.8%	0	.0%	8	7.3%
	Myself	6	5.5%	51	46.4%	0	.0%	13	11.8%	3	2.7%	73	66.4%
	Other	0	.0%	1	.9%	0	.0%	1	.9%	0	.0%	2	1.8%
	Total	12	10.9%	74	67.3%	0	.0%	21	19.1%	3	2.7%	110	100.0%
C.6	My agent	7	1.4%	138	27.9%	2	.4%	32	6.5%	0	.0%	179	36.2%
	My teachers	7	1.4%	8	1.6%	0	.0%	2	.4%	0	.0%	17	3.4%
	My parents	10	2.0%	36	7.3%	0	.0%	6	1.2%	2	.4%	54	10.9%
	My friends and relatives	7	1.4%	82	16.6%	2	.4%	14	2.8%	3	.6%	108	21.9%
	My career advisor	0	.0%	8	1.6%	0	.0%	3	.6%	0	.0%	11	2.2%
	Alumni (ex-students) of Americanos College	1	.2%	16	3.2%	0	.0%	3	.6%	0	.0%	20	4.0%
	Myself	10	2.0%	156	31.6%	2	.4%	29	5.9%	8	1.6%	205	41.5%
	Other	4	.8%	5	1.0%	0	.0%	0	.0%	0	.0%	9	1.8%
	Total	31	6.3%	375	75.9%	6	1.2%	73	14.8%	9	1.8%	494	100.0%
C.8	Reasonable Tuition Fees	6	1.2%	117	24.1%	2	.4%	30	6.2%	5	1.0%	160	32.9%
	Easy Admission	9	1.9%	123	25.3%	2	.4%	25	5.1%	1	.2%	160	32.9%
	Its Reputation	3	.6%	75	15.4%	0	.0%	5	1.0%	1	.2%	84	17.3%
	Accommodation provided	4	.8%	15	3.1%	0	.0%	1	.2%	0	.0%	20	4.1%
	Courses on offer	14	2.9%	92	18.9%	1	.2%	20	4.1%	5	1.0%	132	27.2%
	Location (at the centre of the capital city)	10	2.1%	109	22.4%	0	.0%	16	3.3%	4	.8%	139	28.6%
	Scholarships available after coming to Cyprus	1	.2%	42	8.6%	0	.0%	2	.4%	1	.2%	46	9.5%
	Its image	6	1.2%	38	7.8%	1	.2%	9	1.9%	0	.0%	54	11.1%
	Its facilities	7	1.4%	60	12.3%	1	.2%	8	1.6%	0	.0%	76	15.6%
	Willing to accept my previous qualifications	6	1.2%	41	8.4%	1	.2%	7	1.4%	2	.4%	57	11.7%
	Qualifications recognised worldwide	2	.4%	55	11.3%	1	.2%	8	1.6%	2	.4%	68	14.0%
	Well-known to future employers	3	.6%	30	6.2%	0	.0%	1	.2%	1	.2%	35	7.2%
	Other (please specify)	4	.8%	19	3.9%	0	.0%	6	1.2%	0	.0%	29	6.0%
	Total	31	6.4%	371	76.3%	5	1.0%	70	14.4%	9	1.9%	486	100.0%
C.9	Received a college publication (bulletin, International students guide etc)	4	.8%	60	12.4%	2	.4%	11	2.3%	1	.2%	78	16.2%
	Searched the internet (WWW)	14	2.9%	168	34.9%	2	.4%	34	7.1%	7	1.5%	225	46.7%

	Attended a fair/exhibition and got information about the College	4	.8%	45	9.3%	1	.2%	4	.8%	0	.0%	54	11.2%
	Saw an advertisement	3	.6%	41	8.5%	1	.2%	6	1.2%	1	.2%	52	10.8%
	Attended a presentation by Americanos College admissions officer	3	.6%	35	7.3%	0	.0%	10	2.1%	0	.0%	48	10.0%
	Word-of-mouth (friends, alumni etc)	2	.4%	79	16.4%	1	.2%	7	1.5%	2	.4%	91	18.9%
	Promoted by Agent/Representative of the College in my country	8	1.7%	85	17.6%	0	.0%	31	6.4%	0	.0%	124	25.7%
	Other (please specify)	4	.8%	13	2.7%	0	.0%	3	.6%	1	.2%	21	4.4%
	Total	32	6.6%	365	75.7%	4	.8%	72	14.9%	9	1.9%	482	100.0%
C.10	Myself	14	2.8%	141	28.7%	2	.4%	18	3.7%	5	1.0%	180	36.6%
	My parents	24	4.9%	294	59.8%	2	.4%	58	11.8%	7	1.4%	385	78.3%
	My relatives	3	.6%	22	4.5%	0	.0%	9	1.8%	0	.0%	34	6.9%
	I took a loan from a bank	0	.0%	36	7.3%	1	.2%	0	.0%	0	.0%	37	7.5%
	I am sponsored by my company	0	.0%	2	.4%	0	.0%	1	.2%	0	.0%	3	.6%
	Total	32	6.5%	374	76.0%	4	.8%	73	14.8%	9	1.8%	492	100.0%
D.11	College publications (bulletin, Students guide etc)	6	1.2%	70	14.5%	1	.2%	17	3.5%	4	.8%	98	20.3%
	Internet (WWW)	15	3.1%	210	43.5%	2	.4%	43	8.9%	6	1.2%	276	57.1%
	Meet a college/university admissions officer and learn more about that institution	5	1.0%	78	16.1%	1	.2%	23	4.8%	5	1.0%	112	23.2%
	Fairs and exhibitions	3	.6%	71	14.7%	0	.0%	10	2.1%	2	.4%	86	17.8%
	Print media (Newspapers and Magazines)	1	.2%	32	6.6%	1	.2%	3	.6%	0	.0%	37	7.7%
	Broadcast media (Television and radio)	0	.0%	22	4.6%	1	.2%	4	.8%	0	.0%	27	5.6%
	Agent/Representative office	7	1.4%	84	17.4%	0	.0%	25	5.2%	2	.4%	118	24.4%
	Other (please specify)	3	.6%	17	3.5%	0	.0%	6	1.2%	0	.0%	26	5.4%
	Total	32	6.6%	365	75.6%	4	.8%	73	15.1%	9	1.9%	483	100.0%
D.12	High Educational standards	12	2.5%	105	21.8%	1	.2%	16	3.3%	1	.2%	135	28.0%
	Recognised qualifications worldwide	3	.6%	78	16.2%	1	.2%	11	2.3%	2	.4%	95	19.7%
	Easy university admissions	10	2.1%	110	22.8%	0	.0%	33	6.8%	5	1.0%	158	32.8%
	Easy Immigration procedures	12	2.5%	77	16.0%	1	.2%	17	3.5%	3	.6%	110	22.8%
	Low Cost of Living	12	2.5%	126	26.1%	0	.0%	11	2.3%	3	.6%	152	31.5%
	Ease of finding employment	3	.6%	24	5.0%	1	.2%	6	1.2%	5	1.0%	39	8.1%
	Well-known for hotel and catering programmes offering paid practical training during summer	2	.4%	59	12.2%	1	.2%	14	2.9%	2	.4%	78	16.2%
	Safe and friendly environment	11	2.3%	101	21.0%	2	.4%	18	3.7%	3	.6%	135	28.0%
	Nice weather	9	1.9%	77	16.0%	0	.0%	25	5.2%	4	.8%	115	23.9%
	Other (please specify)	4	.8%	21	4.4%	0	.0%	9	1.9%	0	.0%	34	7.1%
	Total	32	6.6%	366	75.9%	4	.8%	71	14.7%	9	1.9%	482	100.0%
D.13	Offer lower tuition fees	16	3.3%	183	38.0%	1	.2%	40	8.3%	3	.6%	243	50.5%
	Provide more scholarships	8	1.7%	135	28.1%	4	.8%	40	8.3%	2	.4%	189	39.3%
	Provide better services	15	3.1%	135	28.1%	2	.4%	37	7.7%	7	1.5%	196	40.7%
	Provide better facilities	9	1.9%	162	33.7%	1	.2%	35	7.3%	3	.6%	210	43.7%
	Have lower admission requirements	5	1.0%	66	13.7%	1	.2%	16	3.3%	2	.4%	90	18.7%



	Better promotion and marketing	10	2.1%	55	11.4%	1	.2%	17	3.5%	2	.4%	85	17.7%
	Attend fairs and exhibitions abroad	5	1.0%	54	11.2%	0	.0%	11	2.3%	4	.8%	74	15.4%
	Authorise more agents and representatives	3	.6%	21	4.4%	0	.0%	12	2.5%	4	.8%	40	8.3%
	Visit schools and other higher education institutions and give presentations	11	2.3%	58	12.1%	0	.0%	15	3.1%	3	.6%	87	18.1%
	Other (please specify)	0	.0%	15	3.1%	0	.0%	3	.6%	0	.0%	18	3.7%
	Total	30	6.2%	364	75.7%	5	1.0%	73	15.2%	9	1.9%	481	100.0%
D.14	Cyprus	3	.6%	100	20.5%	0	.0%	12	2.5%	1	.2%	116	23.8%
	USA	10	2.1%	117	24.0%	1	.2%	45	9.2%	4	.8%	177	36.3%
	UK	14	2.9%	127	26.1%	3	.6%	43	8.8%	9	1.8%	196	40.2%
	Australia	11	2.3%	125	25.7%	3	.6%	18	3.7%	2	.4%	159	32.6%
	Canada	8	1.6%	155	31.8%	3	.6%	52	10.7%	1	.2%	219	45.0%
	New Zealand	1	.2%	51	10.5%	1	.2%	1	.2%	0	.0%	54	11.1%
	Ireland	2	.4%	44	9.0%	2	.4%	9	1.8%	0	.0%	57	11.7%
	My country	6	1.2%	40	8.2%	0	.0%	7	1.4%	1	.2%	54	11.1%
	Other (please specify)	3	.6%	25	5.1%	0	.0%	8	1.6%	0	.0%	36	7.4%
	Total	30	6.2%	371	76.2%	5	1.0%	72	14.8%	9	1.8%	487	100.0%

**Part E – Scale questions to the following statements:**

E.15: On a scale of 1-4, please rank the following factors which influence your decision to study abroad.

Scale 1		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	Choice of country	61	12.0	32.1	32.1
	Choice of city	2	.4	1.1	33.2
	Choice of Higher Education Institution (College or University)	64	12.6	33.7	66.8
	Choice of Programme of study	63	12.4	33.2	100.0
	Total	190	37.3	100.0	
<b>Missing</b>	System	319	62.7		
<b>Total</b>		509	100.0		

Scale 2		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	Choice of country	38	7.5	20.1	20.1
	Choice of city	21	4.1	11.1	31.2
	Choice of Higher Education Institution (College or University)	70	13.8	37.0	68.3
	Choice of Programme of study	60	11.8	31.7	100.0
	Total	189	37.1	100.0	
<b>Missing</b>	System	320	62.9		
<b>Total</b>		509	100.0		

Scale 3		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	Choice of country	65	12.8	34.4	34.4
	Choice of city	42	8.3	22.2	56.6
	Choice of Higher Education Institution (College or University)	45	8.8	23.8	80.4
	Choice of Programme of study	37	7.3	19.6	100.0
	Total	189	37.1	100.0	
<b>Missing</b>	System	320	62.9		
<b>Total</b>		509	100.0		

Scale 4		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	Choice of country	25	4.9	13.3	13.3
	Choice of city	123	24.2	65.4	78.7
	Choice of Higher Education Institution (College or University)	11	2.2	5.9	84.6
	Choice of Programme of study	29	5.7	15.4	100.0
	Total	188	36.9	100.0	
<b>Missing</b>	System	321	63.1		
<b>Total</b>		509	100.0		

**E.16: On a scale of 1-4, please rank the following factors which make students leave your country and search for both other destinations for their studies.**

Scale 1		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	Political	59	11.6	33.1	33.1
	Economical	59	11.6	33.1	66.3
	Low quality local higher education institutions	30	5.9	16.9	83.1
	Not enough places in local higher education institutions	30	5.9	16.9	100.0
	Total	178	35.0	100.0	
<b>Missing</b>	System	331	65.0		
<b>Total</b>		509	100.0		

Scale 2		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	Political	48	9.4	27.1	27.1
	Economical	53	10.4	29.9	57.1
	Low quality local higher education institutions	41	8.1	23.2	80.2
	Not enough places in local higher education institutions	35	6.9	19.8	100.0
	Total	177	34.8	100.0	
<b>Missing</b>	System	332	65.2		
<b>Total</b>		509	100.0		

Scale 3		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	Political	22	4.3	12.6	12.6
	Economical	42	8.3	24.0	36.6
	Low quality local higher education institutions	51	10.0	29.1	65.7
	Not enough places in local higher education institutions	60	11.8	34.3	100.0
	Total	175	34.4	100.0	
<b>Missing</b>	System	334	65.6		
<b>Total</b>		509	100.0		

Scale 4		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	Political	47	9.2	27.0	27.0
	Economical	21	4.1	12.1	39.1
	Low quality local higher education institutions	53	10.4	30.5	69.5
	Not enough places in local higher education institutions	53	10.4	30.5	100.0
	Total	174	34.2	100.0	
<b>Missing</b>	System	335	65.8		
<b>Total</b>		509	100.0		

**E.17: On a scale of 1-4, please rank the 4 most important reasons which influenced you to choose Cyprus for your studies. Because of Cyprus:**

Scale 1		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	High educational standards	39	7.7	24.1	24.1
	Recognised qualifications worldwide	16	3.1	9.9	34.0
	Easy university admissions	31	6.1	19.1	53.1
	Easy immigration procedures	17	3.3	10.5	63.6
	Low cost of living	16	3.1	9.9	73.5
	Lower tuition fees compared to other education destinations	8	1.6	4.9	78.4
	Ease of finding employment during studies	4	.8	2.5	80.9
	Well-known for hotel and catering programmes offering paid practical training	13	2.6	8.0	88.9
	Safe and friendly environment	10	2.0	6.2	95.1
	Comfortable climate	7	1.4	4.3	99.4
	Other (please specify)	1	.2	.6	100.0
	Total	162	31.8	100.0	
<b>Missing</b>	System	347	68.2		
<b>Total</b>		509	100.0		

Scale 2		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	High educational standards	16	3.1	9.9	9.9
	Recognised qualifications worldwide	20	3.9	12.4	22.4
	Easy university admissions	21	4.1	13.0	35.4
	Easy immigration procedures	20	3.9	12.4	47.8
	Low cost of living	20	3.9	12.4	60.2
	Lower tuition fees compared to other education destinations	16	3.1	9.9	70.2
	Established population of international students	6	1.2	3.7	73.9
	Ease of finding employment during studies	4	.8	2.5	76.4
	Well-known for hotel and catering programmes offering paid practical training	9	1.8	5.6	82.0
	Safe and friendly environment	16	3.1	9.9	91.9
	Comfortable climate	12	2.4	7.5	99.4
	Other (please specify)	1	.2	.6	100.0
	Total	161	31.6	100.0	
<b>Missing</b>	System	348	68.4		
<b>Total</b>		509	100.0		

Scale 3		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	High educational standards	4	.8	2.5	2.5
	Recognised qualifications worldwide	5	1.0	3.1	5.6
	Easy university admissions	23	4.5	14.3	19.9
	Easy immigration procedures	17	3.3	10.6	30.4
	Low cost of living	28	5.5	17.4	47.8
	Lower tuition fees compared to other education destinations	23	4.5	14.3	62.1
	Established population of international students	8	1.6	5.0	67.1
	Ease of finding employment during studies	5	1.0	3.1	70.2
	Well-known for hotel and catering programmes offering paid practical training	14	2.8	8.7	78.9
	Safe and friendly environment	17	3.3	10.6	89.4
	Comfortable climate	17	3.3	10.6	100.0
	Total	161	31.6	100.0	
<b>Missing</b>	System	348	68.4		
<b>Total</b>		509	100.0		

Scale 4		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	High educational standards	7	1.4	4.4	4.4
	Recognised qualifications worldwide	9	1.8	5.7	10.1
	Easy university admissions	14	2.8	8.9	19.0
	Easy immigration procedures	12	2.4	7.6	26.6
	Low cost of living	16	3.1	10.1	36.7
	Lower tuition fees compared to other education destinations	22	4.3	13.9	50.6
	Established population of international students	10	2.0	6.3	57.0
	Ease of finding employment during studies	6	1.2	3.8	60.8
	Well-known for hotel and catering programmes offering paid practical training	9	1.8	5.7	66.5
	Safe and friendly environment	23	4.5	14.6	81.0
	Comfortable climate	24	4.7	15.2	96.2
	Other (please specify)	6	1.2	3.8	100.0
	Total	158	31.0	100.0	
<b>Missing</b>	System	351	69.0		
<b>Total</b>		509	100.0		

**E.18: On a scale of 1-4, please rank the 4 most important factors which influenced you in your choice to study at Americanos College.**

Scale 1		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	Reasonable tuition fees	39	7.7	24.1	24.1
	Easy admission	44	8.6	27.2	51.2
	Its reputation	17	3.3	10.5	61.7
	Accommodation provided	3	.6	1.9	63.6
	Courses on offer	17	3.3	10.5	74.1
	Location (at the centre of the capital city)	6	1.2	3.7	77.8
	Scholarships available after coming to Cyprus	3	.6	1.9	79.6
	Its image	7	1.4	4.3	84.0
	Its facilities	5	1.0	3.1	87.0
	Willing to accept my previous qualifications	5	1.0	3.1	90.1
	Qualifications recognised worldwide	15	2.9	9.3	99.4
	Well-known to future employers	1	.2	.6	100.0
	<b>Total</b>		162	31.8	100.0
<b>Missing</b>	System	347	68.2		
<b>Total</b>		509	100.0		

Scale 2		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	Reasonable tuition fees	27	5.3	16.8	16.8
	Easy admission	15	2.9	9.3	26.1
	Its reputation	19	3.7	11.8	37.9
	Accommodation provided	4	.8	2.5	40.4
	Courses on offer	37	7.3	23.0	63.4
	Location (at the centre of the capital city)	22	4.3	13.7	77.0
	Scholarships available after coming to Cyprus	8	1.6	5.0	82.0
	Its image	4	.8	2.5	84.5
	Its facilities	6	1.2	3.7	88.2
	Willing to accept my previous qualifications	4	.8	2.5	90.7
	Qualifications recognised worldwide	7	1.4	4.3	95.0
	Well-known to future employers	7	1.4	4.3	99.4
	Other (please specify)	1	.2	.6	100.0
<b>Total</b>		161	31.6	100.0	
<b>Missing</b>	System	348	68.4		
<b>Total</b>		509	100.0		

Scale 3		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	Reasonable tuition fees	13	2.6	8.1	8.1
	Easy admission	13	2.6	8.1	16.3
	Its reputation	8	1.6	5.0	21.3
	Accommodation provided	4	.8	2.5	23.8
	Courses on offer	24	4.7	15.0	38.8
	Location (at the centre of the capital city)	32	6.3	20.0	58.8
	Scholarships available after coming to Cyprus	12	2.4	7.5	66.3
	Its image	8	1.6	5.0	71.3
	Its facilities	20	3.9	12.5	83.8
	Willing to accept my previous qualifications	15	2.9	9.4	93.1
	Qualifications recognised worldwide	6	1.2	3.8	96.9
	Well-known to future employers	4	.8	2.5	99.4
	Other (please specify)	1	.2	.6	100.0
	Total	160	31.4	100.0	
<b>Missing</b>	System	349	68.6		
<b>Total</b>		509	100.0		

Scale 4		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	Reasonable tuition fees	16	3.1	10.0	10.0
	Easy admission	12	2.4	7.5	17.5
	Its reputation	7	1.4	4.4	21.9
	Accommodation provided	5	1.0	3.1	25.0
	Courses on offer	19	3.7	11.9	36.9
	Location (at the centre of the capital city)	16	3.1	10.0	46.9
	Scholarships available after coming to Cyprus	16	3.1	10.0	56.9
	Its image	14	2.8	8.8	65.6
	Its facilities	12	2.4	7.5	73.1
	Willing to accept my previous qualifications	11	2.2	6.9	80.0
	Qualifications recognised worldwide	17	3.3	10.6	90.6
	Well-known to future employers	9	1.8	5.6	96.3
	Other (please specify)	6	1.2	3.8	100.0
	Total	160	31.4	100.0	
<b>Missing</b>	System	349	68.6		
<b>Total</b>		509	100.0		

**E.19: On a scale of 1-4, please rank the 4 sources of information which would better work for you in choosing a college/university.**

Scale 1		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	College publications (bulletin, Students guide etc)	17	3.3	10.8	10.8
	Internet (WWW)	80	15.7	51.0	61.8
	Meet a college/university admissions officer and learn more about that institution	19	3.7	12.1	73.9
	Fairs and exhibitions	10	2.0	6.4	80.3
	Print media (Newspapers and Magazines)	4	.8	2.5	82.8
	Broadcast media (Television and radio)	6	1.2	3.8	86.6
	Agent/Representative office	20	3.9	12.7	99.4
	Other (please specify)	1	.2	.6	100.0
	Total	157	30.8	100.0	
<b>Missing</b>	System	352	69.2		
<b>Total</b>		509	100.0		

Scale 2		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	College publications (bulletin, Students guide etc)	33	6.5	21.2	21.2
	Internet (WWW)	34	6.7	21.8	42.9
	Meet a college/university admissions officer and learn more about that institution	22	4.3	14.1	57.1
	Fairs and exhibitions	23	4.5	14.7	71.8
	Print media (Newspapers and Magazines)	10	2.0	6.4	78.2
	Broadcast media (Television and radio)	9	1.8	5.8	84.0
	Agent/Representative office	24	4.7	15.4	99.4
	Other (please specify)	1	.2	.6	100.0
	Total	156	30.6	100.0	
<b>Missing</b>	System	353	69.4		
<b>Total</b>		509	100.0		



Scale 3		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	College publications (bulletin, Students guide etc)	22	4.3	14.2	14.2
	Internet (WWW)	12	2.4	7.7	21.9
	Meet a college/university admissions officer and learn more about that institution	33	6.5	21.3	43.2
	Fairs and exhibitions	33	6.5	21.3	64.5
	Print media (Newspapers and Magazines)	22	4.3	14.2	78.7
	Broadcast media (Television and radio)	13	2.6	8.4	87.1
	Agent/Representative office	20	3.9	12.9	100.0
	Total	155	30.5	100.0	
<b>Missing</b>	System	354	69.5		
<b>Total</b>		509	100.0		

Scale 4		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	College publications (bulletin, Students guide etc)	21	4.1	13.5	13.5
	Internet (WWW)	15	2.9	9.7	23.2
	Meet a college/university admissions officer and learn more about that institution	12	2.4	7.7	31.0
	Fairs and exhibitions	28	5.5	18.1	49.0
	Print media (Newspapers and Magazines)	23	4.5	14.8	63.9
	Broadcast media (Television and radio)	19	3.7	12.3	76.1
	Agent/Representative office	31	6.1	20.0	96.1
	Other (please specify)	6	1.2	3.9	100.0
	Total	155	30.5	100.0	
<b>Missing</b>	System	354	69.5		
<b>Total</b>		509	100.0		

**Appendix 8 – Agents’ Questionnaire**

# **AGENTS’ QUESTIONNAIRE**

**PLEASE COMPLETE AND RETURN TO:**

**Americanos College**  
2 Omirou Avenue  
Eleftheria Square  
P.O. Box 22425  
1521 Nicosia – Cyprus  
E-MAIL: [admissions@ac.ac.cy](mailto:admissions@ac.ac.cy)  
TEL: +357-22-661122 FAX: +357-22-664118

NAME OF ORGANISATION: .....

REGISTERED COMPANY NAME: .....

NAME OF AUTHORISED REPRESENTATIVE: .....

TITLE OF AUTHORISED REPRESENTATIVE: .....

ADDRESS OF ORGANISATION: .....

.....

CITY: ..... COUNTRY: .....

E-MAIL CONTACT ADDRESS: .....

INTERNET ADDRESS (WHERE APPLICABLE): .....

TELEPHONE NUMBER: Country Code: ..... Area Code: ..... Number: .....

FACSIMILE NUMBER: Country Code: ..... Area Code: ..... Number: .....



5. Does your company conduct activities other than student recruitment? If yes, please provide details:

6. To which education level do you recruit students? Please provide approximate percentages to each level:

University Level:                      English Language:

Academic Foundation:              High School:

7. What is the total number of students recruited by you in the last four years?

8. Do you currently represent other Cyprus institutions? If yes, please provide details of these institutions and the length of association:

1.    Number of years

2.    Number of years

3.    Number of years

9. Do you have a representative based in Cyprus? If yes, please provide details:

10. Do you charge prospective students a service fee? If yes, how much? What services do students receive for this fee?



15. What can your company do to facilitate recruitment of international students to Americanos College?

16. What do you see as unique about Americanos College?

NAME: ..... SIGNATURE: .....

POSITION:.....DATE: ...../...../.....

**THANK YOU!**  
WE APPRECIATE THE TIME YOU HAVE TAKEN  
TO HELP US LEARN MORE ABOUT YOU

## **Appendix 9 – Executive Summary Report for the Target Audience**

So many universities around the world try to attract foreign students and this makes the marketing strategy more important year after year. The appropriate recruitment practice should take into consideration environmental and external factors as well as the students' needs and their capacity to meet those needs. Petruzzellis and Romanazzi (2010) declare that “understanding choice and decision making of students helps in better qualifying the institutional positioning strategy through a clear identification of the ‘purchase’ behaviour (p. 142).

This project, the first of its kind in Cyprus (with the exception of a previous research study, with a different aim, but which included a few questions, relevant to this research,), analysed the factors which influence choice and decision-making of international students in choosing a Cyprus's educational institution. AC can only generate additional revenue if it carefully assesses the factors that influence the mobility of international students around the world with specific reference to Cyprus. Assessing these factors could help develop more effective international student recruitment and marketing strategies and techniques that could increase the students' intake at AC. The number of international students recruited plays a vital role in the success or failure of colleges with a big percentage of international students, like AC.

Although the research concerns the international students of AC, many of the factors analysed and the methodology used are applicable to other academic institutions in Cyprus, and to a lesser extent, abroad. Also, other institutions may benefit from the findings of the study by identifying, comparing and evaluating their strengths and weaknesses in their recruitment and marketing actions.

The main findings of this research project are given below. The whole project can be sent to you upon request.

### **Identify the factors and the people influencing AC international students' choice**

According to this research, the factors that influence international students' decisions in choosing AC (and Cyprus) are the following:

1. The TF charged, which are much lower compared to the TF charged by other HEIs based in more popular educational destinations e.g. UK and USA.
2. The easy admissions and immigration procedures, which result in a bigger percentage of prospective students studying in Cyprus as opposed to other more well-known destinations.
3. The location of the HEI, which is directly associated with the walking distance available accommodation and part-time jobs for students. This is particularly important since most students cannot afford to buy a car or a motorcycle and the public transportation system in Cyprus is very weak.
4. The good range of courses offered and the good quality of the programmes of study.
5. The image and reputation of the institution.

Furthermore, the people that influence international students' decisions in choosing AC are the following:

1. The agents (by far the most influential people regarding students' decisions).
2. The students themselves.
3. The friends and relatives of prospective students, and especially the ones that are living and studying in Cyprus.
4. The students' parents.

### **Identify the role of current students and alumni in recruitment and marketing**

This research showed that the role of the alumni and especially of the current students is very important and is increasing in importance, as the technological means available to students are improving. The big number of current AC students acting as agents (7% of students are recruited by other students) is one of the points which supports their important role. Moreover, the WOM effect (either from people in Cyprus or in the students' home country), which was chosen by 13.04% of our students, as a source of information for AC, as well as the students' friends and relatives (in Cyprus) which was chosen by 17.96% of our students, as the people who influence them to choose AC, adds to the importance of their role. The observations also shed some light to the number of current students who sent information about Cyprus and AC to their friends and relatives in their home countries. Moreover, some alumni represent the College and recruit students for AC, some on a more casual and others on a more professional basis.



### **Determine how the behaviour/conduct by key members of the recruitment staff affects recruitment**

This study indicated that the behaviour of key members of staff who are responsible for the recruitment of students at AC greatly affects the number of students recruited. The interviews, as well as the observations illustrated that their character, personality and actions, both personal and professional, affects AC's recruitment. This is even more important when these members of staff travel abroad for recruitment and represent AC exclusively. Their role is even more significant, as the College depends more on its agents than on the direct student recruitment. Therefore, the good or bad relationships between the admissions SM in a specific country and AC's local agent/representative are directly linked with the number of students recruited.

### **Identify the strengths and weaknesses of AC**

The analysis of mainly the student questionnaire and the staff interviews revealed that AC biggest strengths are the following:

1. The reasonable TF and their good value for money.
2. The quality of the offered education.
3. The good name and reputation both in Cyprus but especially abroad
4. The good location right in the centre of the city and its proximity to available accommodation, part-time jobs and various social events around the city.
5. The good commission structure offered to agents.

In terms of weaknesses, students and SMs identified the following:

1. The SMs' behaviour (some students complain that some SMs do not behave to students in the most appropriate manner).
2. High TF (some students find our TF high compared to other smaller HEIs in Cyprus).
3. Absence of a quality monitoring mechanism for agents (the agents give wrong and misleading information in order to recruit students for AC. The College does nothing to prevent or stop the agents who act unprofessionally).

4. Unsuitable and limited facilities (some students expressed dissatisfaction with the facilities offered by the College).