

Doc. 300.2.1

External Evaluation Report (Institutional)

Date: October 31st, 2023

- **Higher Education Institution:**
Cosmos Open University
- **Town:** Nicosia
- **Institution Status:** New institution – 2nd evaluation

The present document has been prepared within the framework of the authority and competencies of the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education, according to the provisions of the “Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education and the Establishment and Operation of an Agency on Related Matters Laws” of 2015 to 2021 [L.136(I)/2015 – L.132(I)/2021].

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A. Introduction

The External Evaluation Committee (EEC) visited the premises of the University on Monday 30th of October 2023. The infrastructure visit took place on Thursday 26th of October 2023 by the building infrastructure expert of the EEC.

The visit started with a welcome from the founders and academic staff and continued with a briefing at the board meeting room with Prof. Panos Razis (President of Governing Board), Ms. Kiki Clark (Vice President of Governing Board and Head of Student Welfare Services), Prof Andreas Pavlakis (Vice President of the Governing Board and President of the Pedagogical Planning Committee), and Mr. Dimitris Mastoridis (Director of Administration and Finance).

This was the second evaluation, and although the EEC conducted a fairly comprehensive review of all the accreditation criteria, this visit primarily focused on the eLearning platform, building infrastructure and student services, which either had received poor ratings or raised concerns in the first EEC assessment. Our role was not to evaluate the previous EEC's work; therefore, we agreed to mainly assess the identified shortcomings they had found.

Then there was a meeting with the coordinator and members responsible for the e-learning unit regarding distance learning philosophy and methodology, distance learning material, the interaction plan and interactive weekly activities, as well as study guides.

The presenters for this second meeting were Prof. Antonis Lionarakis (President of the Distance Education Unit), Prof. Andreas Pavlakis (Vice President of the Governing Board and President of the Pedagogical Planning Committee), Dr. Nikolas Stylianides (Head of the eLearning Unit and Technology Dept.), Ms. Paraskevi Vasiliou (Educational Technology).

The visit continued with short presentations of the MSc program Epidemiology & Public Health (18 months, 90 ECTS), which is going to be evaluated in a separate report. It is worth mentioning that the EEC relied on these presentations to answer some of the institutional criteria such as the ones on quality assurance or teaching staff sections.

There was also a final meeting with the President and Vice Presidents of the Governing Board, the Director of Administration and Finance, as well as with the Academic Coordinator of the MSc, for final questions and clarifications.

The site visit provided us with a deeper understanding of both the MSc program and the institution.

Dr Lefkios Neophytou, Education Officer of the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation and Higher Education (CYQAA), was present in all the meetings the EEC had.

B. External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

Name	Position	University
Marta Aymerich	Chair	Universitat Oberta de Catalunya
Diederick E (Rick) Grobbee	Member	Utrecht University
Hendrik Drachsler	Member	Open University the Netherlands
Anastasia Charalampous	Student member	Open University of Cyprus
Katerina Evangelou	Student Welfare Expert	University of Cyprus
Alexis Valiantis	Building infrastructures expert	

C. Building Facilities - Student Welfare Services - Infrastructure

1. Building facilities

1.1 Plans and licenses

Choose Yes or No depending on the existence of the following documents.

1. Building facilities			Yes / No
1.1 Plans and licenses			Yes / No
1.1.1	The following should be copies from the original building permit. On the copies, there should be a visible official stamp of approval from the respective authorities.		
	1.1.1.1	A topographical plan, which displays in a clear manner the extent of the development.	Yes
	1.1.1.2	A general site plan, which marks the building facilities, allocated parking spaces (for students, academic and teaching personnel, visitors and disabled individuals), sports premises and outdoor areas.	Yes
1.1.2	An operating license issued by the Local Authorities		Yes
1.1.3	The following operating license certificates, duly completed:		
	1.1.3.1	Visual Inspection Form E.O.E. 102	Yes
	1.1.3.2	Visual Inspection for the Building's Seismic Sufficiency Form E.O.E.Σ.E.K 103	Yes
	1.1.3.3	Inspection Certificate Form 104	Yes
	1.1.3.4	Fire Safety Certificate, issued by the Fire Department	Yes
1.1.3.5	Certificate for Adequate Electrical and Mechanical Installations, issued by the Electromechanical Department	No*	
Justify the answers provided for the building facilities by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.			
Regarding 1.1.3.5. indicator, the certificate should be updated.			

1.2 Other Facilities

Choose Satisfactory or Poor or Unsatisfactory depending on the level of compliance of each statement.

1. Building Facilities		
1.2 Other Facilities		Satisfactory - Poor - Unsatisfactory
1.2.1	Number of teaching rooms and their respective areas, capacity and the percentage of daily occupancy for all units	Satisfactory*
1.2.2	Number of offices for teaching staff and their respective areas and capacity	Satisfactory*
1.2.3	Number of laboratories and their respective areas and capacity	---*
1.2.4	Number of rooms/offices for directors/administrators and their respective areas and capacity	Satisfactory*
1.2.5	Number of rooms/offices for administrative services and their respective areas and capacity	Satisfactory*
1.2.6	Number of parking spaces designated for students	---*
1.2.7	Number of parking spaces designated for teaching staff	---*
1.2.8	Number of parking spaces designated for people with disabilities	Satisfactory*

Justify the answers provided for the building facilities by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

The University building will not be used for teaching in person on site. According to the institutes academic program the lectures will be 100% online. Therefore, the building is classified as office spaces only and will be used for administrative purposes only.

Important Notes

The building is currently permitted as office spaces. It covers almost all of CYQAA'S building facilities requirements except for the certificate of approval of electrical and mechanic installations.

CYQAA does not accept the building's current permits as office use and requires that the institute secures a planning and building permit by the competent authorities as a School of Higher Education. The competent authorities are the Town Planning Authority and the Municipality of Engomi. It is noted that the Local Town Plan has a specific chapter (reference is made to Chapter 17) for the requirements for schools of higher education. It is the opinion of the buildings expert that the institute could secure a permit

for the specific building as a school of higher education, based on Article 17.5.4.2 which gives flexibility to the regulation according to the school's actual needs and program of study.

If it is the case, CYQAA will have to grant an extension of time to the University to secure the following permits and certificates:

1. Town Planning Permit as a school of Higher Education by the Town Planning Authority
2. Building Permit as a school of Higher Education
3. Updated Fire Department Approval Certificate
4. Updated Certificate of E&M installations
5. CoFA as a school of Higher Education by the Municipality of Engomi
6. Operating Licence by the Municipality of Engomi

If it is the case, the University will have to employ a competent architect to consult with the Town Planning Department in order to secure a permit as a school of Higher Education.

However, it is the opinion of the committee that the University can properly and sufficiently operate with its current facilities based on the fact that it is an online University and therefore no further requirements regarding building facilities are considered necessary.

[Click to add text](#)

Attachment:

COSMOS OPEN UNIVERSITY BUILDING FACILITIES INSTITUTIONAL REPORT, ANNEX TO EXTERNAL EVALUATION COMMITTEE REPORT FOR EVALUATION OF 30TH AND 31ST OF OCTOBER 2023

2. Student Welfare Services

Choose Satisfactory or Poor or Unsatisfactory depending on the level of compliance of each statement.

2. Student Welfare Services		Satisfactory - Poor - Unsatisfactory
2.1	Special access for students with disabilities (PWD)	Satisfactory
2.2	Recreation areas	N/A
2.3	Policy and statutes for academic student support	Satisfactory
2.4	Policy and statutes for financial student support	Satisfactory
2.5	Counselling services	Satisfactory
2.6	Career office	Satisfactory
2.7	Service linking the institution with business	Satisfactory
2.8	Mobility office	N/A
2.9	Student clubs/organisations/associations	Satisfactory
2.10	Other services	Satisfactory

Justify the answers provided for the student welfare services by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

In summary, at the present time the administration staff that supports the student welfare services appears to be adequate, as the University is under establishment. The Student Welfare Service is currently staffed by the Head of Student Services and a psychologist. They both have sufficient professional experience and expertise in their field. The Head of Student Services has over 24 years of relevant professional experience in the Open University UK.

The institution presented to the EEC the administrative organization chart, which is considered satisfactory. The institution will employ at least four University qualified and experienced Officers to give the best possible student support, before they accept the first student cohort.

The Head of Student Services set out a coherent strategic direction that seeks to support students throughout their 'learning journey'.

The institution created a good Student Handbook which includes accurate information about the University and the distance learning methodology, its services, regulations and procedures, and the available sources of help for student support.

The administrative structure of the University will be operational when the University is accredited.

2.1 Special access for students with disabilities:

The University has a policy and procedures for admitting students with disabilities and ensures equal access to academic studies. Upon admission, students are required to complete an application declaring if they have any disabilities or health problems and what special requirements they need during their studies. The specialist member of support staff will then cooperate with the psychologist to make an assessment and offer alternative assessment methods.

The campus has a lift in place although this is not a major consideration as all students will be studying by distance.

2.2 Recreation areas:

The University does not have recreation areas for students, however this does not pose a problem given the distance learning modality of programs.

2.3 Policy and statutes for academic student support:

In the Student Handbook there is a section which clearly details the procedures of student support, guidance, and advice. This includes induction arrangements, personal tutoring, study skills, career advice, counselling, and guidance to the virtual learning environment.

2.4 Policy and statutes for financial student support:

The institution has a clear commitment to providing an expansive range of financial support to students. They will be offering full or partial scholarships to candidates with high scores or financial problems.

Moreover, if students have difficulties in paying off their tuitions, the University will offer them more flexible payment methods.

2.5 Counselling services:

Students in need of psychological or other counselling services can contact the psychologist for an online private guidance and support.

2.6 Career office:

As stated, an employment engagement strategy is in hand. The Career officer will be offering the appropriate information to students on any work vacancies and also provides essential services in personal guidance and development. The officer will also guide students how to prepare for a job interview, how to write a personal statement or a CV.

2.7 Service linking the institution with business:

As presented by the Head of the Students Services, the Career Officer will work with the relevant professors who will be expected to have connections with industry to give students the best career advice possible.

2.8 Mobility office:

The institution does not have a mobility office in place, however this does not pose a problem given the distance learning modality of programs. Nevertheless, it is recommended to bear in mind that there can be student exchanges in the framework of virtual mobility.

2.9 Student clubs/organizations/associations:

Student clubs will not operate in person but the institution has appropriate plans in place to facilitate virtual coffee sessions and other online social activities where students can meet up and socialize.

A student's association will also be set up and run by the students themselves. As stated, students will be also members of the institution's committees.

2.10 Other services:

Alumni

The institution intends to establish an alumni office which is included in the administrative organization chart.

General guidance for online study

Given the international character of the university and the different time zones the Head of student services will organize online seminars on general guidance for online study that includes managing time and planning accordingly based on the students' needs.

3. Infrastructure

Choose Satisfactory or Poor or Unsatisfactory depending on the level of compliance of each statement.

3. Infrastructure		Satisfactory - Poor - Unsatisfactory
3.1	Library	Satisfactory
3.2	Computers available for use by the students	Satisfactory
3.3	Technological support	Satisfactory
3.4	Technical support	Satisfactory

Justify the answers provided for the infrastructure services by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

The University building will not be used for teaching in person on site. According to the institutes academic program the lectures will be 100% online. Therefore, the building is classified as office spaces only and will be used for administrative purposes only.

D. Guidelines on content and structure of the report

4. Institution's Academic Profile and Orientation

(ESG 1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9)

Sub-areas

1.1 Mission and strategic planning

1.2 Connecting with society

1.3 Development processes

Mark from 1 to 5 the degree of compliance for each quality indicator/criterion

1 or 2: Non-compliant

3: Partially compliant

4 or 5: Compliant

Quality indicators/criteria		
1. Institution's academic profile and orientation		
1.1 Mission and strategic planning		1 - 5
1.1.1	The Institution has formally adopted a mission statement, which is available to the public and easily accessible.	4
1.1.2	The Institution has developed its strategic planning aiming at fulfilling its mission.	4
1.1.3	The Institution's strategic planning includes short, medium-term and long-term goals and objectives, which are periodically revised and adapted.	3
1.1.4	The offered programmes of study align with the aims and objectives of the Institution's development.	4
1.1.5	The academic community is involved in shaping and monitoring the implementation of the Institution's development strategies.	3
1.1.6	In the Institution's development strategy, interested parties such as academics, students, graduates and other professional and scientific associations participate in the Institution's development strategy.	3
1.1.7	The mechanism for collecting and analysing data and indicators needed to effectively design the Institution's academic development is adequate and effective.	3

Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

The University has clear ambitions and long term goals but is currently unaccredited and therefore in certain areas "on hold" when it comes to translating aims into actions. Overall the route to success is clear with the establishment of three schools and a master's

program in Epidemiology & Public Health as one of the frontrunner programs. As such (1.1.4), while there is mentioning of involvement of various parties in elements of the program it seems so far mainly concerning inner circles of individuals and stakeholders closely related to the initiative. The Advisory Board is large but currently skewed towards physics. Moreover, there appears to be a significant gender bias in the composition of both the governing and advisory board. Given the state of development this can be partly accepted, but wider dissemination and involvement of professionals and scientific bodies relevant to the programs offered is advised when matters proceed. This will be commented upon more specifically in the evaluation of the intended master's program. Locally, there is a pedagogical planning committee including e.g., student representatives.

One important observation is that the University emphasizes to be “open” (1.1.1, 1.1.2), yet the definition or implication of this qualification remains unspecified. As far as could be judged, like in other so-called open universities in other countries, conventional criteria for admission apply albeit while targeting a large, heterogeneous and (geographically) diverse audience. Rather, the unique selling point seems to be that the education is completely on-line which differentiates this University clearly from other institutions. Being completely on-line has a range of implications for students, teachers and infrastructure which are being addressed elsewhere in the report, but importantly this allows in principle the attendance of students in courses irrespective of country of origin or time-zone.

Regarding indicator 1.1.3, the precise demarcation of the “product-market” combination remained somewhat vague, with rather optimistic projections of student inflow. However, it was repeatedly emphasized that these were indeed uncertain estimates and the University's financial viability in the intermediate term was not dependent on reaching the targets.

1.2 Connecting with society		1 - 5
1.2.1	The Institution has effective mechanisms to assess the needs and demands of society and takes them into account in its various activities.	4
1.2.2	The Institution provides sufficient information to the public about its activities and offered programmes of study.	4
1.2.3	The Institution ensures that its operation and activities have a positive impact on society.	4
1.2.4	The Institution has an effective communication mechanism with its graduates.	N/A

Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

The University has several mechanisms to assess the needs and demands of society (1.2.1) which appear adequate and have led to the current choices in the development of

programs, notably the Epidemiology & Public Health master's. There appears to be a good connection to an able, well networked and enthusiastic team in this domain (1.2.3). However, as indicated above (1.1.4) this is only partly covered in the Advisory Board.

Point 1.2.4. is currently irrelevant as there no graduates yet. Plans, however, include arrangements such as an alumni club.

1.3 Development processes		1 - 5
1.3.1	Effective procedures and measures are in place to attract and select teaching staff to ensure that they possess the formal and substantive skills to teach research and effectively carry out their work.	4
1.3.2	The Institution has a two-year growth budget that is consistent with its strategic planning.	5
1.3.3	Planning academic staff recruitment and their professional development is in line with the Institution's academic development plan.	4
1.3.4	The Institution applies an effective strategy of attracting students/ high-level students from Cyprus.	3
1.3.5	The Institution applies an effective strategy to attract high-level students from abroad.	3
1.3.6	The funding processes for the operation of the Institution and the continuous improvement of the quality of its programmes of study are adequate and transparent.	4

Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

There appears to be access to both permanent and part-time staff in the relevant areas (1.3.1). Moreover, as the teaching will be fully on-line, a dedicated set of training modules to assure mastering of the on-line teaching environment was presented (1.3.3). Although elements of the strategy for recruiting students from both Cyprus and abroad were presented there was still some lack of detail, hence a score of 3 (1.3.4, 1.3.5). What “high level” for students exactly means here is unclear to the committee, more so because the University aims at diversity and inclusivity in its recruitment rather than only selecting “the best”. The budget and funding for the coming years seem in order, in line with the strategic planning, adequate for the programmes and quality, and not depending on the number or growth of students (1.3.2, 1.3.6).

Findings

The presentation on the Academic orientation and profile was well structured and informative although sometimes a bit “high over” and generic. While ambitions are clear, and the organization appears eager to commence, the specificity of some of the information is hampered by the fact that much is still theoretical and the University cannot draw from experience in running operations.

Strengths

- Systems, technical infrastructure and organizational elements specific to a distance learning institute are well in place and thought through.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Broader embedding in (international) academic networks and links to professionals with complementary expertise as well as access to “best practices” in on-line academic teaching is recommended.

Please select what is appropriate for each of the following sub-areas:

Sub-Area	<i>Non-compliant / Partially Compliant / Compliant</i>
1.1 Mission and strategic planning	Compliant
1.2 Connecting with society	Partially Compliant
1.3 Development processes	Compliant

2. Quality Assurance

(ESG 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8)

Sub-areas

2.1 System and Quality Assurance Strategy

2.2 Ensuring quality for the programmes of study

Mark from 1 to 5 the degree of compliance for each quality indicator/criterion

1 or 2: Non-compliant

3: Partially compliant

4 or 5: Compliant

Quality Indicators/Criteria		
2. Quality Assurance		
2.1 System and Quality Assurance Strategy		1 - 5
2.1.1	The Institution has a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of its strategic management.	4
2.1.2	Internal stakeholders develop and implement a policy for quality assurance through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders.	3
2.1.3	The Institution's policy for quality assurance supports guarding against intolerance of any kind or discrimination against students or staff.	4
2.1.4	The quality assurance system adequately covers all the functions and sectors of the Institution's activities:	
	2.1.4.1 The teaching and learning	4
	2.1.4.2 Research	4
	2.1.4.3 The connection with society	3
	2.1.4.4 Management and support services	3
2.1.5	The quality assurance system promotes a culture of quality.	3

2.1.6	The Institution consistently applies pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of student 'life cycle', e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification.	3
2.1.7	Institutional practice for recognition being in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, cooperation with other institutions and quality assurance agencies and the national ENIC/NARIC center.	2
2.1.8	Graduates receive documentation explaining the qualification gained.	2

Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

The EEC mainly follows the ratings of the previous evaluation committee. The University showed significant improvements on an internal research framework that enables the University scholars to apply for different sizes of internal research grants. They reserved an overall budget of 500.000 EUR for these internal research grants. They also expressed their willingness to facilitate their students' research endeavors. So this is a very positive step ahead of the previous evaluation. The University can improve their research efforts by also facilitating their staff for the EU Horizon program to reach an even higher level of complaints.

2. Quality assurance

2.2 Ensuring quality for the programmes of study		1 - 5
2.2.1	The responsibility for decision-making and monitoring the implementation of the programmes of study offered by the Institution lies with the teaching staff.	4
2.2.2	The system and criteria for assessing students' performance in the subjects of the programmes of studies offered by the Institution are clear, sufficient and known to the students.	4
2.2.3	The quality control system refers to specific indicators and is effective.	3
2.2.4	The results from student assessments are used to improve the programmes of study.	3
2.2.5	The policy dealing with plagiarism committed by students as well as mechanisms for identifying and preventing it are effective.	4
2.2.6	The institutionalised procedures for examining students' objections/disagreements on issues of student evaluation or academic ethics are effective.	3
2.2.7	The Institution provides information about its activities, including the programmes of study it offers and the selection criteria for them, the intended learning outcomes of these programmes, the qualifications awarded, the teaching, learning and assessment procedures used, the pass rates and the	3

	learning opportunities available to the students as well as graduate employment information.	
2.2.8	The Institution ensures that effective methodology is applied in the learning process.	3
2.2.9	The Institution systematically collects data in relation to the academic performance of students, implements procedures for evaluating such data and has a relevant policy in place.	4
2.2.10	The Institution ensures adequate and appropriate learning resources in line with European and international standards and / or international practices, particularly:	
2.2.10.1	Building facilities	N/A
2.2.10.2	Library	4
2.2.10.3	Rooms for theoretical, practical and laboratory lessons	N/A
2.2.10.4	Technological infrastructure	4
2.2.10.5	Support structures for students with special needs and learning difficulties	3
2.2.10.6	Academic Support	3
2.2.10.7	Student Welfare Services	4

Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

The committee mainly follows the ratings of the previous evaluation committee, we express here reasons for diverging from the previous committee.

The University demonstrated rubrics on various levels and also made them transparent to the students (indicator 2.2.2). In addition, the University expressed their willingness to take assessment and learning analytics results into account to improve the learning process over time (indicators 2.2.4 & 2.2.9).

The University also expressed their willingness to buy in to Turnitin to check thesis for plagiarism consequently. During the site visit they emphasized the plagiarism check policy they will apply to all student texts (indicator 2.2.5).

Although a convincing education vision is still lacking, the University demonstrated that they take care of effective methods for teaching and learning (2.2.8 indicator).

Finally, the University expressed to have means to facilitate disabled students, already at admission the students can expressed specific needs. However, the University cannot cover all students disabilities but they aim for subtitle lectures and provide also other means (indicator 2.2.10.5).

Findings

There is enough information to identify compliance. The University addressed many of the vagueness presented to the previous committee plagiarism, assessment of students outcomes and lessons learned for the teaching and learning programme, as well as addressing special needs.

Strengths

- Academic support, especially for research is strong.
- Student welfare support is reasonably good.
- There is a reasonable assessment strategy in the form of rubrics and learning analytics in place that also provides statistics for further improvement of the study program. The University showed systems and how data are collected analysed over the Moodle and BBB environment.
- There are measures for plagiarism specified.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The persistent absence of a clearly articulated educational model, coupled with congruent teaching methodologies, remains a salient concern for the assessment of the University. It is imperative for the University to reframe this not merely as a prerequisite for accreditation but as an opportunity for genuine academic enhancement.

In addition, the University should engage with experts specializing in online learning to develop or adapt another educational model. By doing so, the University can pave the way for the development of a Mediterranean-centric educational model that incorporates the specific needs of the region and the needs of their international students, ranging from Cyprus and Greece over Arabic to Indian countries. Creating and using such an all-encompassing educational model for a certain region would not only help the University's branding efforts in a market that is becoming more crowded, but it would also give the institution a unique identity and mission within its geographical scope. The benefits of such a strategic approach extend beyond immediate accreditation goals and have the potential to significantly elevate the University's standing in the academic community. Finally, such a model is not done in a one time achievement, it is an iterative process that further

Please select what is appropriate for each of the following sub-areas:

Sub-Area	<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
2.1 System and quality assurance strategy	Compliant
2.2 Ensuring quality for the programmes of study	Compliant

3. Administration (ESG 1.1)

Mark from 1 to 5 the degree of compliance for each quality indicator/criterion

- 1 or 2: Non-compliant
3: Partially compliant
4 or 5: Compliant

Quality indicators/criteria		
3. Administration		1 - 5
3.1	The administrative structure is in line with the legislation in force and the Institution's declared mission.	3
3.2	The members of the teaching and administrative staff and the students participate, at a satisfactory degree and on the basis of based on specified procedures, in the management of the Institution.	2
3.3	Adequate allocation of competences and responsibilities is ensured so that in academic matters, decisions are made by academics and the Institution's Council competently exercises legal control over such decisions.	4
3.4	The Institution applies effective procedures to ensure transparency in the decision-making process.	4
3.5	The Boards of Departments and Schools, as well as the institutionalised committees of the Institution, operate systematically and exercise fully the responsibilities provided by legislation and / or the constitution and / or the internal regulations of the Institution.	4
3.6	The Council, the Senate as well as the administrative and academic committees, operate systematically and autonomously and exercise the full powers provided for by the statute and / or the constitution of the Institution without the intervention or involvement of a body or person outside the law provisions.	4
3.6	The manner in which the Council, the Senate and/or and the administrative and academic committees operate and the procedures for disseminating and implementing their decisions are clearly formulated and implemented precisely and effectively.	4
3.7	The Institution applies procedures for the prevention and disciplinary control of academic misconduct of students, academic and administrative staff, including plagiarism.	4

3.8 The administrative structure is in line with the legislation in force and the Institution's declared mission.

4

Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

The documentation, the presentations delivered during the second site visit, as well as the answers to the second EEC committee, are sufficient to justify the high scores in this section.

Findings

According to the first evaluation, the documentation is sufficient to determine that high scores should be assigned. The institutional application specifies and details the organizational chart. In addition, in the second site visit the EEC the Governing board names were delivered.

Comments raised by the 1st EEC regarding plagiarism tools and the role of the adjunct professors were clarified during the second site visit.

Strengths

- Administrative processes are well-defined.
- The Governing Body, with 19 members, meets monthly for decision-making issues.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Governance body should be gender balanced.

Please select what is appropriate for the following assessment area:

Assessment Area	<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
3. Administration	Compliant

4. Learning and Teaching

(ESG 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.9)

Sub-Areas

4.1 Planning the programmes of study

4.2 Organisation of teaching

Mark from 1 to 5 the degree of compliance for each quality indicator/criterion

- 1 or 2: Non-compliant
3: Partially compliant
4 or 5: Compliant

Quality indicators/criteria		
4. Learning and Teaching		
4.1 Planning the programmes of study		1 - 5
4.1.1	The Institution provides an effective system for designing, approving, monitoring and periodically reviewing programmes of study.	4
4.1.2	Students and other stakeholders, including employers, are actively involved on the programmes' review and development.	3
4.1.3	The programmes of study are in compliance with the ESG and the existing legislation and meet the professional qualifications requirements in the professional courses, where applicable.	3
4.1.4	The Institution ensures that its programmes of study integrate effectively theory and practice.	3
4.1.5	The assessment and evaluation procedures and content are in compliance with the level of the programme of study (in reference to EQF).	4

Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

There is nothing to add to the review of the previous committee on the indicator 4.1.1.

Regarding the indicator 4.1.2, the University demonstrated how the employees (tutors, professors, and IT staff) are actively involved in the development and review of the program. They have a highly motivated teaching staff that aims for the best possible outcomes. As there are no students, they are not involved so far, but the University expressed their ambition to also let students review the course program.

In addition, the University addressed most of the ten standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance (indicator 4.1.3.). Their approaches still need to prove their effectiveness in practice; information on cyclical external quality assurance and a public information strategy still need to be specified.

On the indicator 4.1.4., it is worth mentioning that the application showed a plethora of teaching methodologies, spanning from constructivism and connectivism to cooperative learning, project-based learning, problem-based learning, and inquiry-based learning. While the diversity of approaches is commendable, there is a lack of clarity on how these methods interrelate. Ambiguity in teaching models comes with challenges in daily practices, it effects challenges in communication amongst the didactical and IT staff and has also posed difficulties when communicating the teaching framework to students. It would be highly beneficial for the University to engage an expert in online learning models to delineate a clear and cohesive educational model for all stakeholders. Streamlining these approaches would not only foster clearer communication but also ensure a more effective and coherent learning experience for the students.

On the indicator 4.1.5. the EEC of the second evaluation follows the results of the previous committee.

4.2 Organisation of teaching		1 - 5
4.2.1	The Institution establishes student admission criteria for each programme, which are adhered to consistently.	4
4.2.2	Recognition of prior studies and credit transfer is regulated by procedures and regulations that are in line with European standards and/or international practices.	3
4.2.3	The number of students in the teaching rooms is suitable for theoretical, practical and laboratory lessons.	3
4.2.4	The teaching staff of the Institution have regular and effective communication with their students.	3
4.2.5	The teaching staff of the Institution provides timely and effective feedback to their students.	3

Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

The University is aiming for international students from the Mediterranean area they should add a criterion on language skills to their admission criteria (indicator 4.2.1.)

There is nothing to add here specifically to indicator 4.2.2.

Since the University aims to provide mainly online teaching, there is no need for certain teaching rooms. However, they expressed plans in the future to also facilitate a lab infrastructure, but this cannot be evaluated today (indicator 4.2.3.).

The University has demonstrated a communication strategy consisting of 10 interactive sessions and up to six synchronous sessions between the teaching staff and students, as well as student-to-student communication (indicators 4.2.4 & 4.2.5).

Findings

The University has taken commendable steps to address the concerns raised by the previous committee. Their efforts have brought them to an acceptable standard, though the aim towards academic excellence requires further refinements.

The EEC recognizes and appreciates that many of the pivotal concerns of the prior committee have been sufficiently addressed by the University.

For a more comprehensive understanding and detailed insights into the findings, refer to the justifications provided in the table above.

Strengths

- Staff to student communication
The University online teaching potentially offers flexibility and convenience to its students. The institution's communication strategy emphasizes regular and interactive sessions, fostering both teacher-student and student-student engagement.
- Assessment Strategies
On a positive note, the University has showcased clear rubrics for both formative assignments and summative assessments. These have been made transparent to the students, which is an exemplary move towards fostering clarity and trust.
- ICT Infrastructure
Both the teaching staff and students have access to an online ICT teaching and learning infrastructure. Notably, the University has presented a robust cybersecurity concept, which commendably addresses the recent vulnerabilities that have plagued universities and public organizations.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Admission of students
The University could benefit from introducing language proficiency criteria in its admissions, given its target audience.
- Educational Model
The University has yet to provide convincing documentation outlining their educational model, and more specifically, its impact on the design and dynamics of student learning and teaching.

Please select what is appropriate for each of the following sub-areas:

Sub-area	<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
4.1 Planning the programmes of study	Compliant
4.2 Organisation of teaching	Compliant

5. Teaching Staff (ESG 1.5)

Mark from 1 to 5 the degree of compliance for each quality indicator/criterion

- 1 or 2: Non-compliant
3: Partially compliant
4 or 5: Compliant

Quality Indicators/Criteria		
5. Teaching Staff		1 - 5
5.1	The number of teaching staff - full-time and exclusive work - and the subject area of the staff sufficiently support the programmes of study.	4
5.2	The teaching staff of the Institution have the relevant formal and substantive qualifications for teaching the individual subjects as described in the relevant legislation.	4
5.3	The Visiting Professors' subject areas adequately support the Institution's programmes of study.	3
5.4	The special teaching staff and special scientists have the required qualifications, sufficient professional experience and expertise to teach a limited number of programmes of study.	4
5.5	The ratio of special teaching staff to the total number of teaching staff is satisfactory.	4
5.6	The ratio of the number of subjects of the programme of study taught by teaching staff working fulltime and exclusively to the number of subjects taught by part-time teaching staff ensures the quality of the programme of study.	4
5.7	The ratio of the number of students to the total number of teaching staff is sufficient to support and ensure the quality of the Programme of Study.	4
5.8	The number of teaching staff - full-time and exclusive work - and the subject area of the staff sufficiently support the programmes of study.	4
5.9	The visiting Professors' subject areas adequately support the Institution's programmes of study.	4

Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

All of the above applies to the master’s program in Epidemiology & Public health as this is one of the first programs to be rolled out once the University receives accreditation. We have not been informed about the arrangements and time planning for other courses in one of the other three schools of the institute. As to Epidemiology & Public Health, the teaching staff was enthusiastic and motivated. While there were differences in seniority all seem well qualified and trained (several with educational periods outside Cyprus in different academic cultures). Most have significant experience in distance learning. The teaching staff was well balanced in gender.

We have not seen the exact numbers and time dedication notably in relation to other programs about to be launched such as Medical Physics and Diagnostic Imaging, Strategy, Intelligence and Cyber-Security, and Sustainable Environment and Energy Management.

Findings

We are not sure whether the unit working on the first program (MSc Epidemiology & Public Health) should be regarded a “department”. Moreover, given the full on-line nature of the teaching, there is not a relevant “site” to visit except office space which seemed more than adequate.

Strengths

All requirements appear to be met to successfully launch a first fully on-line master’s level course on Epidemiology & Public Health. Note that this is the only teaching staff we have been able to judge as part of the current institutional evaluation. The content of the program is evaluated separately, but regarding teaching staff this is the relevant group considered by the committee for the short term. There is a, somewhat crude, marketing strategy and there are financial predictions that appear realistic with a target of 100 and a minimum of 50 students entering the first year.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The EEC recommends to be consistent regarding terminology and positions. It should be stated that visiting professors have the same position than adjunct professors, as the EEC was told in the site visit.

Please select what is appropriate for the following assessment area:

Assessment Area	<i>Non-Compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
5. Teaching staff	Compliant

6. Research

(ESG 1.1, 1.5, 1.6)

Mark from 1 to 5 the degree of compliance for each quality indicator/criterion

- 1 or 2: Non-compliant
3: Partially compliant
4 or 5: Compliant

Quality indicators/criteria		
6. Research		1 - 5
6.1	The Institution has a research policy formulated in line with its mission.	4
6.2	The Institution consistently applies internal regulations and procedures of research activity, which promote the set out research policy and ensure compliance with the regulations of research projects financing programmes.	3
6.3	The Institution provides adequate facilities and equipment to cover the staff and students' research activities.	4
6.4	Through its policy and practices, the Institution encourages research collaboration within and outside the Institution, as well as participation in collaborative research funding programmes.	4
6.5	The Institution uses a policy for the protection and exploitation of intellectual property, which is applied consistently.	4
6.6	The results of the teaching staff research activity are published to a satisfactory extent in international journals which work with critics, international conferences, conference proceedings, publications, etc. The Institution also uses an open access policy for publications, which is consistent with the corresponding national and European policy.	N/A
6.7	The Institution ensures that research results are integrated into teaching and, to the extent applicable, promotes and implements a policy of transferring know-how to society and the production sector.	4
6.8	The Institution provides mechanisms which ensure compliance with international rules of research ethics, both in relation to research activity and the rights of researchers.	4
6.9	The external, non-governmental, funding of research activities of academic staff is similar to other Institutions in Cyprus and abroad.	N/A

6.10	The policy, indirect or direct of internal funding of the research activities of the academic staff is satisfactory, based on European and international practices.	4
6.11	The programmes of study implement the Institution's recorded research policy.	3

Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

The principles for establishing research activities alongside the on-line teaching (which is the current focus of the University) are well spelled out and confirm with international standards in conduct, IP etc. (all rated 4). However, the real world implementation remains a bit elusive at this point in time as there are no current research activities. While most teaching staff of the program the committee has evaluated appear to be involved in more or less extensive research activities at their home institutions including academic publications, presentations at conferences and research grants, this cannot yet justifiably be assigned to the University (6.6 N/A).

Findings

Given the state of affairs, with the institute not yet having been accredited, there is no research yet so several aspects of its (successful) implementation cannot be judged at this time. Overall, principles appear to be spelled out well. The EEC acknowledges that for an institution such as the University the EEC evaluated, with its focus on online education and its recent establishment, it is not realistic to expect a full blown internationally competitive research port-folio overnight. Similarly, it is impossible to predict at this point in time how research at the University in terms of scope, breath and funding would compare to other institutions in Cyprus and abroad (6.9 N/A). However, one attractive feature of the current set-up is that there are internal funds to promote and initiate research at different levels of intensity by the teaching staff. Many other institutions do not benefit from such "revolving funds". Finally, by nature of its organization, many of the teaching staff at a professorial or adjunct level are (partly) affiliated with established research institutions elsewhere in Cyprus or abroad. Their work there will give access to the University to running (international) research programs and cross fertilize, while also providing opportunities to students for their assignments from the get go.

Strengths

See under Findings

Areas of improvement and recommendations

International scientific research is highly competitive and it is not realistic to expect anything at this level when starting from scratch at the University in the short term. However, the board embraces and promotes research activities by their teaching staff and provides financial support to trigger initiatives. According to the committee, and echoed by the board of the University, the key principle here is (international) collaboration. It is advised that some of the funding available for research is used to build international collaboration and prepare for involvement in EU grants rather than

specific research projects. Also, through their affiliated staff and Advisory Board it is recommended to explore and install collaborations with networks/consortia, academic institutions and individuals to ensure sufficient involvement and exposure of staff and students to high level research.

Please select what is appropriate for the following assessment area:

Assessment Area	<i>Non-Compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
6. Research	Compliant

7. Resources

(ESG 1.6)

Mark from 1 to 5 the degree of compliance for each quality indicator/criterion

- 1 or 2: Non-compliant
3: Partially compliant
4 or 5: Compliant

Quality indicators/criteria		1 - 5
7. Resources		
7.1	The institution has sufficient financial resources to support its functions, managed by the Council/Senate.	4
7.2	The Institution follows sound and efficient management of the available financial resources in order to develop academically and research wise.	3
7.3	The Institution's profits and donations are used for its development and for the benefit of the university community.	4
7.4	The Institution's budget is appropriate for its mission and adequate for the implementation of strategic planning.	2
7.5	The Institution carries out an assessment of the risks and sustainability of the programmes of study and adequately provides feedback on their operation.	4
7.6	The Institution's external audit and the transparent management of its finances are ensured.	4
7.7	The fitness-for-purpose of support facilities and services is periodically reviewed.	4

Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

The information in hand suggests compliance. The university board explains having sufficient funding for the first phase until accreditation as well as sufficient financial buffers for the first 5 years of operation, even if the number of students might remain limited. The university should work on a solid business plan and marketing strategy with experts, especially as they aim to provide their services on significantly different cultures and markets in the region.

Findings

Upon review, the university has demonstrated financial compliance, particularly noteworthy given the notable subsidy discrepancies observed in the past two years. It is imperative for the

university to formulate a business plan that meticulously outlines annualized revenue and expenditures. Furthermore, establishing clear benchmarks for course and program viability will be instrumental in ensuring sustained financial stability and operational effectiveness.

Strengths

The university benefits from robust funding from investors for the pre- and post-accreditation phase that can last until 5 years, establishing a solid foundation for its commencement.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

It is evident that while significant emphasis has been placed on the backing of investors, a comprehensive understanding of the financial viability of the post-accreditation phase is still needed.

The university's revenue generation mechanisms, including both fixed and variable costs associated with its operations, have not been adequately detailed. It is essential to have a clearer picture of revenue and costs on an annualized basis, alongside established benchmarks for the viability of courses and programs as well as the assurance of staff. A specified timeline for assessing the financial feasibility of individual modules is also imperative. The committee has concerns regarding the full cost of operating an online learning university to steer the University towards a financially sustainable trajectory.

Also, the fact that there is not any information about possible additional financial contributions from investors makes it hard to figure out how long the University will be able to carry out its mission and vision. It is crucial to emphasize the need for a robust marketing strategy tailored to the unique demands and opportunities of the Mediterranean educational market in the Arabic, Greek, Cyprus, and Indian regions.

Please select what is appropriate for the following assessment area:

Assessment Area	<i>Non-Compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
7. Resources	Compliant

E. Conclusions and Final Remarks

The External Evaluation Committee (EEC) visited the premises of the University on Monday 30th of October 2023. The infrastructure visit took place on Thursday 26th of October 2023 by the building infrastructure expert of the EEC.

This was the second evaluation, and although the EEC conducted a fairly comprehensive review of all the accreditation criteria, this visit primarily focused on the eLearning platform, building infrastructure and student services, which either had received poor ratings or raised concerns in the first EEC assessment. Our role was not to evaluate the previous EEC's work; therefore, we agreed to mainly assess the identified shortcomings they had found. Moreover, it should be noted that for some sections of this report, such as quality assurance or teaching staff, the EEC relied on the documentation and presentations for the MSc of Epidemiology and Public Health.

The administration staff that supports the student welfare services appears to be adequate, as the University is under establishment. The Student Welfare Service is currently staffed by the Head of Student Services and a psychologist. They both have sufficient professional experience and expertise in their field. The Head of Student Services has over 24 years of relevant professional experience in the Open University UK.

The University building will not be used for teaching in person on site. According to the institutes academic program the lectures will be 100% online. Therefore, the building is classified as office spaces only and will be used for administrative purposes only.

The EEC found that the University has demonstrated a strong commitment to academic relevance and exhibited a highly motivated and devoted academic staff during the site visit. In addition, the University maintains a robust quality assurance framework, consistently meeting the standards set by the accrediting body. The administrative processes are well-defined, and the Governing Body meets monthly for decision-making process, although it is not gender balanced. It is worth mentioning that achieving this balance should be pursued. Furthermore, the Advisory Board is large but currently skewed towards physics, and it is not gender-balanced either. Given the state of development this can be partially accepted, but wider dissemination and involvement of professionals and scientific bodies relevant to the programs offered is advised when matters proceed.

The University has showcased a strong commitment to learning and teaching excellence. The student-centric approach and integration of innovative teaching methods enhance the overall learning experience, although it should be noticed that the application showed a plethora of teaching methodologies, spanning from cooperative learning, project-based learning, problem-based learning to inquiry-based learning. While the diversity of approaches is commendable, there is a lack of clarity on how these methods interrelate. Ambiguity in teaching models comes with challenges in daily practices, it effects challenges in communication amongst the didactical and IT staff and has also posed difficulties when communicating the teaching framework to students. It would be highly beneficial for the University to engage an expert in online learning models to delineate a clear and cohesive educational model for all stakeholders.

The University demonstrated how the employees (tutors, professors, and IT staff) are actively involved in the development and review of the program. They have a highly motivated teaching staff that aims for the best possible outcomes. As there are no students, they are not involved so far, but the University expressed their ambition to also let students review the course program.

The principles for establishing research activities alongside the online teaching (which is the current focus of the University) are well spelled out and confirm with international standards in conduct. However, the real world implementation remains a bit elusive at this point in time as there are no current research activities. At this point it is worth mentioning that the University will make a map of research priorities. While most teaching staff of the program the committee has evaluated appear to be involved in more or less extensive research activities at their home institutions including academic publications, presentations at conferences and research grants, this cannot yet justifiably be assigned to the University.

The EEC evaluation encompassed a fair comprehensive review of various aspects of the University and recognizes and appreciates that many of the pivotal concerns of the first evaluation have been sufficiently addressed by the University. Therefore, the University has successfully met all the accreditation criteria as set forth by the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education.

F. Signatures of the EEC

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>	
Marta Aymerich		
Diederick E. (Rick) Grobbee		
Hendrick Drachsler		
Anastasia Charalampous		
Katerina Evangelou		
Alexis Valiantis		

Date: October 31st, 2023

