

**Higher Education Institution's Response
E-Learning Programme of Study**

- **Higher Education Institution:**
Frederick University
- **Campus:** Nicosia (the programme is distance learning and offered online)
- **School:** Business and Law
- **Department / Sector:** Business Administration
- **Programme(s) of study under evaluation**
Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)

Programme

In Greek:

Διοίκηση Επιχειρήσεων (3 ακαδημαϊκά
Εξάμηνα, 90 ECTS, Μάστερ (MBA), Εξ αποστάσεως)

In English:

Business Administration (3 academic semesters, 90
ECTS, Master (MBA), Distance Learning)

Language(s) of instruction: English and Greek

Programme's Status: Currently Operating

The present document has been prepared within the framework of the authority and competencies of the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education, according to the provisions of the "Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education and the Establishment and Operation of an Agency on Related Matters Laws of 2015 to 2019" [N. 136 (I)/2015 to N. 35(I)/2019].



A. Guidelines on content and structure of the report

- *The Higher Education Institution (HEI) based on the External Evaluation Committee's (EEC's) evaluation report (Doc.300.3.1) must justify whether actions have been taken in improving the quality of the department in each assessment area.*
- *In particular, under each assessment area, the HEI must respond on, without changing the format of the report:*
 - *the findings, strengths, areas of improvement and recommendations of the EEC*
 - *the deficiencies noted under the quality indicators (criteria)*
 - *the conclusions and final remarks noted by the EEC*
- *The HEI's response must follow below the EEC's comments, which must be copied from the external evaluation report (Doc. 300.3.1).*
- *In case of annexes, those should be attached and sent on a separate document.*



1. Study programme and study programme's design and development

(ESG 1.1, 1.2, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9)

All areas marked as compliant

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- a. In the provided list of elective courses an elective on Organisation Behaviour is offered. In many MBA programmes, Organisation Behaviour is placed as a mandatory course within the first semester. Therefore, it may not appear sufficiently advanced as an elective. We therefore suggest that Frederick University change the title (and content) of this elective in order to make it more attractive for students.

Department's Response:

In the current structure of our MBA Programme, the course on *Organisation Behaviour* is offered as an elective. We have taken the view of offering a course on *Human Resource Management and Leadership* as a mandatory module and a course on *Organisation Behaviour* as an elective module which further builds on the former foundational course. It is worth noting that, over the recent years, this elective has proved to be a very popular option among students.

Based on the recommendation of the Committee and reviewing current trends in international practice by many MBA Programmes, we have changed the title of this elective course to *People and Behaviour in Organizations* so that it better reflects the content of the module and it is also in line with the key sources recommended to students and basic journals in the field. However, it is noted that during the next major round of internal review of the MBA Programme structure, the Department will evaluate the offering this course is as an elective or as a mandatory course.

- b. Asking students about their wishes for electives could be beneficial for the development of this part of the programme.

Department's Response:

During the 2nd semester of the Programme, DLMBA students are required to select two electives from a pool of available elective courses (each corresponding to 10 ECTS).



Students' wishes for electives is a very critical proposition for the development of this part of the Programme and it is supported and encouraged by the MBA Programme Coordinator. The list of electives offered to students so far, was compiled as a result of a combination of factors like (i) students' feedback and expressed preferences on the type of electives they would generally like to be offered and (ii) expected class size per elective.

Although the electives list is comprehensive, the Department has decided that during the next internal re-evaluation of the programme, taking into account the student feedback, to introduce a course on "Quality Management- Quality Assurance" in both conventional and distance learning MBA.

2. Student – centred learning, teaching and assessment

(ESG 1.3)

Sub-area		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
2.1	Process of teaching and learning and student-centred teaching methodology	Compliant
2.2	Practical training	Compliant
2.3	Student assessment	Compliant
2.4	Study guides structure, content and interactive activities	Partially compliant

Department's Response:

The Committee's following comment is well received: "The contents of the various courses as well as the criteria for student assessment are well-described and follow international standards. Study guides are well-developed".

In response to the Committee's assessment for the sub-area **2.4 study guides structure, content and interactive activities** as "Partially compliant", we provide relevant comments in our response under section 5 (Learning resources and student support, ESG 1.6) where we also address relevant recommendations of the Committee for assessment area 5. In that section, we present a revised Distance Learning Pedagogical Framework that relates the learning outcomes of a course to the activities and the assessment. Furthermore, details of examples of using the revised framework for the development of interactive activities are given in **ANNEX 2** of this response Document.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- a. The introduction to the distance learning and online community is called 'a 0 credits course'. The ECTS framework requires all mandatory activities to carry an ECTS-value to reflect the average workload on the student. Even it was said in the visit that the 0 credits course was not mandatory, the committee suggests that the activity is given another label, as the label 'course' implies an ECTS activity.



Department's Response:

In agreement with the Committee's recommendation, we have changed the title name of the '**0 credits course**' to that of "**Introductory training module**". As explained during the online site visit, students undertaking this module are not expected to deliver exercises or coursework, hence, there is no work load, assessment or grading. As the module is offered on a voluntarily basis it does not increase students' workload. Its scope is to introduce students to the Distance Learning mode of study at Frederick University. The module aims to familiarize students with the pedagogical framework, the process, procedures and technological tools employed in distance learning, as well as, to support their journey to acquire knowledge, making it as productive, beneficial and enjoyable as possible.

3. Teaching staff

(ESG 1.5)

Sub-area		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
3.1	Teaching staff recruitment and development	Partially compliant
3.2	Teaching staff number and status	Compliant
3.3	Synergies of teaching and research	Compliant

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- a. More encouragement, incentives and support for research activities among faculty is recommendable. The transition from college (i.e. teaching-focused institution) to university (i.e. research-based institution) seems not to have fully materialized yet, and research output for more of the faculty members must be stronger. A means could be to find ways to reduce the required teaching load, which is 12 h/week (even though the department has managed to reduce it to some extent.). Another means would be to make the criteria for research evaluations more transparent.

Department's Response:

We appreciate the Committee's recommendations that aim to improve research activity of faculty members. The Committee observes that significant variation in research output among staff is a problem that must be addressed. Indeed, the Department has identified several challenges in promoting the research efforts of its staff to become research active. Under a broader university plan, the Department has identified a series of research related KPIs so that members of staff can relate to tangible and quantifiable targets as well as a series of support mechanisms to help in that direction.

More specifically, taking on board the Committee's recommendations, the Department has taken the following decisions/ actions:



A. Clarify the criteria used for faculty research evaluations so that they become more transparent.

While research is appreciated, the Committee encourages the Department to further support and enhance research activities among faculty and recommends that there is space for improvement in terms of how research is evaluated.

Taking these comments on board, the Department updated its research policy to provide guidance and set targets for its faculty members that relate to key performance indicators (KPIs) in the following areas:

- Number of publications as listed in Scopus
- High impact (quality) publications as measured by SJR index in Scopus
- Submitted research proposals and funding
- h-index (measured in Scopus)
- Citations (measured in Scopus)
- PhD supervision

The Department has measured and assessed all KPIs listed above for each faculty member and defined overall targets for each KPI over a horizon of 3 years, monitoring progress on an annual basis. Considering the importance placed on higher quality publications informed by international metrics and the resulting impact on the reputation of the Department and the University in general, the publications rating $SJR \geq 1$ for each faculty member was evaluated. While it is noted that there are several other measures of quality one may consider, the current approach was deemed to be transparent since data is easily available in Scopus and measured centrally by the university research services. It is noted that, despite some possible weaknesses, the $SJR \geq 1$ appears to be highly correlated with other international rankings such as ABS.

In addition to the above, considering the trade-offs between quality and quantity of publications, in a recent meeting the Department decided to adopt the Academic Journal Guide (AJG) published by the Chartered Association of Business Schools. This journal list covers a wide range of business-related fields and it is widely used by academic business schools internationally. The list can be found at: <https://charteredabs.org/academic-journal->

[guide-2021-view/](#). The list uses the AJG rank (1-4 with 4* reserved for few leading journals in respective fields). It is the Department's intention to use this index as an additional way of measuring the quality of faculty publications.

Clearly, in line with the University's strategic plan to become an internationally recognized research-based institution, the Department proposes to use the above criteria to provide further transparency and clarity to faculty for research evaluations, in addition to the explicit criteria and guidelines for promotion set by the University. With regards new recruitments, these criteria will be applied where priority will be placed on high quality research output.

B. Offer incentives, encourage, support and promote the research culture and activity among faculty. The following decisions have now been taken:

- Reduce faculty teaching load. The University's teaching load reduction scheme is applied in the case of faculty who are engaged in research activities, participate in research projects or supervise PhD students. This scheme reduces teaching load for faculty to develop their research agenda and build up their research output. Furthermore, the Department's decision to proceed with the recruitment of visiting faculty to strengthen program development and delivery, contributes to the teaching load reduction of resident faculty and further concentration on their research activities. The Visiting Staff include:
 - i. Dr Marianna Makri from the University of Miami (Management / Entrepreneurial Management)
 - ii. Dr Elena Chatzopoulou from Kent University (Digital Marketing)

(please refer to Annex 1).

- Increase research support mechanisms. It has been identified that many colleagues are reluctant to engage in funded research initiatives due to the administrative load this often entails. For this reason, a new research officer has been hired in the Research and Interconnection Service to offer support in this direction. Administering research projects, editing research proposals, and enhancing/facilitating the development of research networks are some of the duties of the new research officer.
- Offer opportunities for internal funding to encourage faculty members that require financial assistance to develop their research ideas. Notably, faculty members can take advantage of the decision taken by the Senate in Fall 2020 to fund competitive research proposals.



The Senate has allocated a portion of the University's Research Fund to an internal funding scheme through which members of staff can apply for internal small-scale financial support (5,000 to 10,000 euros per project). The call was announced in January 2021 and several faculty members submitted proposals in their field of expertise.

- Encourage / fund a greater number of visits from external academics and other collaborators to promote research engagement and identify areas for collaboration with resident faculty. To this end, the research seminar series can provide a platform for faculty members, as well as, invited speakers of international calibre, to present their research work. The use of online technology contributes in limiting the travel costs for invited speakers. For example, it is noted that the Department has already put in place arrangements with two visiting faculty members, one from the University of Miami (in the field of Management /Entrepreneurship) and one from the University of Kent (in the field of Digital Marketing) to provide research seminars to faculty members and PhD students of the Department. We believe this type of initiatives can have a positive impact in initiating potential research collaborations. (please refer to Annex 1).
- Increase the funding for participation in Scopus indexed conferences that lead to publications. It is noted that the University already allocates a budget to the Department for such activities.
- Further encourage the use of European funds and in particular European COST actions. A number of faculty members already participated and expressed their interest to continue. They have also shared experiences with other faculty members to increase participation in this important form of European funding.

Furthermore, the University already has procedures in place for the evaluation of its academic staff. As per the Mission, the Regulation and Rules and of the University, the academic staff are evaluated based on four (4) pillars:

(1) Teaching, (2) Research, (3) Administrative Work, (4) Contribution to society.

These procedures are publicly available at the University's website ([Link](#)) and indicate specific criteria for the evaluation for each rank. These criteria include publications in peer reviewed journals, funded research projects, international recognitions, doctoral studies supervision, contribution in teaching and administrative work of the University, professional achievements and social contribution.

The University's Council has decided to further expand and specify the evaluation criteria and at the 150th Senate Meeting, after a first discussion the suggested framework of evaluation of each pillar was:

Teaching

- Student evaluation reports for the last 3 years
- Educational material that has been developed since the last evaluation
- Samples of two (2) detailed course descriptions
- Presentation of a sample course on the online learning platform
- Participation in training programmes
- Design and development of innovative courses

Research

- Total number of publications
- Number of scientific publications since the last evaluation
- Percentage of publications submitted, that appear in international databases (eg. Scopus, Web of Science)
- Number of Citations
- Scientific recognition
- Research Work Autonomy
- Research projects
- Funding
- Laboratories
- Doctoral Student Supervision
- Creating / leading a research team

Administrative Work

- Election to an academic position such as Head, Dean etc
- Participation in Senate / Council Committees
- Participation in Departmental Committees
- Committee Chair
- Program of Study Coordinator
- Participation in the planning and submission of a new programme of study



- Participation in the design and delivery of training programmes
- Participation in activities for the development of the University

Social Contribution

- Participation and planning of programmes and actions for the society
- Representation of the University in National Committees
- Representation of Cyprus in European and International Committees
- Organizing events, open to the public
- Commons Participation (ex. Non-scientific articles, media presence etc).

The Rector's Council has been authorized to finalize the evaluation criteria in order for the process to be initiated before summer 2022.

4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

(ESG 1.4)

All areas marked as compliant

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- a. An increased focus on recruitment of international students to enhance an international culture.

Department's Response:

We acknowledge the Committee's comment that the University and Department have a relatively low recruitment of international students.

The issue has been given a priority in the University's strategic action plan and it has also been discussed with the other private universities in Cyprus as they generally also experience low international recruitment from non-EU countries, except for certain niche programs of study. Discussions with the government are taking place to provide the appropriate framework that facilitates international student recruitment in a sustainable manner. One example of systemic issues that inhibit this is the access to work rights for students from third countries, something that has to be aligned with existing policies in competitive countries with respect to the fast-growing Asian market (such as Australia and Ireland).

Despite the above, alternative ways are being considered both at Departmental and University level to attract more international students to our study-programs. Since 2018, the Department pursues its activities for international recruitment. A faculty member established ERASMUS+ links with universities in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Whilst various exchanges of faculty and students were set up with institutions in these countries, other initiatives were taken to recruit students in those countries using local agents.

The above actions resulted in a small number of international students, providing scope for future growth; the Department has planned for expansion of these activities in the broader region. However, the impact of the COVID19 pandemic and the related restrictions for travel from non-EU countries have put on hold any such efforts.

5. Learning resources and student support

(ESG 1.6)

All areas marked as compliant

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- a. The Distance Learning Pedagogical Framework does not (yet) specify scientifically based guidelines how to design learning activities to attain specific types of learning outcomes. At the moment this happens by sharing best-practices, but it would be good to formalize the type of pedagogical approach for different outcomes, e.g.:

How to setup the learning environment to support students to:

- Acquire basic knowledge of the fundamental concepts, principles and theoretical approaches, or - Use state-of-the-art analytical methods, modelling techniques and case-studies to analyse and provide solutions to real-life business problems, or
- Critically debate theories of the firm and evaluate the economic and competitive environment that firms operate in. Etc. for each outcome defined in page 7/8 in the application.

The same is true for student training to learn online: connect the training to the different learning outcome types.

Department's Response:

We thank the members of the Committee for their constructive comments and recommendations in relation to improving the setup of the learning environment to support students.

To this end, the **Distance Learning Pedagogical Framework (DLPF)** has been revised in order to relate the learning outcomes of a course to the activities and the assessment. The application of the revised framework is illustrated in **ANNEX 2** of this response document using examples with reference to course DL MBA 512: Managerial Economics.

The revised DLPF relates the learning outcomes to the activities and the assessment. The three pillars of the Theoretical Framework (Directed Learning, Dynamic Online Interaction and

Assessment) are related to Learning Objectives by providing action verbs and then related to learning activities. The action verbs provided are then related to the Bloom's taxonomy levels.

A diagrammatic presentation of the revised **Distance Learning Pedagogical Framework (DLPF)** is presented in Figures 1 and 2 given below.

The Instructor's and Student's Induction courses were developed based on the distance learning pedagogical framework. It is important for the instructors to experience, acting in the role of students, the online learning environment in which they are expected to design and deliver their courses. Along the same lines, the Induction course for students introduces them to Distance Learning at Frederick University via an interactive online environment similar to the one they will experience in their courses.

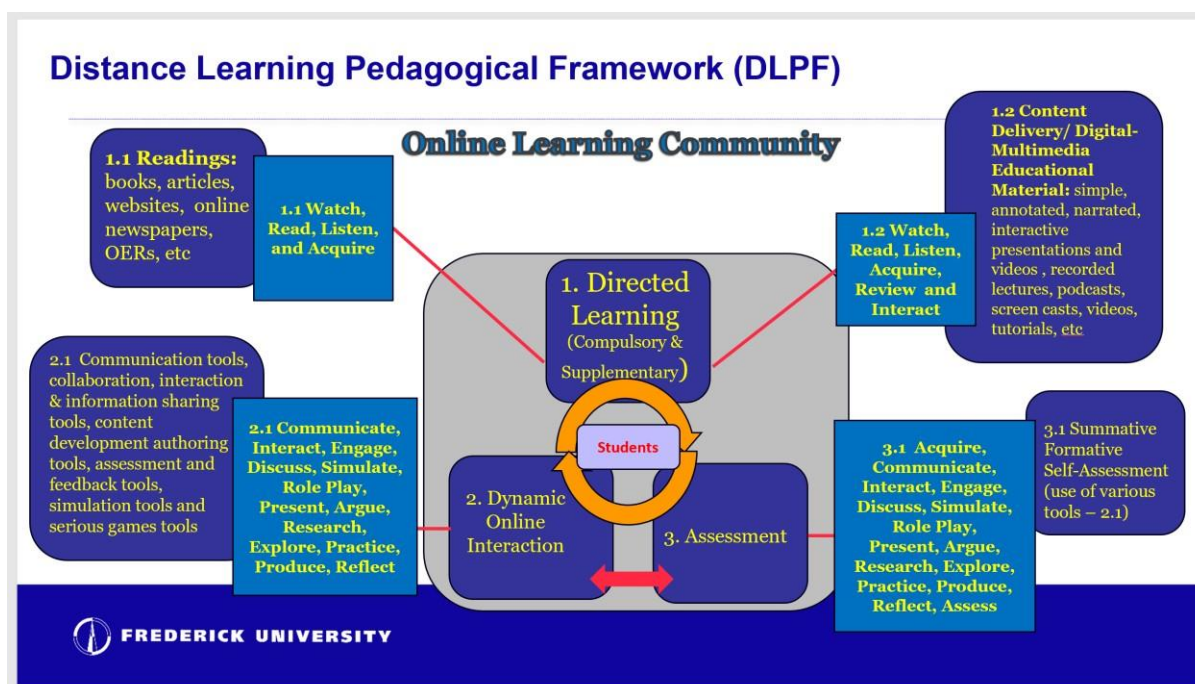


Figure 1 Revised Distance Learning Pedagogical Framework (DLPF)

Link DLPDF to Bloom's Learning Objectives

- The DLPF is consisted of three pillars that are linked to Bloom's taxonomy:
 1. Directed Learning Online and Educational Material = **Lower Order Thinking Skills – Bloom's Taxonomy**
 1. 1.1 Watch, Read, Listen, Acquire = **Remembering, Understanding**
 2. 1.2 Watch, Read, Listen, Acquire and Interact = **Remembering, Understanding, Applying**
 2. Dynamic Online Interaction = **Higher Order Thinking Skills**
 1. 2.1 Communicate, Interact, Engage, Discuss, Simulate, Role Play, Present, Argue, Research, Explore, Practice, Produce, Reflect = **Analyzing, Evaluating, Creating**
 3. Assessment Activities = **Lower & Higher Order Thinking Skills**
 1. 3.1 Summative and Continuous Assessment, Self-Assessment = **Remembering, Understanding, Analyzing, Evaluating, Creating**

Figure 2: Link DLPF to Bloom's taxonomy levels

B. Conclusions and final remarks

The EEC would like to thank all involved at Frederick University for the high engagement throughout the evaluation process - and for providing a rich set of supporting documents and videos before, during and after the remote visit. In addition, we appreciate the positive and constructive spirit during the visit as well as the commitment to continuous improving of learning and academic excellence clearly expressed by the various representatives of the Frederick University. The preceding sections of this report point to the many strengths as well as to some areas for improvement of the programme.

Strengths include:

- **A very clear and well-described governance structure**, in general and on the departmental, programme and distance learning approach levels.
- **Considerable distance learning experience** exists due to a number of concurrent programmes operated via distance learning.
- **Extensive quality assurance** (internally and externally) in place. Many stakeholders are involved.
- Management, faculty and administrative staff appear very committed to the programme.
- **The structure, contents and learning goals of the programme are very clearly described.**
- Active development and deployment of a Distance Learning Pedagogical Framework for all DL courses.
- **A thorough process for the MBA thesis**, incl. a course on research methodology and project planning as well as a multi-faceted assessment.
- **Valuable electronic sources** for students and faculty are available in the library

Areas for improvement include:

- a. More encouragement, incentives and support for research activities among faculty. The transition from college (i.e. teaching-focused institution) to university (i.e. research-based institution) seems not to have fully materialized yet, and research output for more of the faculty members could be stronger. A means could be to find ways to reduce the required teaching load, which is 12 h/week (even though the department has managed to reduce it to some extent.). Another means would be to make the criteria for research evaluations more transparent.

- b. The Distance Learning Pedagogical Framework does not (yet) specify scientifically based guidelines how to design learning activities to attain specific types of learning outcomes. At the moment this happens by sharing best-practices, but it would be good to formalize the type of pedagogical approach for different outcomes.
- c. In the provided list of elective courses an elective on Organisation Behaviour is offered. In many MBA programs, Organisation Behaviour is placed as a mandatory course within the first semester. Therefore, it may not appear sufficiently advanced as an elective. We therefore suggest that Frederick University change the title (and content) of this elective in order to make it more attractive for students.
- d. The introduction to the distance learning and online community is called 'a 0 credits course'. The ECTS framework requires all mandatory activities to carry an ECTS-value to reflect the average workload on the student. Even it was said in the visit that the 0 credits course was not mandatory, the committee suggests that the activity is given another label, as the label 'course' implies an ECTS activity.
- e. An increased focus on recruitment of international students to enhance an international culture

Concluding we would like to thank the EEC for their hard work and candid discussions held throughout the rigorous process of the evaluation. We have adopted and implemented all suggestions by the EEC as shown in sections 1-5.

We are particularly pleased and gain much needed strength from the overall positive remarks and will strive to further improve and achieve our strategic goals in the near future.



C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Signature</i>
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Prof. George Demosthenous Rector

