

Doc. 300.1.2

Higher Education Institution's Response

Date: 29.7.2021

- **Higher Education Institution:**
EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY CYPRUS

- **Town:** NICOSIA

- **Programme of study
Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)**

In Greek:

Επιστήμες της Αγωγής (18 μήνες/90 ECTS,
Μεταπτυχιακό)-Εξ Αποστάσεως

In English:

Education Sciences (18 months/90 ECTS, MA)-
E-Learning

- **Language(s) of instruction:** Greek & English
- **Programme's status:** Currently Operating
- **Concentrations (if any):**

In Greek: α) Δημιουργικότητα και Παιχνίδι στην
Πρώτη Αγωγή και Εκπαίδευση, β) Τεχνολογίες
Μάθησης & Επικοινωνίας και Εκπαίδευση
STEAM, γ) Εκπαιδευτική Διοίκηση και Ηγεσία

In English: a) Creativity and Play in Early
Childhood Education (b) Technologies of
Learning & Communication and STEAM
Education, (c) Educational Management and
Leadership



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.300.1.1 or 300.1.1/2 or 300.1.1/3 or 300.1.1/4) must justify whether actions have been taken in improving the quality of the programme of study 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 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.300.1.1 or 300.1.1/2 or 300.1.1/3 or 300.1.1/4).*
- *In case of annexes, those should be attached and sent on a separate document.*

The Department of Education Sciences of European University Cyprus and the Coordinators of the MA Education Sciences-E-Learning Program wish to express their sincere gratitude to the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) for the evaluation of this program of studies.

It is with great pleasure that the Coordinators, the Department and the School of Humanities, Social and Education Sciences noted the positive feedback of the EEC and we highly appreciate its insightful recommendations, which provided us with the opportunity to further improve the quality and implementation of the program. In the following pages, we respond in detail to all recommendations for improvement suggested by the EEC, and we provide all the necessary information for explaining the actions taken to ensure that the program under re-accreditation is of high quality.

1. Study programme and study programme's design and development (ESG 1.1, 1.2, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9)

Comments by the EEC:

Areas of improvement and recommendations

1. During the presentation of course examples, teachers demonstrated they give assignments encouraging students to apply their knowledge in their own workplace and professional practice. However, this had not been mentioned clearly in the validation documents that all emphasize acquisition of theoretical knowledge, and to the opinion of the EEC could still be intensified to better deal with the demands of future work environments. The case studies presented (on request of the EEC) not always reflect the full complexity of the professional context the graduates are getting (better) prepared for.
2. Textbooks are the main sources of teaching content. We recommend including more research materials and case studies, e.g., from the research projects the staff are involved in. This will strengthen the academic status of the program.
3. For an academic master, the voluntary character of doing a Master's Thesis as the final proof of mastership in research and/or innovation skills is problematic. Especially since only about 5% opts for acquiring this proof of 30 ECTS, where others take two elective courses of 15 ECTS each. The EEC realizes this choice option by students is compliant within national governmental regulations, but at the same time questions whether 80% of graduates would fully qualify as academic master (compared to professional master) within the EQF standards. We fully appreciate the time constraints of (working) students and the capacity limits of a currently small teaching staff that have led to this voluntary choice for the thesis study. At the same time do not see these reasons as fit from an academic end terms perspective, in which setting up and executing independent research is an essential part (especially for the Research component of the Dublin descriptors at EQF7/8 levels). In most European Universities writing a master's thesis therefore is mandatory. The EEC therefore suggests (pending the current situation) to introduce a dual label to the certificate: academic master for those who have completed a thesis, and professional master for those who choose to do electives and improve their professional competences.
4. We recommend actions and activities to enhance more positive attitudes towards research and taking on a master's thesis, such as meetings during their first year focusing on understanding the goals and the demands of a master's thesis. Also, to have a mini conference where the theses of last year are presented by the authors to all students and staff of the programme. This could inspire and show that it is doable and worth doing. Such actions may change students' prior negative or overly cautious attitudes on the demands and workload of the master's thesis and may lead to an increase of the number of students that finally choose to do a master's thesis.
5. We recommend considering if the amount of ECTS for each unit should be a 'one size fits all' solution. From an administrative perspective we understand the simplicity, but from the academic perspective we feel there could be more variety in needs and importance. This also applies to the way units are being assessed upon completion and the order of provision (now it is often just-in-case where it better be just-in-time).

6. The 'commercial model' of a private university contains certain academic risks. The vice-Rector stated he did not want to be put under pressure by demands and expectations. However, the EEC feels that making students decide whether (or not) to do a Master research with thesis (demand-driven) is such an academic compromise. The choice is very legitimate and understandable, but from an autonomic and proposition-driven academic perspective 'being more competitive or more attractive for students' are not valid reasons. We recommend to carefully distinguish this in the labelling in the diploma: 'professional' versus 'academic' paths.

EUC Response for Section 1

We thank the EEC for these important recommendations, which we have taken into account effectively, as indicated below (each point corresponds to the numbered points above):

1. We definitely understand the Committee's concern that assignments should encourage students to apply theories and knowledge in professional practice. We regret if this was not been communicated clearly enough during the evaluation process as it is an important underlying principle of our programme of study and we continuously strive to link theories with students' personal professional experiences and workplace needs, both during teaching and in assessment activities. In order to fully respond to the Committee's concerns, in Appendix 1 we have compiled a list of examples of existing *and revised* assignments for every course in each Concentration, which take seriously into account students' professional experiences and ask students to apply the acquired theoretical knowledge in their workplace or in case studies of professional contexts.

Moreover, the University through its Faculty Development Program (offered by the C.I.Q.A. Faculty Development Standing Committee) organizes and delivers various seminars on a semester basis on issues pertaining to teaching and learning, and research in higher education which emerge through feedback and needs identified by academic staff or indeed evaluation Committees, as well as in the context of current needs and developments. Seminars provided during the current academic year have aimed to support staff both in their teaching, particularly in the extreme circumstances brought by the current pandemic, as well as their research through the offering of various seminars on teaching and learning in online environments as well as on research ethics (see F2020-S2021 program in Appendix 3). Following the Committee's recommendations we are planning to address the issue of using case studies in evaluation and assessment of students work in the upcoming professional development seminars (See Appendix 3 for the F2021 Preliminary Faculty Development Program; see also more details on Section 3 point 3 below).

2. We agree with the Committee that research materials and case studies are extremely valuable resources in addition to textbooks. The University through its library offers to all students remote access to a great variety of resources and academic electronic books and journals. We would like to bring to the Committee's attention that there are two types of documents that describe our courses and readings: On the one hand, we have the more general syllabus that includes a brief course description and learning objectives, together with a suggested list of '*key textbooks*' and further reading list. On the other hand, we have a more detailed 'Study Guide' which, further to the general textbooks suggested in the syllabus, it also includes essential and complementary readings for each week. As evident in

the list we prepared in Appendix 2, the *essential* readings in each Concentration cover much more than textbooks and include a variety of resources of different chapters, articles, policy documents as well as articles reporting research conducted by the faculty – as recommended by the Committee. We hope that this list will ensure the Committee that our students are thoroughly engaged with research materials.

In addition, although we cannot give primary research data to students due to ethics restrictions and GDPR regulations, students have the opportunity to participate in presentations of projects organised under the SOSCIETH Centre of Excellence. As a result, of the pandemic project presentations, research days and events are now taking place online, and since the infrastructure is now available, in the post-pandemic period we plan to offer all events in hybrid form, which will encourage the participation of distance learning students located outside Cyprus. A list of research events organised online by the Centre during the pandemic can be found here: <https://soscieath.euc.ac.cy/index.php/events/>

3. There appeared to be a misunderstanding by the Committee in relation to the students' options vis a vis a thesis or elective courses. Students who do not opt for a thesis **do not just take two electives of 15 ECTS** each, as written in the report. As we understand the importance of a strong research background –and in alignment with the EEC rationale–, all students opting out of a thesis, are still required to attend an Advanced Research Methods course of 10 ECTS, **in addition** to two electives. In both the Quantitative and Qualitative Methods in Education Courses the aim is for students to further enhance their research skills by designing and conducting their own small-scale research. Therefore, even if students do not write a Master's Thesis, they nonetheless get to engage in a research project of their own choice, based on their research interests and concentration under the personalized guidance of the instructor who oversees the progress of each different project. The structure and set up of the course follows a *just-in-time* staged and gradual approach to content that allows for the direct application of new knowledge to their project as the course progresses (see for example the guidelines for the written assignment for the Qualitative Research Course in Appendix 4 in juxtaposition with the pertinent course study guide).

Still the program coordinators and the program team acknowledge the EEC's concern about the disparity between completing a Masters' thesis compared to electives. As a response, the course coordinators of each research course will continue to collaborate closely with the course instructors for the design and development of the courses' content and requirements, in order to ensure balance in workload and effectiveness in relation to students' research skills development. The course coordinators will enhance their efforts towards this aim by also providing instructors with some examples of how research courses' assignments can include opportunities for students to engage in small-scale research projects. In Appendix 1 you can find some examples of assignments that also involve small-scale research, and Appendix 4 provides a more detailed assignment example of the Qualitative Research in Education course which includes:

- Development of methodological design for the conduct of a small-scale research project
- Design and development of all pertinent data collection tools, information sheet templates and informed consent form templates
- Research conduct: Data collection and analysis
- Presentation and discussion of findings in the form of a research paper.

In addition, the Advising Centre has scheduled meetings with Coordinators at the beginning of each semester so we will make sure that the advantages and limitations of each choice are clearly communicated to Advisors and students so that students' choices will be in accordance with their needs and future options.

Finally, regarding the distinction between a 'professional and 'academic degree, although we understand the logic and where this is coming from, at a practical level this is not feasible as degrees are awarded in the way that they have been submitted for accreditation and furthermore such a distinction between 'taught' and 'research' degrees does not exist in the Cypriot context and academic culture.

4. We thank the Committee for the helpful recommendations in relation to activities that can help students develop more positive attitudes towards research. We are happy to report that according to the decision of the Departmental Meeting held on the 21st July 2021, an MA Research Colloquium will now take place annually, where students near completion can present their MA research and dissertations. The colloquium will be offered in a hybrid form so that all distance students can participate. In addition, all the research events of the SOSIEATH Centre will be also offered in hybrid form and all MA students will receive invitations. Additionally, SOSIEATH organizes an annual online event in Greek for people working in the field of education in Cyprus and Greece providing space for teachers and MA students to both participate but also present research work they carried out in their classrooms and/or their MA projects/theses. In the past, this event was highly popular (more than 400 people participated, and more than 20 presented in a series of parallel sessions, keynote addresses, etc.). In the upcoming years, we plan extending invitations for this event especially to our MA students, as well as inviting them to present their work. The event is at no cost to all the participants. In the past events, a small number of MA and PhD students presented their work, or participated in discussions, round tables etc. Lastly, SOSIEATH Multidisciplinary Research Units organize a number of funded-project related events, presentations, etc. every year. Some of them have fora for researchers outside the project's consortia to present their research work that falls under the theme of the project organizing the event. We will include all the MA students in the information that we send for these events and welcome their contributions.
5. We acknowledge the concerns of the EEC about the risks of the 'one size fits all' ECTS policy adopted in the program. We would like, however, to highlight that the 10 ECTS per course policy has been a decision taken centrally by the University for better cross-programmes administration. This decision ensures that courses' workload corresponds to the level of postgraduate study (BA courses correspond to 6 ECTS) and that students' workload remains the same across elective courses and concentrations. It also ensures that all courses are treated as equally important in the curriculum regardless of whether they are core courses, concentration compulsory courses or electives. The Department adheres to the rationale of this central policy and through the Concentrations' Coordinators and Course Coordinators will continuously ensure that the amount of ECTS corresponds to students' actual workload across courses.
6. As mentioned earlier we acknowledge the EEC's concerns regarding the Masters' thesis as optional (elective Vs other elective and research courses) based on which the EEC suggests a distinction between academic and professional degrees. However, as explained earlier



such decisions and program changes are beyond the Department's/University's control. Please see point 3 above, which further explains that we do not currently have the authority to make such a distinction between academic and professional degrees in the Cyprus national context. Still, we have taken actions in order to: (a) better inform the students in relation to the option of doing an MA Thesis or not, and (b) encourage more students towards the option of doing an MA thesis by outlining the advantages.

2. Student – centred learning, teaching and assessment (ESG 1.3)

The EEC has raised the following issues in relation student-centered learning, teaching and student assessment for the program. The EUC's corresponding response can be found below numbered according to the number of each point/issue in Areas of Improvement.

Comments by the EEC:

Areas of improvement and recommendations

1. Better integration of teaching methodologies with individual needs and learning strategies
2. Incorporate more current research in course material on a more intensified level
3. Include more opportunities for students to take an active role in the learning process
4. Include more hands-on experience where applicable
5. Strengthen teaching and practice interconnections (even more)
6. Enhance critical and creative thinking, making judgements on evidence-informed ways
7. Strengthen Programme (Theory)-Professional (Practice) relationships for re- and decontextualization of knowledge
8. We recommend considering more diversity in final course assessments, and esp. more practice-based
9. We recommend considering the order of content provision (from just-in-case to just-in-time), especially for research methods in context.
10. The concentration Creativity and Play has a clear focus on enabling students to develop activities that stimulate creativity and play in educational settings for children aged 3-8. It could be more explicit on the various developmental outcomes of these activities (in areas such as literacy; numeracy; executive functions; social skills; understanding of the material world; problem solving; ...) and on how students can learn to monitor these different outcomes.
11. The name of the concentration 'Technologies of Learning & Communication and STEAM Education' is somewhat confusing. An alternative could be 'Applying emerging technologies to achieve educational outcomes'. This emphasizes that augmented reality, programming in Scratch, robotics, et cetera, can be useful not only to achieve STEAM objectives.
12. Dividing the workload for the master's thesis over two academic semesters may help the students to organize their scientific work and ensure a manageable timeframe that will lead on a successful thesis. As always in adult education, it needs to be clear to the students why something is done and how they benefit from the activity. Explaining the WHY? of a thesis in a relevant and convincing manner could help.

EUC Response for Section 2:

We thank the EEC for these important recommendations, which we have taken into account effectively, as indicated below:

1. Given the diverse profile of students attending our program, several measures are taken to ensure that the course content and activities, as well as the course assignments meet students' individual needs and learning strategies. As shown in Appendix 1, which includes examples of assignments in each Concentration, students are given flexibility in both the selection of topics to focus on in their assignments, and in the way in which to approach these tasks.

The implementation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles is one of the main concerns of the design and development teams of all our programs offered at-distance, in order to provide learning design in ways that address students' individual needs and are inclusive. The faculty of the Department of Education Sciences is highly involved in the university Faculty Development Programs. One of the areas covered during the faculty development activities is inclusive education, differentiation and UDL in higher education. The main aim is to respond to the UDL principles through the design and delivery of the distance learning courses that meet the learning needs of each individual student by setting flexible goals, methods, learning activities, and assessments that provide scaffolds and supports, including digital tools, as shown in the table below:

	Activities and course design	Means, technology and tools
Provide options for Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Organisation of the course in weeks/themes/units with indicative timeframe for study ● Facilitation of self-paced learning/study ● Regular contact with instructor in a variety of ways ● Assignments and learning activities linked to personal experiences, background, professional status etc (e.g. variations of practical experience, assignments linked to own experiences and work environment) ● Compulsory and optional activities ● Opportunity to choose some graded activities over others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● LMS with accessibility features ● Study guides available in various forms (word document, pdf) as well as content structured on platform follows the study guides ● LMS build in communication tools (e.g. discussion forums, chat options and messaging) ● Options for communication off platform (e.g. blogs, personal IM, social network closed groups, video channels)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Options for individual and group activities and assignments Options for authentic work (e.g. conducting of small research projects in activities, assignments that avoid reproduction of literature but entail practical/implementation sections) Variety in assessment methods (e.g. projects, portfolios, quizzes, open-ended questions, public dialogue discussions, discussion forum) 	
Provide options for Representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alternative options of introduction of new knowledge and content (e.g. readings, teleconferencing, slide notes, pre-recorded videos, links to external content) Both English and Greek literature (though scientific production in Greek is limited compared to the amount of resources available in English) Uses of Glossary (in some courses that terminology is especially important) Use of synchronous and asynchronous content connection activities (e.g. wikis, presentations, mind-mapping) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Videos (accessible where possible) Text on platform (online documents) Visuals (e.g. diagrams, images, mind-maps) Hyper-titles where possible Recorded teleconferencing meetings available to all
Provide options for Action and Expression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Synchronous and Asynchronous options for interaction (student-student, student-instructor, student-content, student-platform) through various channels Variety in assessment methods (e.g. projects, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interactive videos Interactive (user-controlled) content (e.g. though authoring tools such as H5P) Alternative accepted modes of communication (e.g. email, IM, discussion)

	<p>portfolios, quizzes, open-ended questions, public dialogue discussions, discussion forum)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variety of types of questions in final exams (though by regulation all need to be written exams) • Creative assignments (e.g. presentations, repositories of resources, peer review activities) • Assignments broken in consecutive sections/parts during the semester (one building on the other) 	<p>forum, chat, social media closed groups)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternative accepted modes of class participation (e.g written, auditory, video presentations) • Access to Assistive Technology and reasonable adaptations through the Committee for the Support of Students with Disabilities and/or Special Educational Needs
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- Please see EUC Response to the Comments by the EEC in Section 1, point 2, where we explain how our students are thoroughly engaged with research materials. The incorporation of current research in all courses' materials on an intensified level is also evident in the list prepared in Appendix 2.
- The Department of Education Sciences assures the EEC that the Department makes every possible effort to be fully compliant with criterion 1.3 of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), and to apply relevant approaches throughout the process of design and implementation of all its programs of study.

Hence, the Department wishes to reaffirm to the EEC that it will continue to take all measures possible to ensure full compliance of all its programs with the European Criteria and Guidelines, and in particular the student-centered approach to the design and implementation of the courses included in the MA in Education Sciences program, with regard to the setting of learning objectives and outcomes, the planning of course activities, and the setting of student evaluation procedures. In this context, some of the Department's institutionalized practices are next outlined:

- Students have the opportunity to evaluate each course they attend, through the completion, at the end of each semester, of an anonymous **Survey on "Students' Feedback on their Learning Experience"**. The results of this evaluation in aggregate form are communicated to the Chair of the Department and forwarded confidentially to each instructor. On the basis of student feedback, courses are reviewed and redesigned, and instructional practices are adjusted accordingly.
- Students actively participate in the process of periodic **Program Evaluation Review (PER)**, conducted for all programs of study offered by the Department, through participation in the data collection process (e.g. completion of questionnaires, participation in interviews, etc.) but also through participation in various institutional bodies (e.g. Departmental Internal Evaluation Committee, Advisory Board, Departmental Council, etc.). A more detailed description of the periodic **Program**

Evaluation Review (PER) process, can be found in the 200.1 application form submitted for the re-accreditation of this program (please see Annex 13 (p. 181), PER Process, in the 200.1 Application form submitted for the re-accreditation of this program).

- The basic principles of adult learning have been incorporated into the design of our program. Students are offered a highly social and collaborative learning environment, with opportunities to share experiences and combine instruction with discussion, reflection, implementation, and (self-)evaluation. Rather than adopting transmission of knowledge instructional models, our courses facilitate inquiry, problem-based learning, and the development of communities of learning. Students are rendered responsible for their own learning, supported by an environment rich in challenges and interactions. Particular emphasis in our courses is placed on drawing upon and extending students' workplace experiences (e.g. utilizing the experiences of many of our graduate students who are in-service teachers). The Department commits to sustaining the emphases outlined above through revisiting these during its regular PER process, through performing regular update and revision of course outlines, as well as through the provision and attendance of Faculty Professional Development Seminars on teaching and learning in Higher Education (see also EUC Responses to the EEC Comments in Section 3 below).
4. Our response to the Comments by the EEC in Section 2, point 3 above, and the examples of assignments in each Concentration included in Appendix 1, are indicative of the program emphasis on hands-on application of the theoretical knowledge that students acquire in each course to their workplace or to case studies of professional contexts.
 5. As pointed out in our response to the Comments by the EEC in Section 1, point 1, linking theories with students' personal professional experiences and workplace needs both during teaching and in assessment activities is an underlying principle of our program design. We agree with the Committee that we should aim to further strengthen teaching and practice interconnections. Since Spring 2021, and after a decision of the University's Quality Assurance Committee and the University Rectorate (17.2.2021), the School of Humanities, Social and Education Sciences has introduced the regular organisation of Departmental Internal Pedagogical Meetings (twice a semester) between all involved faculty (full time and part-time), as well as regular meetings between Coordinator of the Program, the course coordinators and the teaching staff, in which among others, presentations and discussions are focused on best teaching and learning practices for digital learning, including the use of case studies in teaching and assessment (see more details on Section 3 point 3 below).
 6. We would like to reassure the EEC that the enhancement of critical and creative thinking and of students' ability to make judgments on evidence-informed ways is a top priority of our MA in Education Sciences program. The in-depth revisions to the program is indeed an effort on our behalf to respond to the changing nature and role of schools and universities in the Transformative Age, and to the need for the adoption of alternative pedagogical approaches aimed at equipping youth with the creative, critical thinking, problem-solving and innovation skills required to adapt to the needs of the rapidly changing and complex digital era. It is this need that fuelled the redesign of the program to more closely align with the principles underlying the interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary STEAM approach. We advocate the adoption of integrated curricula because we consider this as essential for fostering true

creativity and innovation in youth by allowing them to use systematic thinking skills that combine the mind of a scientist or technologist with that of an artist or designer. The holistic approach we espouse is situated across and beyond each technological, scientific and creative discipline, in order to promote relevancy of learning, and better prepare students for their future complex life and work environments.

7. Our program provides our graduates with very strong theoretical and practical foundations in their field through courses that simultaneously develop participants' theoretical background, teaching methodologies, and practical skills. The examples of practical assignments we have included in response to the Committee's suggestions in Section 2, point 9, attest to the strong relationship between theory and practice underlying our course content and activities. The examples of Assignments for each course, included in Appendix1, also attest our emphasis in linking theory to practice. Recognizing the importance of providing students with multiple opportunities for re- and decontextualization of knowledge, we will continue to strengthen Program (Theory)-Professional (Practice) relationships, as per the EEC's suggestion.
8. Although we would have certainly liked more diversity in final course assessment and especially more practice-based final assessment procedures as per the EEC's suggestion, the overall assessment per regular course is a university and nationally regulated policy, which according to the national regulations should include **a written exam under invigilation, in designated examination centers (see CY.Q.A.A. announcement here: <https://www.dipae.ac.cy/index.php/el/nea-ekdiloseis/anakoinoseis-el/166-2018-07-13-exetaseis-ex-apostaseos-programmatapspoudon>)**.

Nevertheless, we strongly acknowledge the importance of providing multiple ways for engagement and alternative opportunities for students' assessment. Hence, given the restrictions, the following strategies are already in place, and will be further enhanced, in order to better respond to the diversity of students enrolled in the program and advocate a more flexible and tailored approach to honour students' strengths:

- The program coordinator in collaboration with the courses' coordinators support course instructors to include a variety of assignment formats/types and activities as part of the total of students' assessment, by providing creative, alternative and interactive examples such as: individual and/or group assignments in the form of small projects, reflective activities (e.g. journals and blogs), portfolios, presentations that may be delivered in diverse ways (e.g. live audio and/or video, pre-recorded, in presentation software/applications, in collaborative online tools, etc.). In addition, where possible instructors are encouraged to provide options to students and not strictly define the means/type of assignment delivery/presentation. Appendix 1 provides examples of a variety of assignments that can be used in different courses across the three Concentrations.
- The grading allocated to assignments and on-going assessment of the students is divided up in a number of different group and individual activities of various formats, in order to provide more opportunities to students to accumulate more points/grades towards the successful completion of their courses, and in order to avoid the risk of failure in case they do not perform well in a single course requirement. Please see table below for a suggested breakdown:

DESCRIPTION	PERCENTAGE	DUE DATE
GRADED ASSIGNMENTS:		
1. Blog: Individual posting in personal blog of an essay critically discussing the post The SAMR model was not created to classify apps . Commenting on at least one peer's post.	5%	4 th – 6 ^h week
2. Individual assignment: Design of an instructional unit (and accompanying materials) incorporating the use of mobile app(s) into STEAM teaching and learning	20%	End of 6 th week
3. Discussion Forum: Selection and evaluation of an application/interface based on the principles of UDL. Posting of evaluation report in the relevant forum of the course platform. Commenting on at least one peer's post.	5%	11 th – 13 ^h week
4. Group written report and presentation: A written report summarising the current and expected future developments in a selected AI topic, and a short presentation summarizing the content of the report.	20%	End of 13 th week
Final exam (closed or open books)	50%	TBA
Total	100%	

- Providing alternative ways for preparation for the final exams, while at the same time maintaining compliance with the national regulations. To this end, the program coordinator in collaboration with the course coordinators and the Professional Development Committee have included faculty training and education opportunities on the variety of final exams assessment methods, given the restrictions. These involve the following strategies:
 - Invigilated written **open-books** examinations, for which students are previously supported to organize their notes, highlight important points, conduct activities during the semester that will help them navigate the course material
 - **Take home preparation for the exams** in the form of project/portfolio/creative activity, which students can prepare, while their written invigilated final exam will take the form of a report and/or a reflection on the work performed in a previously self-paced way.
 - Final examination papers **with different sections each including a variation in the type of questions**, with equal weight in grading, in order to respond to as many different types of learners as possible. E.g. a final exam paper including Section A: Multiple Choice Questions, Section B: Short Answer Questions. Section C: Open Ended Questions. The European University Cyprus is promoting this approach by internal policy, which also involves a moderation mechanism for the preparation of the final exams papers. Relevant

university internal guidelines and examination framework are included in Appendix 5.

- The final exam paper is reviewed by a designated Department Committee to ensure the balancing in the different types of questions.
 - Students are given the opportunity to take a mock exam beforehand to familiarize themselves with the format and invigilated nature of the exam.
- Lastly, final examination format may vary for students identified as students with disabilities and/or special educational needs, who are supported by the corresponding committee of the European University Cyprus. The Committee of Students with Special Educational Needs (Ε.Φ.Ε.Ε.Α.) (details have been provided in the application form 200.1 of this re-accreditation process), provides academic accommodations/support to all referred/registered students, the identification of whom takes place after their official registration to the University. The Committee informs all instructors for the presence of students with disabilities and/or special educational needs in their courses and provides information and guidelines about the reasonable adaptations each student is entitled, during the course as well as for the final exams. In summary, reasonable adaptations in relation to the final exams may include: (a) allowance of additional time for examinations (normally 20% of the examination time); (b) simplification of the wording of the exam paper (the module's terminology or definitions which the student has been taught and is assessed on are excluded); (c) explanation of unknown words during the examination (the module's terminology or definitions which the student has been taught and is assessed on are excluded); (d) frequent rest breaks are suggested during the examination; (e) accessibility of the exam paper (basic guidelines provided); (f) oral examination.
9. We do espouse the EEC's advocacy for flexibility in the order of delivery of course content and for the provision of opportunities for students to engage with not just-in-case, but also with *just-in-time* learning especially for research methods in context. The design of our courses has actually taken this need into consideration. Possibly, this was not clearly conveyed to the EEC due to the weekly structure (14 weeks per course) of the courses' Study Guides which gives the false impression to the reader that the practical assignments included in each course "just scratch the surface and are limited to very first levels of skills", as noted by the EEC (see Comments by the EEC in Section 5: Learning resources and student support, below). There are indeed several short assignments in the Study Guide of each course, but these assignments only carry a very small portion of the overall course grade (10% in total) and are included mainly for review/self-evaluation purposes. In addition to these weekly exercises, more profound practical assignments that span the length of several weeks and do "represent the authentic complexity of future professional work contexts" (see Comments by the EEC in Section 5: Learning resources and student support, below) are also included in each course. To illustrate that this is indeed the case, we next provide a few representative examples of these longer, more profound assignments. We have selected to present assignments included in the research methods courses and in the courses EDT620 and EDT625, as the practical assignments of these courses were commented in the EEC report:
- The course EDG683: Quantitative Research Methods, includes the project "Conducting a Statistical Study", which is being carried out by students throughout the course by way of completing Group Assignment I (Weeks 1-2), Group Assignment II (Weeks 3-6), and Assignment III (Weeks 7-13). This project (40% of the overall course

grade) familiarizes students with how to apply quantitative approaches in educational research, and of the main stages of an integrated research process (e.g. in the context of a graduate/PhD thesis): identifying the research problem, carrying out the research (collection/processing of data etc.), writing a research report. The aim is to turn students into autonomous researchers, capable of conducting research studies in the area of education.

- The course EDG684: Qualitative Research Methods, includes both individual and group assignments that span the duration of the semester and follow a gradual approach. The group assignment consists of the design and conduct of a qualitative mini research project from scratch. Students define their own research problem and research questions and go through all of the stages of methodological design. As the course content progresses, they are able to apply new knowledge acquired following a just-in-time approach, including the selection of their data collection methods, methods of recruitment and selection, methods of analysis, strategies for enhancing validity and reliability, the write-up and, of course, the handling of any potential ethics issues that arise from the project activities. In addition, they develop themselves, under the guidance and personalized support of the course instructor tailored to each group's focus and needs, all the necessary research tools such as interview guides, and informed consent form templates and templates of information sheets (20-25%, due Week 12). Further, the individual assignment (15-20%) due by Week 7 constitutes each individual researcher's reflection over their involvement in the research process (with an emphasis on the interview process) up until the point of conducting their first interview, and is linked to as well as builds on their end-of-the-semester group project. In addition, the course offers to students the opportunity to engage with a variety of both group and individual interactive assignments of smaller scale throughout the semester (10-15% due each week)
- The course EDT620: Applications of New Technologies in STEAM Education, in addition to short weekly assignments like "6.1 (blog about 10 criteria for SG), exercise 7.1 (write 250 word essay on AR design) for ETD 620" noted by the EEC (see Comments by the EEC in Section 5: Learning resources and student support, below), also includes the following two assignments which take up 40% of the overall course grade:
 - An individual assignment (Weeks 4-6), where students work individually to design a small instructional unit (and accompanying materials) that will incorporate the use of at least one (1) mobile app into STEAM teaching and learning. Students need to carefully select the app(s) to be included in their unit based on important technical and pedagogical considerations discussed during the course.
 - A group assignment (Weeks 9-13), where each group of students has to (i) Select a topic related to current and future uses of artificial intelligence in STEAM education (e.g. learning analytics, adaptive learning systems, smart content, customized learning, customizable digital interface, etc.); (ii) Search the Internet for relevant bibliographic and other resources; (iii) Prepare a report (around 2000 words) summarising the current and expected future developments in the AI topic they have selected, as these emerge from their review of the current literature. In addition to submitting their report, during the teleconference to take place during Week 13, each group also needs to make a short presentation (10-15 minutes) summarizing the content of their report.

- The course EDT625: Design of Learning Technologies, in addition to short weekly assignments "like exercise 7.2 (draw house with Scratch)" noted by the EEC (see Comments by the EEC in Section 5: Learning resources and student support, below), also includes the following three longer assignments:
 - An individual assignment (Weeks 7-13; 25% of overall grade), which involves a) the production of an educational application using either Scratch or MIT App Inventor, and b) the presentation of its design in an essay (approximately 800 words), with the storyboard of the application being included in an Appendix.
 - An individual assignment (Weeks 1-2; 8% of overall grade), that involves the evaluation of a multimedia learning object using the design principles of the cognitive theory of multimedia learning. Students present their evaluation in an essay, including both positive and negative examples for each multimedia principle.
 - A group assignment (Weeks 3-4; 7% of overall grade), where each group of students examines the features of the environments "The Geometer's Sketchpad" and "The Doctor's Cure" to identify the scaffolds that are embedded in their design to aid student problem-solving and learning. Individual members of each group need to contribute their ideas to a group wiki in which they will describe these scaffolds and explain which student difficulties they address and how they may support students.

The models of instruction we use in our at-distance courses, which focus on strategies such as the flipped classroom, also promote *just-in-time* teaching and learning. Our synchronous sessions are not typically used for lecturing, but for interaction and discussion purposes. Individual students and/or groups of students in a course communicate with their instructor via email and blackboard ultra tools, including blackboard collaborate, as well as other communication media based on students-instructor preferences and agreement. The instructor collects students' responses and identifies areas of understanding and misunderstanding to adjust the next videoconference. This encourages student responsibility for learning the content outside of class, and enables class time to be devoted to what students are most concerned with (e.g. concepts that need to be clarified).

In future offerings of our at-distance courses, we plan to further promote the "*just-in-time*" approach through encouraging and widening the adoption of tools and activities already utilized by some of our instructors to collect information concerning students' opinions, needs and preferences (e.g. use of a Mentimeter, use of an electronic voting system, creation of a weekly "muddiest point" discussion thread in which students collaboratively contribute, debate, and then nominate their top three muddiest points of the week, etc.).

10. We appreciate the Committee's understanding of what is one of the main focuses of the Creativity and Play Concentration and the suggestion for ways to make it even more explicit connecting more efficiently theory with practice. As it becomes apparent from all of the concentration's study guides (describing the learning objectives of the different courses), a great emphasis is attributed through the different courses to all of the developmental outcomes mentioned in the Committee's report: literacy; numeracy; executive functions; social skills; understanding of the material world; problem solving. Beside the courses that clearly focus in a specified manner to some of these outcomes (e.g. literacy in ECD625 Literacy Practices, numeracy in ECD630 Mathematics & Sciences etc), through the STEAM approach that is adopted as one of the main pillars of the Concentration, these developmental

outcomes (literacy, numeracy, social skills, problem solving etc) are addressed in all courses from different perspectives and within different contexts and thus are approached repeatedly and in a dynamic manner. These outcomes are emphasized in the context (summary and introductory remarks), aims, objectives and learning outcomes, keywords, basic and supplementary sources and assignments of most units in all Study Guides. The weekly exercises and assignments are designed in a way that enables students to better recognize and monitor these different outcomes in a developmental manner in their everyday practice in early education settings (for a sample of such assignments, existing and revised following the Committee's recommendations see Appendix 1). Furthermore, we reassure the Committee that, as part of our ongoing effort to constantly revising and improving the students' learning experience, the faculty, under the close supervision of the concentration's coordinator, will be guided into further enriching the courses in explicit and practical ways towards this direction.

11. The concentration 'Technologies of Learning & Communication and STEAM Education' has evolved out of 'Technologies of Communication and Learning', a very well designed concentration that addresses the current trends and needs of national and global policies and practices with respect to the educational applications of contemporary technologies. However, despite the high quality of the concentration, we decided to revise its curriculum so as to closely align with both the affordances of new and emerging technologies and with the principles underlying STEAM education. This was deemed necessary in order to respond to the sharp interest and need for STEAM Education worldwide and locally. We changed the name of the revised concentration to 'Technologies of Learning & Communication and STEAM Education' in order to convey its focus on both new technologies of learning and communication and on STEAM Education. Changing the name to an alternative like the one suggested by the EEC (i.e. 'Applying emerging technologies to achieve educational outcomes'), would fail to capture this dual focus of the concentration, which makes it attractive and differentiates it from other programs in Education Studies. To our knowledge, 'Technologies of Learning & Communication and STEAM Education' will be the first Master's level degree in either Cyprus or Greece, but also one of the first programs internationally, to focus on both STEAM education and ICT-enhanced learning.

With regards to the EEC comment that "augmented reality, programming in Scratch, robotics, et cetera, can be useful not only to achieve STEAM objectives", we would like to point out that the revised concentration does not focus on specific subjects, but adopts a transdisciplinary approach that transcends academic disciplines. As noted in the Study Guide of the introductory, common core concentration course ETD600: Theories of Learning and Foundations of STEAM Education (Week 7: Introduction to STEAM Education, p. 30): "the key feature of the STEAM methodology is transdisciplinarity, which focuses on addressing authentic problems through the complex use of tools across all disciplines. The STEAM transdisciplinary approach transcends through all the cognitive fields with the aim of studying an object as it really is, that is, as a multi-dimensional and complex system. STEAM constitutes a holistic approach to learning that is situated at the same time, across and beyond each technological, scientific and creative discipline, emphasizing learning through practice and linking the components of STEAM with the real world and students' daily life. This transdisciplinary approach supports dialogue and collaboration both between different subjects, and between students."

Another reason that would make us hesitant to change the name of the concentration is the fact that 'Technologies of Learning & Communication and STEAM Education' is one of the concentrations included in the Department's conventional MA in Education program that was recently evaluated and re-accredited by the CY.Q.A.A. Council.

12. In response to the suggestion by the EEC to divide the workload for the master's thesis over two academic semesters, we would like to inform them that the **minimum** timeframe for the completion of a master's thesis is 6 months, which essentially translates to two semesters (see Annex 12 of the 200.1 document for the Master's thesis study guide). Thus, all students end up taking at least 2 semesters to complete their thesis.

Before starting to work on their thesis, students prepare, in collaboration with their thesis advisor, a short report describing their proposed study's topic, objectives and research questions and outlining the methodology to be employed in their study. Prior to acceptance, the thesis proposal is reviewed by the Departmental Master's Program Committee and is revised based upon feedback received. As per the EEC's suggestion, we intend to make it mandatory for students to also prepare (again in collaboration with their thesis advisor) and include in their thesis proposals a tentative timetable for the completion of the different phases of their research. This will help ensure a manageable timeframe for thesis completion.

In Section 1, we have also highlighted different actions we intend to take in order to encourage "in a relevant and convincing manner" more students to opt for a thesis (e.g. close collaboration with the Advising Centre and inviting students nearing the completion of their thesis to present their study findings in an MA research colloquium, etc.) and to cultivate positive stances to research.

3. Teaching staff

(ESG 1.5)

Comments by the EEC:

Areas of improvement and recommendations

1. In most courses, the emphasis is on disseminating existing theories and applying these to practice, which is good. In a master's program, students should also be confronted with the process of knowledge construction through research. Teaching and learning could be more enlightened by this process, by engaging students more in the research of the staff, or by making this more visible when it occurs.
2. The research output for about half of the academic staff that teach in the Programme are not published in international journals. For others impact factors encountered ($h < 10$) leave room for improvement. Only a small portion of central staff (about three four) achieved adequate impact ($h > 15$) with room for improvement.
3. There is room for staff development with regard to teaching methods, such as case studies, work-based simulations, data driven assignments, in order to provide more active and experiential learning and to have an impact on educational practice through the assignments the students do in their own workplace. The availability of the SOSIEATH lab can be exploited more for distance learning.
4. Nucleus of fixed staff has to be further extended for sufficient critical mass in generating own research (from within EUC), even for a relatively small school or ES master. Currently there is some proof of tenure tracks and career perspective that can be offered. Internal research nuclei are starting and considered necessary for the future.
5. Enrich Erasmus Mobility Agreements with institution from neighbouring countries and encourage students to participate in.
6. For a next (international) accreditation of the Programme we recommend that the CV's provided are better actualized and structured in a more uniform (APA compliant) and less chaotic way, and do not contain large parts in Greek (which makes the evaluation work for the EEC complicated).

EUC Response for Section 3:

1. We acknowledge and agree with the Committee's comments on how MA students should also be confronted with the process of knowledge construction through research. Please see our response in Section 1 point 3 above, and Appendix 4, where we describe the way the Department and the programme coordinators are committed to exposing students to research work and critical thinking and construction of knowledge and skills through research.
2. Increasing the quality of the research output is a central pillar in both the University's and the Department's strategy. To this end, the Department promotes research synergies of its faculty, through the School's research centers and through research clusters of common research interests. With respect to the latter, from Spring 2021, the Department started investing further through organizing twice a year, a research meeting/workshop, whereby faculty discuss their research agenda, further promoting research synergies among the

Department's members, but also supporting less active faculty and offering assistance. The first online meeting took place in May 2021.

This culture of high quality research output is supported by a number of EUC's research support policies and mechanisms, including among others a policy on Teaching Hour Reduction (THR), the Sabbatical leave scheme, the "Annual Awards for Excellence in Research", as well as the available budgets for conference participation and membership in scientific and professional societies, and the Ph.D. Scholarships Award Scheme.

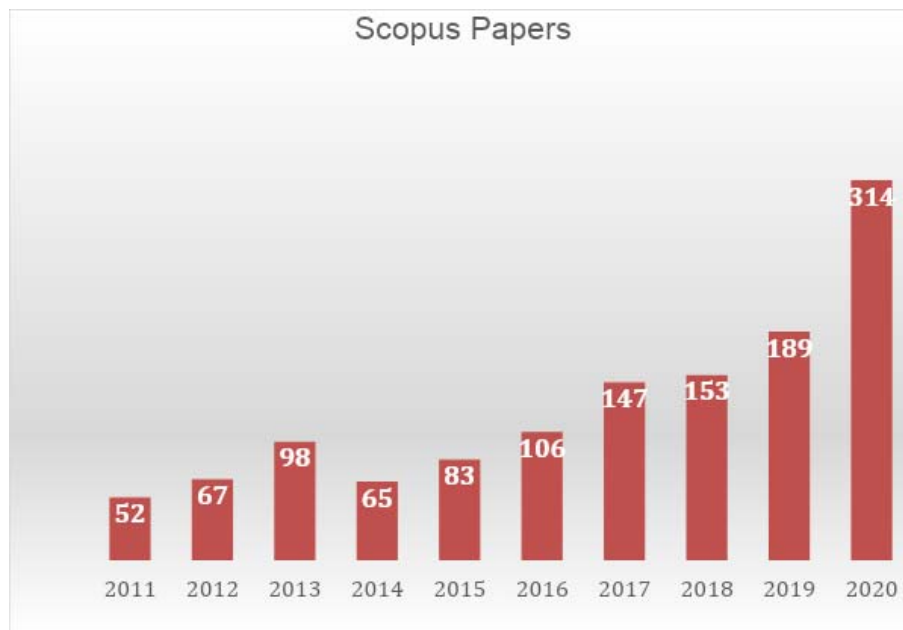
In particular, the University recognizes and supports the need for the Faculty's engagement in systematic and consistent research activities and career advancement. Consequently, to motivate, support and enhance the faculty's research activities, the University has adopted the THR policy, which is part of the wider University Research Policy (see Annex 6 in submitted 200.1 document). Through the THR policy, faculty members who have a contractual obligation of 12 teaching hours per semester, may, through this provision, have a reduced workload of either 6 or 9 hours per semester.

Following the introduction of the THR policy, the research activities of full-time faculty have substantially increased. This is evident from the steady increase in both the number of faculty who are granted a THR, and the parallel increase in research activities.

For instance, during the Spring 2020 semester, 35 full-time faculty members obtained a THR, 19 of whom had a three (3) hour reduction, and 16 a six (6) hour reduction. Within a year, the percentage of full-time faculty that was awarded a THR increased by 69% (February 2020 – February 2021), whereby in the Spring 2021 semester alone, 59 full-time faculty members were granted a THR: 37 members obtained a three (3) hour reduction, and 22 faculty members were granted a six (6) hour reduction. A number of the Department's faculty members have systematically capitalized on the particular policy, while every year additional faculty members are eligible for the THR. These figures demonstrate the steady increase in the number of allocation of THR per semester (2014 to date).

The THR policy has led into a boost of not only the quantity but also the quality of research output. Specifically, in the last five years, the University's output in Scopus indexed paper journals has quintupled. That is, for the years 2018, 2019 και 2020, the University's publications in Scopus indexed journals is of the order of 156, 192 and 312, respectively. On the basis of this track record, and provided that the University maintains the benchmark of 150 high quality journal articles in the years 2021 και 2022, it fulfils the criteria for the Times Higher Education World rankings in 2023.

The figure below depicts the steady increase in the number of University's output in Scopus indexed paper journals per calendar year (2011 to date).



Moreover, the positive effect of the THR policy is also evident from the strong growth in the research activity of the University as measured through competitive external research projects. Such funding has quadrupled during the last 5 years.

Apart from the cumulative nature of the THR policy, this high research culture is supported through the recently introduced Sabbatical leave scheme (Appendix 6). The Sabbatical leave scheme aims at encouraging faculty members to engage in scholarly research and international networking, and it is granted with full remuneration. Sabbatical leave is granted for planned travel study, formal education, research, writing of papers, monographs and books or other experience of academic value. At the end of the Sabbatical period, the faculty member must submit a detailed report on the research activities performed under that period.

In addition, the “Annual Awards for Excellence in Research” may be seen as a further motivation for faculty to engage in high quality research. Specifically, two faculty members are awarded these Awards, on the basis of the quality and impact of their research. These two awards are:

- i. The "EUC Research Award-Young Researcher", is awarded to young researchers that have demonstrated the ability to perform high-quality research. The Award aims to enhance the research activity of young scientists who have shown an ability to produce significant and internationally recognized achievements from the early stages of their career.
- ii. The "EUC Research Award-Distinguished Researcher" is granted to excellent scientists with extensive research experience who have demonstrated significant and internationally recognized research results. The Award aims to appraise and promote the work and personality of these distinguished scientists who honour European University Cyprus through their high-quality research and its impact.

To be eligible, full-time faculty members must be nominated by February 28 of each year. The nominations are assessed by a special committee, comprised of both internal and external members.

A series of other incentives are also employed, so as to encourage and support full-time faculty in their research activities, as outlined below:

- Based on their research profile and activities (at the time of hiring), newly hired full-time faculty members may be granted a THR from the very first semester of employment.
- The University has introduced the Ph.D. Scholarships Award Scheme. The general aim of the scheme is to reward faculty members who have been able to demonstrate an excellent recent research record. The scholarships for PhD fees are awarded to faculty members (prospective PhD Advisors) who fulfil the selection criteria of the scheme and who have a suitable Ph.D. candidate in their field. All full-time faculty members of the University who hold the rank of Assistant Professor or higher are eligible to apply for the award. After prospective PhD advisors are awarded, then the Ph.D. scholarships are offered to the most promising candidates of any nationality. They cover the tuition fees of new Ph.D. students for the whole duration of their studies. Five (5) such scholarships have been announced for the academic year 2021-22.
- Following the Ph.D. scholarships award scheme, the University enhances Ph.D. students with the Policy for the Award of Scholarships for publishing a Scopus paper. This scheme awards scholarships to Ph.D. students who have presented an article to a Scopus Conference or published a paper in a Journal indexed by Scopus. The scholarships are in the form of a tuition fee exemption.
- In addition, an annual budget of 1470 Euro is available to each full-time faculty member, for participation in local and/or international conferences.
- A further, annual budget in the order of 120 Euro is available to each full-time faculty member, for subscription in scientific and professional associations.

In line with the EEC's recommendation to provide further academic support especially for academic writing and for top journal article submissions, in addition to the synergies amongst faculty, the Department is setting up a research workshop to take place during the upcoming academic year. The workshop will include a presentation, followed by a discussion on best practices amongst peers. It has also been agreed, and a budget has been secured for a webinar on academic writing to be delivered by an external, international expert. Finally, it is also worth mentioning that the University Professional Development Seminars offered to academic staff in Spring 2021 were devoted to a large extent to research related topics such as Personal Data Protection in Research, Research Ethics, Internationalization in Higher Education, Open Access in Higher Education (See Appendix 3).

3. We agree with the Committee that there is always room for further professional development of faculty members. In fact, at European University Cyprus, we consider Academic Staff professional development not to be an optional or occasional activity. We believe that regular participation in professional development activities should be an expectation for all. The well-known three-legged 'stool' of academic life - teaching, research, and service - has been assumed to cover the main responsibilities of academic staff. We consider that the academic staff professional development is the 'missing leg' that would add strength and stability to the 'stool'. We consider that professional development and learning promote continuous, career-long growth based upon not only the trial and error of experience, but also theory, research, and

professional collaboration with colleagues. The understanding of instructional concepts and teaching processes can be expanded and deepened via professional development. Hence, we consider that ‘good’ teaching in tertiary education is not just a “you have it, or you don’t” skill, nor is it an automatic companion of terminal, disciplinary degrees. It is an action, process, and way of thinking, and as such, it constitutes serious, complex intellectual work. It thus requires regular reflection and exposure to new ideas and information that are inherently a part of good professional development activities. It is not, however, remedial or something only for those having problems, but should be an integral part of all academic staff’s efforts to become more effective in the classroom. Further, any professional development activities connect instructors across disciplines and career stages, serving to create a pedagogical community within the University. Professional development provides faculty members with opportunities to learn about learning, about teaching, about students, and about themselves. EUC has therefore established three (3) academic staff professional development schemes organized, offered, evaluated and revised by the Office of the Vice-Rector of Academic Affairs.

Seminars planned for the next academic year will involve the offering, as usual, of both compulsory and optional seminars. Compulsory seminars are addressed to newly hired staff (both full-time and part-time) and optional ones are addressed to all staff who are strongly encouraged to attend and, as previous experience has shown, in fact do so for there is an established University culture that values continuous education and professional development.

Further, following a recent decision by the University’s Quality Assurance Committee and the University Rectorate (17.2.2021) in an effort to better address more program- and discipline-specific needs in the various scientific fields, Schools and Departments are to organize and offer on a semester basis in-house professional development seminars catered to their needs so as to support the creation of a learning and research community within their Departments and Schools through the exchange of best practices as well as recent scientific developments in their respective fields (an example of such activity, is the organization of a seminar to explore best practices for online interactive activities during emergency remote teaching in light of Covid -19). **Following the Committee’s suggestion, in the next Departmental training we will include active and experiential learning, including how to use case-studies for teaching and assessment purposes.**

Finally, in relation to the SOSIEATH lab, we definitely agree with the Committee and we are indeed planning to exploit it more for distance learning. Since we have now developed the infrastructure for offering seminars and other research dissemination activities online, we will continue to provide online participation as an option to distance learning students in an effort to keep them engaged with faculty research activities (See responses in Section 1 for further details).

4. We certainly agree with the Committee that a critical mass of EUC based research is important and necessary and we are glad that the Committee acknowledges our efforts to start creating such internal research nuclei. These efforts are to be further extended in the upcoming years and *Point 2* above (same Section) outlines all the steps taken by the University and the Department to meet this goal. We are also confident that the creation of the new Centre of Excellence will also facilitate this process. SOSIEATH has a current research funding of more than 1,000,000 Euros of a total of 17 funded research projects. Currently, a total of 2 MA students, 6 PhD students and 3 Post-doctoral researchers work as Research Associates in the

research projects of the Centre and all faculty members are dedicated to increasing these numbers. A list of research activities in which faculty members are currently involved can be found here: <https://soscieath.euc.ac.cy/index.php/research/>

5. One of the main challenges we have encountered in Erasmus agreements is the language as most of our programmes are currently offered in Greek. However, recognizing the benefits of such agreements, and responding to the Committee's concerns, The Office of the Vice-Rector of Research & External Affairs and the Erasmus Office of the University have developed a scheme for attracting incoming Erasmus students in programs offered in Greek. The scheme will allow the offer of a package of courses in selected programs of study in English for Erasmus students with a total of 30 ECTS in a particular semester. EUC students will also be encouraged to attend these courses in English. The package of courses may include courses such as History of Cyprus or other General Education Electives which are usually taken by EUC students from a broad range of programs. As a result of the pandemic Erasmus mobilities are unfortunately currently suspended, but this scheme is planned to be piloted as soon as restrictions are lifted (at the moment it is planned for S2022).

In order to attract more countries in collaborating and signing agreements, the university used to organise an 'Erasmus week' each Spring which attracted staff from different European Universities and led to the signing of new agreements. Although during the last two years Erasmus Weeks were cancelled due to the pandemic, the University will continue the tradition of the Erasmus week once the pandemic is over.

6. We definitely agree with the Committee that the CV templates of the 200.1 document have been chaotic and we will be very happy to use simpler ones provided that this is allowed in the forms in our future re-accreditation process. We will also make sure that we translate Greek publications in the new forms.

4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification (ESG 1.4)

The EEC has raised the following issues in relation to student admission, progression, recognition and certification. The EUC's corresponding response can be found below numbered according to the number of each point in Areas of Improvement.

Comments by the EEC:

Areas of improvement and recommendations

1. Relationship between teaching staff and students are productive but sometimes could still have more of a challenging character.
2. Students could be supported more in becoming self-guided / independent researchers.
3. Continue with confidence building and academic reputation, as there are other universities in Cyprus (and globally) that are more favoured by potential students
4. The process for downloading the prospectus of a Programme is complicated. We suggest simplifying this process and offer an open access file of prospectus without the prerequisite to fill in a personal data form.

EUC Response for Section 4:

We thank the EEC for these important recommendations, which we have taken into account effectively, as indicated below:

1. We would like to thank the Committee for this observation and for acknowledging the very productive relationships between our teaching staff and students, despite the challenges in communication posed by distance education. As elaborated in EUC Responses to the EEC Comments in Section 2, the adoption of a student-centered approach to learning and teaching by all program instructors, promotes mutual respect within the learner-teacher relationship. The Department and the coordinators of the program will continue all possible efforts to ensure the provision of adequate feedback, guidance and support from teaching staff, while at the same time also facilitating independent study, student autonomy, critical thinking and decision-making.
2. As mentioned earlier, all students are required to do independent research regardless of whether they opt for a Master thesis or not (see EUC Response in Section 1: Study program and study program's design and development, above).
3. We appreciate the acknowledgement by the EEC of our efforts to build a good academic reputation for our program, our Department, and our University more generally. Recognizing the fact the academic reputation is among the most important factors influencing a student's decision on their next study destination, we would like to reassure the EEC that we will continue our efforts aimed at confidence building and academic reputation:
 - Being a very young, self-financed private university, it is definitely challenging for EUC to compete with public universities in Cyprus which receive considerable state funding for financing student tuition fees, or with older, well established universities abroad when it comes to national/international university rankings, obtaining of competitive

funding, and publication record of its staff. Despite the challenges, our University has been striving, and has been very successful so far, in continuously improving its national and international standing in the academia. This trend is likely to continue in forthcoming years given that the University is committed to investing in research, and provides multiple incentives to its faculty (e.g. teaching hour reduction) to seek competitive funding, and to improve their publication record (see Section 3 point 2 for more details).

- As evidenced by the substantial revisions to our MA in Education Sciences program, the Department, and the University more generally, has and will continue to have an adaptable brand strategy that enables/will enable it to keep its curricula updated to reflect the changing marketplace and dynamics of the higher education sector.
 - We will continue to improve the international profile/standing of our Department through the promotion of international collaborations and mobility of our faculty and students. For example, during the 2021-2022 academic year we will be hosting Dr. Lara Dick, a mathematics education professor at Bucknell University, USA, as a Visiting Fulbright Scholar in our Department. During her stay at EUC, Dr. Dick will conduct research on teacher professional development in collaboration with Prof. Meletiou-Mavrotheris and the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute. This collaboration is likely to mark the beginning of a long term collaboration between EUC and Bucknell University, which is one of the leading universities in the US (the 2021 edition of US News & World Report ranked Bucknell 34th in the category “Best National Liberal Arts Colleges” and 42nd in the category “Most Innovative”; The 2021 edition of the *Wall Street Journal/Times Higher Education* U.S. College Rankings placed Bucknell 77th among U.S. universities and 27th among U.S. liberal arts colleges). There are already plans in place for future mobility of faculty and students between the two universities.
4. We would like to thank the EEC for the feedback on the university’s website usability and ease of navigation, which we highly appreciate. As the University holds a standard process and template for the design and development of the website, we have shared these concerns with the responsible Marketing Department who will address the issue. It is also highlighted that the marketing and technology teams of EUC are constantly revising and improving the website and other web applications of the Institution, based on user and student feedback.

5. Learning resources and student support (ESG 1.6)

Comments by the EEC:

Areas of improvement and recommendations

1. To have a larger fully employed staff will help generate a collaborative workforce for enabling more effective and innovative DL programs in the future, especially when supported by a dedicated DLU and research units/labs.
2. The EEC saw good examples of ‘engaging practice’ in teaching and learning. However, some of these practical assignments appear to just scratch the surface and are limited to very first levels of skills, like exercises 6.1 (blog about 10 criteria for SG), exercise 7.1 (write 250 word essay on AR design) for ETD 620; and like exercise 7.2 (draw house with Scratch) for EDT625. But they at least do seem to yield interest for acquiring more profound skills levels. We recommend, within the constraints of available ECTS per course of course, to include more profound practical exercises that better represent the *authentic complexity* of future professional work contexts.
3. The weekly structures (14 weeks per course) are clearly outlined in the about 1500 pages (!) of course descriptions, with the (already mentioned) overview of competences mapped on Programme missing. Apart from including such an overview, we recommend to be more flexible and (where required) vary some more on the amount of ECTS per course and on the order of delivery (from just-in-case towards just-in-time, especially for research methods).
4. A mention was made, that all staff are ‘certified DL experts’. However, taking a yearly seminar (mentioned in the site visit that only first course is mandatory) will not be sufficient to qualify as expert.
5. We suggest including more research activities during the semester that offer the opportunity to involve students in academic writing and finally, publish their work to the broader scientific community.
6. The pedagogical design, selection and development of interactive teaching should be initiated by specialized and permanent staff with affinity to more innovative ICT (Information and Communication Technology). The DLU can initiate this.
7. The EEC feels that the potential of the Research Labs is yet not fully exploited in this master’s education (for research-informed teaching), esp. regarding the Research Unit for ICT / the SOSCIETH lab in relation to courses on learning technologies (e.g. ETD620 and 625). In the application there is mention of the presence of research on game-based learning, simulations and modelling, a.o. at the campus’ Lab, but such research seems to be mainly reflected in other Master programs or F2F Masters.
8. In the application we did not encounter any e-learning in the sense of more dedicated interactive media applications (designed by the Labs), that for instance support students to apply their knowledge in a simulated professional environment. During the site visit we could also hear some realities and plans to include real interactive e-learning programs where students experience content, apply knowledge in more authentic contexts. We recommend to develop further on these good initiatives.
9. We had an extensive discussion of ideas on how to improve the research quality of both staff and student within the program, an important but challenging quality aspect for academic programs. We understand the practical conditions that might be limiting here, but still urge the staff to not allow this to demotivate this ongoing endeavor.

10. In respect to controlling for fraud during essay writing and exams we recommend to keep looking for IT improvements for DL, taking in account recent technologies (pattern/handwriting/iris recognition) and proctoring during exams. The ICT staff confirmed these are starting to become into place, but that AVG restrictions are limiting (e.g. no biometrics)
11. We recommend the DLU (a real unique value of the University) should be further extended and contain more substantial and more dedicated expertise for instructional methods and interactive e-learning, in order to design and develop a more active and experiential program, needed to achieve some of the higher order competences in HE (see other comments). It appears recently new staff with more ICT and innovation affinity was contracted, but this an ongoing process. Knowledge on Digital Didactics (offered through center of excellence on digital didactics) might attract paying teachers from other universities (all struggling with 'emergency remote teaching') as an extra source of income.
12. Internal units for research (operational partly), for DL, and standardized liaisons with the working field (already operational through teachers and advisory boards) warrant input and support from science, innovation, and practice. This way the university can truly aim to be great in academic excellence, employability, research and industry.

EUC Response for Section 5:

1. Understanding the need for a larger number of fully employed staff members, we have already initiated processes for the hiring of a new member. A new academic post has already been announced for the position of a Lecturer or Assistant Professor in Research Methods in Education, with a strong pedagogical background. The new position is anticipated to respond to the needs of this program for an additional faculty member with expertise in Advanced Educational Research Methods, and particularly in Quantitative Research Methods. At the same time, as described in the advertised position's required qualifications, the new member of academic staff is expected to be able to support the programmes with respect to modules on innovative pedagogical approaches (see Appendix 7: full-time faculty job position announcement). Required qualifications for new positions, inter alia, include the competence to teach courses in English, thus the faculty to be hired can support both the Greek and the English version of the program.

In addition, it is highlighted that during the preparation for the re-accreditation process, the Department had advertised, and in the meantime has hired a new member of Faculty. Further, a four-year (2021 – 2025) planning has recently been conducted by the Department for the fulfilment of four additional full-time faculty positions – as shown in the table below:

Milestones		Long term planning for hiring new members
1	1.9.2021	1 FT member of staff on Educational Research
2	1.9.2022	1 FT member of staff on Early Childhood
3	1.9.2023	1 FT member of staff on Educational Leadership & Management/Educational policy
4	1.9.2024	1 FT member of staff on Special & Inclusive Education
5	1.9.2025	1 FT member of staff on Digital Learning & Technologies of learning

Additionally new hiring positions for the appointment of scientific collaborators are announced at the end of each academic year based on the teaching needs of all programmes for the upcoming academic year/semester, and given the Teaching Hours Reduction (THR) obtained for the full-time Faculty. As the THR is announced on a semester basis, additional hirings may take place at the end of each semester—beginning of the following (see Appendix 8 for the scientific collaborators job position announcement for Fall 2021).

2. We are glad that the committee acknowledged our good examples of ‘engaging practice’ in teaching and learning. In relation now to the assignments that “appear to just scratch the surface” please see EUC response to the EEC’s suggestions in Section 2, point 9 where we explain further the rationale behind assignments and provide a more comprehensive overview of the assessment process in the courses mentioned by the Committee. Also Appendix 1 provides some examples of practical exercises that represent the complexity of future professional work per Concentration/course.

The amount of ECTS per course is part of a centralised EUC policy for postgraduate programs. Nevertheless, some flexibility exists in course content and course delivery, and this enables instructors to adjust their courses to the requirements of participants.

3. The weekly structure of courses outlined in the Study Guides has been provided by the national accreditation agency (CY.Q.A.A) in the template available to Universities for structuring and presenting study guides. The template is very specific and requires particular information in various sections, consistent across programmes and course. Instructions of the format and content of Study Guides are provided on the CY.Q.A.A. website (<https://www.dipae.ac.cy/index.php/en/news-and-events/announcements/13-dipae-el/dipaeel/anakoinoseis/525-04-05-2020-enimerosi-axilogisi-distance-programme>) outlining:

- The 12-3 weekly structure
- Types of activities in each week: simulations, case studies, problem solving, multimedia content presentation, real life situations and critical thinking activities
- Summary of the week content
- Interactive activities
- Weekly objectives, literature and learning outcomes.

Nevertheless, different instructors and course coordinators may choose to structure their course content in various alternative ways (e.g. in Units or Modules) which however should still be presented in a way that maintains the required weekly breakdown. The main objective for this breakdown is to facilitate students’ independent study by helping them to keep track of their work throughout the semester and to respect course requirements’ deadlines, without though having to strictly adhere to the suggested breakdown. In addition, we appreciate the Committee’s comment on mapping competences in Programme and courses and we would like to highlight that a formal process involving all staff in discussing how individual course learning outcomes align with the overall program outcomes is in place, through the Program Evaluation Review (PER) process during which programs are reviewed and revised based on feedback from faculty and other teaching staff, students and alumni, Advisory Board and external experts panel. Documents and information in relation to PER can be found in the 200.1 application form submitted for the re-accreditation of this program. Examples of this exercise are attached in Appendix 9 of this response. The Appendix presents the tables that result from the discussion among the teaching staff on the way the program courses are

aligned to the program objectives and learning outcomes. In addition, in the design of the study guides submitted with the evaluation application, it is noted that each week/theme includes individual learning objectives, which correspond to each course's/module's learning objectives as outlined in the course syllabus. The coordinator of each course, in collaboration with the coordinator of the Program, makes further effort to inform accordingly and support instructors in following and maintaining this alignment during the design and delivery of their courses. To this end, coordinating meetings are held, and this will be further enhanced, between the program coordinator, the course coordinators and the course instructors twice a semester to allude to a more formal structure of regular meetings beyond the PER process.

4. All academic staff are not certified as DL experts but 5 of them have successfully completed a 20 ECTS (500 hours) course in E-learning Design & Technology offered by Open University of Catalonia (2013-2014), and at least three (3) of them hold academic qualifications in the field of learning and/or instructional technology and/or digital education (e.g. see CVs of Prof Maria Meletiou-Mavroutheris, Dr Loucas Louca and Dr Katerina Mavrou). Particularly, one of the high Ranking faculty members, who is also one of the program coordinators, obtained an MA in Online and Distance Education from Open University, UK.

Moreover, the Office of the Vice-Rector of Academic Affairs runs every year a Professional Development Program for all newly hired academic personnel (both full-time and part-time) that will be teaching in its Distance Learning Programs of Study (see Appendix 3). Some of the topics included in the program are:

- The EUC Distance Education Fundamental Principles, Pedagogical Model & Infrastructure
- Conceptual clarifications: Distance & Online Education; E-teaching & E-learning
- The relationship between educator and learner in Distance Education
- Design & delivery of an online course
- The educational material & the digital transformation of educational material
- E- Assessment & feedback in Distance Education

For further support of instructors, EUC has established the Pedagogical Planning of Distance Learning Programs of Study Standing Committee (as a standing Committee of the university's Committee on Internal Quality Assurance), engaged in:

- monitoring and evaluating the existing programs;
- pedagogical planning of new programs;
- the design and evaluation of educational material;
- feedback process to the students;
- the pedagogical use of technology, digital assets;
- the training, mentoring and support of instructors;
- the interaction between instructors and students.

Finally all staff members have now experience in e-learning due to the fact that all conventional courses have been offered as online courses during the pandemic.

5. We certainly agree with the Committee on the importance of including more research activities during the semester, and in previous sections we have documented both existing and future research activities such as the newly established Research Colloquium for MA Students.

It is important to point out here that in fact, a number of our current or former students have already presented their work in conferences and/or published it in academic journals and conference proceedings while being enrolled in our MA in Education Sciences program or soon after graduation. Some examples include:

- Ligkaki, P (2020). Η αναπηρία στην κοινωνία και στο σχολείο [Disability in society & school]. *Νέος Παιδαγωγός*, 19, 289-294
- Chalides, I. & Meletiou-Mavrotheris, M. (2018). Η συλλογή και επεξεργασία δεδομένων στοιχείο του στατιστικού γραμματισμού των εκπαιδευτικών δευτεροβάθμιας εκπαίδευσης. [*The collection and analysis of data as an element of statistical literacy*] Proceedings of the 5th Conference of “Νέου Παιδαγωγού”, Athens.
- Vasou, C., Michael, M., Paparistodemou, E. & Meletiou-Mavrotheri, M. (2016). Δημιουργική χρήση της τεχνολογίας στα Μαθηματικά μέσω της αξιοποίησης των προγραμματιστικών περιβαλλόντων Scratch και Scratch Jr [*Creative use of technology in Maths through the programming environments of Scratch and Scratch Jr*]. Presented at 14th Conference of the Cyprus Pedagogical Association, Nicosia October 2016.
- Kleanthous, E. & Michael, M. (2016). Χρήση του Scratch Jr για τη διδασκαλία του εμβαδού και της περιμέτρου τετραγώνου και ορθογωνίου με οθόνες αφής: Δυνατότητες και προοπτικές. [*The use of Scratch Jr for teaching the area and perimeter of a square and a rectangle with touch screens: Possibilities and prospects*]. Presented at 14th Conference of the Cyprus Pedagogical Association, Nicosia October 2016.
- It should also be noted that in 2018, a student enrolled in the MA in Education Sciences: Learning and Communication Technologies received an award in the Competition “Students in Research – FOITO” organized by the Cyprus Research and Innovation foundation, for his Master’s thesis research work which he conducted under the supervision of Prof. Meletiou-Mavrotheris.

The Department is committed to continue to support and promote such efforts.

5. Acknowledging the concern of the Committee for the empowerment of the operation and pedagogical support of the E-Learning programs of study, the Distance Education Unit and the Pedagogical Planning of Distance Learning Programs of Study Standing Committee (of the university’s Committee on Internal Quality Assurance) mentioned in Section 4 above, has already requested the recruitment of a staff member specialized in pedagogical instructional design of e-courses. This person in collaboration and guidance by the Pedagogical Planning of Distance Learning Programs of Study Standing Committee will facilitate and monitor the course design process and the development of interactive activities. The relevant procedures are currently in progress.

6. In relation to the Committee’s concern that the potential of the Research Labs is yet not fully exploited in this master’s education programme, we agree and we would like to point that the SOSCIETH Centre of Excellence was only recently launched and is expected that it will contribute towards better exploiting the former individual labs and better integrating them within our programme. In section 1 point 4 we explain how we plan to expand the

activities of the Centre and the research labs in order to include MA distance learning students.

Furthermore, in addition to the SOSIEATH affiliated labs, the ICT-Enhanced Education Laboratory (ICTEE) acts as an umbrella organization for numerous research projects of interdisciplinary nature, seeking to advance current knowledge in the area of ICT applications in educational environments. Although hosted at the CERIDES Center of Excellence and Innovation in Technology, ICTEE is closely affiliated with the Education Department since it is Directed by Prof. Maria Meletiou-Mavrotheris, and also includes other members of the Department (Dr Katerina Mavrou, Dr. Constadina Charalambous). Since its establishment in 2008, ICTEE has been able to secure more than €2,200,000 of internal funding from agencies in Cyprus, the European Union, and the USA in support of its research activities. Research work covers a broad range of different topics. One of ICTEE's main research areas relates to the educational applications of serious games, simulations, and other new and emerging technologies (e.g. augmented reality/mixed reality, educational robotics) in STEM/STEAM teaching and learning (see <http://ictee.euc.ac.cy/> for more details regarding the Laboratory's scope and activities).

ICTEE's recent activity includes the coordination of the Erasmus+ KA2 Project *The Living Book - Augmenting Reading For Life* (Ref. #: 2016-1-CY01-KA201-017315), and the ongoing Erasmus+ KA2 Project *FemSTEAM Mysteries: A Role-Model Game-Based Approach to Gender Equality in STEAM* (Ref. #: 020-1-CY01-KA201-066058). In 2021, the Erasmus+KA2 project *The Living Book* was selected by the Cyprus Lifelong Learning National Agency and the European Commission to receive the European Innovative Teaching Award. This award is one of a number of achievements of the Laboratory over the years, in recognition of its research work in technology-enabled education. For example, the Socrates-Comenius project *EarlyStatistics: Enhancing the Teaching and Learning of Early Statistical Reasoning in European Schools*, also coordinated by ICTEE, won the 2009 Best Cooperative Project Award in Statistical Literacy, awarded by the International Association of Statistics Education (IASE).

6. The European University Cyprus and the Department of Education Sciences shares the EEC's concerns and suggestions for increasing access to interactive course content and materials for all e-learning programs. During the last five years, EUC has increased efforts for enhancing the design and development of interactive learning content and activities in order to engage learners in more meaningful e-learning programs of study. Towards that end the University has employed the following strategies and tools, which are also currently under further development, and both the university and the Department are committed to promote and improve:
 - E-Learning courses structure: Through professional development and other internal departmental pedagogical and coordination meetings, the faculty are supported in ways of structuring e-learning courses content and activities, and are provided with various ideas and examples of best practices. The structure of the courses is either in weekly format (to facilitate students follow the structure of the Study Guides as this was introduced by CY.Q.A.A.), or units, based on how instructors choose to organise their course content. Both strategies aim to facilitate students' organization of their self-paced study as well as to help students follow the course outline and learning objectives as communicated to them at the beginning of the course, and not to restrict students' individual study to strictly time-based curricula and work. When the strategy

of units or themes is employed, estimation of duration of self-study and timing within the semester is provided to help students keep track of the course requirements and obligations. However, students are informed about the philosophy of the distance learning mode of study they selected and how self-paced learning is facilitated as well as anticipated.

- Course content: Course content is presented in multimodal ways (textual information, external resources and links, videos and images, links to library resources) through the platform built in Library content tool. We acknowledge that due to technical, technological and resources limitations, multimodality and interactivity in our DL programs had, and still has, great room for improvement. Hence, efforts towards this end have intensified through the development of ad hoc committees and mechanisms (e.g. see point 4 in this Section about the Pedagogical Planning of Distance Learning Programs of Study Standing Committee) as well as the investment of resources, human and technical. For example, in order to facilitate asynchronous learning resources may be accompanied by explanatory pre-recorded videos which are also linked to activities and complementary material. Such videos are developed by the faculty members, under the production of professional media companies (EUC collaborators), a policy that started in 2019.
- Tools: **Blackboard Collaborate** is an embedded e-Learning collaboration tool of the Blackboard Learn LMS platform. This virtual classroom tools enables instructors to create engaging and pedagogically innovative environment for students fostering on line learning. Additionally, Microsoft Teams can be used as complementary Collaboration Tool to support the interaction needs of students. To increase student motivation and engagement padlet tools can be used for group projects, as well as Flashcards, Kahoot & Archy Learning for game-based learning via formative evaluation (see more below on external interactive material). Moreover, EUC has recently bought licenses **H5P for pilot testing**. This software is well integrated via LTI with Blackboard and many other Virtual Learning Environments that supports LTI integration. H5P makes it easy to create, share and reuse HTML5 content and applications and empowers the instructor to create rich and interactive web experiences more efficiently. It enables existing CMSs and LMSs to create richer content on computers, smartphones and tablets alike such as simulations, interactive videos, presentations, games and more. (for more information please see <https://h5p.org/content-types-and-applications> _
- External Interactive Material and Simulations: The LMS platform used for EUC's courses allows for the integration of interactive content created outside the platform, and can be uploaded in forms of SCORM. Scorms can be a whole unit or theme with content in text, videos, external links, flash cards and interactive tools as well as short quizzes and embedded assignments. Similarly, the LMS was recently enriched with other tools that allow the creation of interactive material such as H5P (see above). Other activities provided to students include readymade simulations (e.g. see <https://www.simschool.org/home/simschool/>), virtual quantitative and qualitative research analysis labs (e.g. SPSS and NVivo virtual labs created within the research course by the MIS department), as well as case studies on which students can work through collaborative documents. Examples of other tools employed to facilitate interactivity that have been integrated in the LMS as external resources are: Audience response tools (i.e. mentimeter), Collaborative Spaces (i.e. Padlet), OneDrive Shared documents, and other. Finally, discipline and content specific simulations and

interactive online tools are used and will be further enriched when the revised programs will be offered (see Section 2 description of interactive learning for STEAM education and more)

- Communication between learners and learners and instructors: The Discussion forum built-in tool is one of the most frequently used tools for facilitating communication of course participants and instructors. Students are engaged in collaborative activities and interaction such as participation in discussion forums based on particular readings and course material, that was either independently studied or presented and discussed in a videoconference synchronous learning meeting with the instructor.
- Student participation: Students are motivated to maintain interest and actively participate in the e-learning process, through activities that require interaction and collaboration, as well as their regular digital asynchronous (or synchronous) digital presence. Towards this end, students are involved in presenting their own work – group or individual work in various multimodal ways, which can be in a synchronous or an asynchronous mode. These may include presentation and discussions of their presentations with peers, participation in classroom blogs (where they can post ideas, news, critical reviews etc. based on requirements and content). In addition, students also present their work in synchronous mode through teleconferencing with Blackboard Collaborate. Other interactive activities include role-play, simulations, real-life scenarios, learning tools, use of visualization tools etc. In this sense, gamification strategies are embedded in our program. Study guides also contain specific instructions, resource guidance, rubrics for grading, assigned grade value for graded activities, and timelines to assist student engagement and participation.
- Synchronous e-learning: Synchronous meetings through teleconferencing are regularly offered by course instructors, spread out in the semester based on the course structure and methodology. During these meetings, instructors may present and discuss the course content, respond to students' questions, and provide guidance for activities, assignments and independent study. In addition, during teleconferencing students are encouraged to participate in synchronous interactive activities, either through shared whiteboard or other documents, or group work through break-out rooms (chat rather than talking). It is noted that all teleconference meetings are recorded and are available to all students, as not everyone is always able to attend the synchronous meetings.

7. Understanding both the necessity of research quality and the practical challenges involved – as raised by the Committee – the University has designed a detailed Research Policy along with several other incentives for supporting faculty in this endeavour – presented in detail in Section 3 point 2. The Department reassures the Committee that they are all very committed to research excellence and that they will indeed not allow difficulties to demotivate them. This commitment is evident in their active research engagement during the devastating and difficult time of the pandemic – as can be seen in the research activities of the SOSCIETH centre.

8. The University and the Department are very much aware and sensitive on issues of plagiarism and fraud. A plagiarism software, Turnitin (<https://www.turnitin.com/>), is used for all written assignments submitted, which are then automatically checked through for unintentional plagiarism. Turnitin tool helps students to improve the final draft of their assignment before the submission to the platform. Flags for instances of similarity empower formative feedback and

opportunities for revision during the writing process. With respect to online examination system, and for handling online fraud, Respondus Lockdown Browser solution is used for e-Proctoring the final exams of E-Learning courses. This tool allows the students to undertake their exams in a proctored environment. The software does not allow the students to perform any other actions on their PCs other than their exams until they have submitted their final answers. The software uses the camera and microphone of their PCs to monitor their movements. If something gets detected by the software, the instructor is alerted accordingly. Before entering the exam, the students are asked to use their University IDs for identifying themselves. Exam recorded videos are stored on GDPR compliant Amazon Web Services (AWS Servers) and automatically deleted every two (2) months.

9. We are very glad that the Committee has recognised the value of the Distance Education Unit for the University. As mentioned earlier (same section) the University is planning to further extend and support the Distance Education Unit through the Pedagogical Planning of Distance Learning Programs of Study Standing Committee and by initiating a process of hiring new specialized staff in instructional design of e-courses (see point 6 of current Section). As evident in Appendix 3, the University also offers continuous support and training in distance learning for newly hired and existing faculty members and is committed in continuously updating the software and tools used in our LMS platform (such as adding H5P - see point 7 above).

Furthermore, in order to offer more dedicated support on instructional methods, the Distance Education Unit with the Pedagogical Planning of Distance Learning Programs of Study Standing Committee, is currently designing a Quality Assurance Policy Document based on 5 elements, specifically course development, teaching & learning, student support & assessment, faculty support, electronic security measures. The booklet will be ready for use in September of 2021.

We are also very proud to report that based on the results of the global evaluation of Universities **QS Stars University Rating System**, which ended in June 2021, **EUC received Five Stars, among others**, in the area of Online Learning by the QS Intelligence Unit (See Appendix 10 Certificate). Important performance indicators & quality criteria for this distinction were (see Appendix 11, QS Stars methodology):

1. Student faculty engagement (live tutoring, live streaming course video, pre-recorded course video, faculty assessment)
2. Faculty-student ratio.

10. We thank the EEC for highlight this. We are committed in continuing and expanding the kind of collaborations with the working field that they acknowledged as already operational, and as described in point 6 above (same section) we are planning to also extend the operation of internal research units better integrating them to our distance learning programmes. As a result, together with the Committee we are confident that we will continue our efforts towards excellence.



6 Additional for doctoral programmes (ALL ESG)

N/A



7. Eligibility (Joint programme) (ALL ESG)

N/A

B. Conclusions and final remarks

Comments by the EEC:

The present situation is very good with potential for a strong future. Finding a way to attract good students to the programme, is of the essence. Offering the programme in English provides opportunities for student recruitment on a global scale. This in turn could provide opportunities for expansion, further development of the personnel (larger, more varied and especially more international) and could enhance the visibility and reputation of the the programme, the Faculty, and the University. Many of the approaches and procedures were efficient and up to date, including recruitment and development of faculty and staff.

The balance between risks and possibilities in a private University is not an easy one. Strong cooperation within Cyprus and internationally could further deepen and broaden the content and quality of the programme. The EEC would suggest that the potential for merging some of the many universities and programmes in Cyprus be seriously considered. The position of Cyprus as a hub of higher education in Europe is promising.

The EEC urges the Faculty to take into account the suggestions of the previous sections. Instruction and research of tomorrow will need investments in infrastructure and personnel. With flexibility in how resources are allocated, high ambitions and goals can be achieved. The University needs to consider how the expertise in the Faculties can best be provided with the autonomy and resources necessary for taking the responsibility of reaching the strategic goals and full potential of the University.

The Department is also well placed to provide inspiration for the University and more globally to find new and efficient methods and technology for DL and instruction. Much has and is changing in instruction and research and many innovative solutions are found daily in the Universities around the world.

EUC Response

Overall, the Department of Education Sciences of the European University Cyprus and the Coordinators of the Program MA Education Sciences would like to thank the EEC for the constructive feedback on the Program, and would also like to reassure the Committee that the faculty will continue to work hard and stay committed to maintaining and further expanding the high quality and international perspective of this academic program, and of the Department's research activities. We found the EEC's candid discussions, a constructive learning process and we assure the Committee that we have indeed taken seriously into account all their suggestions. The review was a positive experience which has provided us with important input on how to move effectively forward. In addition, we have thoroughly reviewed the findings, strengths and areas of improvement clearly indicated by the EEC following its review and attempted to respond to each item specifically and succinctly, indicating our actions. By embracing the EEC's comments and suggestions, we are convinced that the Program MA Education Sciences will be further enhanced in order to more effectively ensure the learning outcomes of its students. In this regard, we are grateful to the EEC for their candid discussions regarding our program, and the insightful comments and suggestions throughout their report.



C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Professor Marios Vryonides	Dean School of Humanities, Social and Education Sciences	
Katerina Mavrou	Chairperson, Department of Education Sciences	
Maria Meletiou Mavrotheri	Program Coordinator Education Sciences: Technologies of Learning & Communication and STEAM Education	
Constadina Charalambous	Program Coordinator Education Sciences: Creativity and Play in Early Childhood Education	
Paraskevi Chatzipanagiotou	Program Coordinator Education Sciences: Educational Management and Leadership	

Date: 29.7.2021

