

REPLY TO THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

PROGRAM OF STUDY: MASTER OF LAWS (LLM) DISTANCE
LEARNING

Nicosia
12 June 2017

I. Introduction

We refer to the Report of the external evaluation committee for the evaluation-accreditation of the program of study: 'Master of Laws (LLM)-Distance Learning', which was prepared following a lengthy 10-hour on site visit at the University of Nicosia by the members of the committee.

We wish to thank the external evaluation committee for the professionalism they showed during the execution of their duties. The on site visit at the University of Nicosia by the committee and the detailed discussion of all issues pertinent to the LLM under evaluation, led to a fruitful discussion between the members of the committee and the official representatives of the University and faculty members of the program. The discussion proved to be extremely helpful, for further improving the program, due to the expertise of the members of the committee. The demanding set of questions allowed us to elaborate on the philosophical and pedagogical foundations of the program and expand upon the content of the application form.

As noted by the committee, during the on site visit we provided the committee with the detailed study guides required by the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education (DIPAE) in accordance with the guidelines issued by DIPAE. The study guides were evaluated by the committee. We further provided the committee with extensive power-point presentations on the University, the LLM and the QAA DL procedures, and proceeded to an online demonstration of a sample module. The Rector, Vice-Rector of Academic Affairs, Dean and Associate Dean of the School of Law, co-ordinator of the program and

faculty of the program, as well as the Executive Dean and personnel of the DL unit and former students were all present and replied to the detailed questions posed by the committee.

The report by the external committee has been carefully assessed and reviewed by us. Indeed, the suggestions of the committee had been orally posed to us during the on site visit and hence we have had the opportunity to consider them, even prior to receiving the report. We note that the report of the committee is an extremely positive one, with the program receiving a perfect score in 85/112 categories and a near perfect score (4/5) in all the remaining categories, but two. This amounts for an average score of 4.73/5.00 which is a sign that the program constitutes a very good practice in the field and it is, as the committee notes, an innovative, well - articulated and adequately resourced program. We consider that the recommendation of the external committee, in view of the above, is clearly that the program should be accredited by DIPAE.

Having said the above, we have seriously taken into account all recommendations and suggestions of the external committee for further improving the new LLM and will refer to them below. We note at the outset that we consider the suggestions of the external evaluation committee as very helpful and we have thus tried to incorporate them to the widest extent possible.

II. Recommendations by the committee

1. Effectiveness of teaching work-available resources

We note the extremely positive evaluation by the committee of all relevant aspects of the organisation of teaching work and resources of the program. We address the suggestions/recommendations of the committee for further improving the program below.

With regards to the admission criteria the committee notes that the admission criteria are consistent with other prestigious universities offering Distance Learning Masters programmes of a similar nature, while noting no particular class of degree is formally required at the moment and would urge the institution to adopt and publicise very clear entrance requirements, in terms of the class of degree required, in the near future. Furthermore, it was noted that for all LLM programmes, applicants whose first language is not English, should be required to provide evidence of proficiency and further recommended that the Distance Learning LLM programme webpage should include a specific tab on admission requirements.

We agree with the recommendations of the committee and will make sure that the LLM programme webpage should include a specific tab on admission requirements. We confirm that all applicants whose first language is not English should be required to provide evidence of proficiency as suggested by the committee. Furthermore, with regards to the class of degree required, we note that it is not always easy to specify the admission requirements due to the different degree classifications used (University of Nicosia adopts a US degree classification system, with

expected candidates originating from the Greek or UK degree classification systems). However, we have now amended the admission requirements so as to properly provide that the class of degree and the accrediting university will be taken into account during admission of prospective candidates and further clarifying the admission requirements so as to be transparent, while at the same time maintaining the necessary discretion. The revised admission requirements are set out in **Appendix A**. These will be further reviewed in the future in accordance with university policy and the suggestions of the committee will also be taken into account in this regard.

In terms of assessment, the committee recommends that an anonymous system of assessment ought to be put in place in order to reduce the potential for bias. Although as the committee notes, the local practice does not require the anonymisation of exam scripts/essays, the recommendation of the committee is seriously taken into account. Since, however, it would not be practically possible to proceed to anonymisation in only one program of the university (a fact of which the committee is aware of) and accordingly potential anonymisation would need to be implemented to all programs of the university, this is an issue that will be discussed at the Senate of the university. At this stage and for the above reason, we have not taken any action. We will, however, introduce the recommendation at Senate level so as to be discussed and potentially decide on the content of the recommendation for all programs of the university.

With respect to the recommendation of the committee that students who choose not to undertake a dissertation ought to be clearly informed that this choice may limit their chances of admission to a PhD degree in many

academic institutions, we confirm that the students will be appropriately and clearly informed of this factor.

The recommendation of the committee that students must achieve at least a minimum number of credits in the essay component of the summative assessment in order to be allowed into the examination component, so as to avoid instances, because of weighting of individual components, where students fail to submit essays in the course of the modules, yet they are allowed to go straight to the final examination, is seriously taken into account. Since the implementation of the recommendation would need an amendment of the grading regulations of the University (as it would also have effect to the September re-examination), this is an issue that will need to be discussed at the Senate of the university. At this stage and for the above reason, we will introduce the recommendation at Senate level so as to be discussed and potentially decide on the content of the recommendation.

We fully agree with the recommendation that course leaders produce written indicative answers and generic feedback on how the class as a whole performed, identifying general themes, common mistakes etc. and this will be implemented immediately. We will further propose that feedback forms include an open comments section and that students are well aware of the requirements for dissertation, including word-limit.

With regards to the recommendation of the committee that it is important to structure the material in small, easy-to-assimilate sections, and to incorporate activities in each stage, using multimedia/polymorphic materials, we confirm that we will give instructions to all lecturers to comply

with the abovementioned requirements and that a peer-review system will be introduced, in addition to existing quality assurance mechanisms, so as to make sure that the suggestions are implemented.

We seriously take into account the recommendation of the committee that, given the intensity of the task of setting up distance learning modules, this should be appropriately weighted in the teaching allocation. Since the implementation of the recommendation would need an amendment of the regulations of the University and since this is an issue that would need to apply to all university programs, this will need to be discussed at the Senate of the university. At this stage and for the above reason, we will introduce the recommendation at Senate level so as to be discussed and potentially decide on the content of the recommendation.

We further confirm that we will dedicate all necessary resources so as to ensure that class sizes do not exceed the number stated in the application. We wish to clarify, however, that the maximum planned number of students per section would be 30 and not 20, as written in the application form.

2. Program of study

We note that the committee feels that the learning outcomes of the program are appropriate and that this section has also received very high grades and a positive evaluation as a whole. We address the suggestions/recommendations of the committee for further improving the program below.

We note the recommendation of the committee for providing a distinct course on International Human Rights which would be required for students following the specialization of 'Human Rights and Social Justice'. At this stage we will implement the recommendation of the committee in the following manner: The course MLAW-531DL 'European Protection of Human Rights' is renamed to 'European and International Protection of Human Rights' so as to also include global protection of human rights in its scope and this will be compulsory for students following the concentration 'Human Rights and Social Justice'. The revised syllabus is attached as **Appendix B**.

We seriously take into account the recommendations of the committee regarding inconsistencies in the length and depth of the reading lists and materials for the different courses and the need to constantly update them and prepare activities. We will implement the suggestion of the committee to put a system of peer-review in place, in addition to current practices. These mechanisms will be immediately implemented and will be constantly reviewed so as to ensure maximum efficiency.

We confirm that we will distinguish between course leaders and course teachers so as to ensure transparency, as per the recommendation of the committee.

3. Research work and synergies with teaching

We note the positive evaluation of this section also and the high grades received. With regards to the specific training on research ethics we confirm that the university currently offers training on research ethics which are not

program specific, but take place at university level. We will ensure that such training is available also to students of this specific program and in DL form.

4. Administration services

We take note of the positive evaluation of this part and the high grades received. We confirm that we will ensure that training in DL methodology is compulsory; this cannot be done in a program specific manner, but would need to be introduced university-wide and accordingly a proposal to this effect will be set before the DL unit of the university. We further confirm that we shall make every effort to be proactive with respect to students who face personal problems.

5. Distance Learning programs

The committee has positively evaluated the Distance Learning services of the program and that this section has also received very high grades and a positive evaluation as a whole. We address the recommendations of the committee for further improving the program below. For all comments of the committee which were addressed in previous sections, we reiterate the actions already having been taken.

We seriously take into account the recommendation of the committee for an opportunity for staff and students to meet face-to-face on a voluntary basis, at least once in the duration of the programme. As we expect that our students will be coming from various countries, this will mean that such meeting(s) should be taking place in Cyprus so all could attend. We would therefore propose that such a meeting takes place during the first semester

and it is on a voluntary basis as suggested by the committee. We will be discussing this suggestion further at the School Council and the Senate to refine the proposal.

We confirm that the DL unit will make full and systematic use of student evaluations and the available analytics in assessing the effectiveness of the program and that there is clear information on the complaints procedures available.

III. Conclusion

We thank the committee once again both for the positive and fair evaluation, as well as the constructive comments and suggestions and the fruitful discussion that we had with its members during the lengthy on site visit. We also thank the committee for the time and thoroughness it dedicated to the evaluation of the program and for helping us improve the program through the suggestions made. We have already taken action and incorporated nearly all recommendations of the committee, with the exception of those which would need discussion and potential decision at Senate level as they are not applicable only to this specific program. The recommendations and evaluation of the committee are seriously taken into account for the further improvement of the program of study.

Dr. Costas Stratilatis
Co-ordinator

Appendix A

Admission Criteria for students:

The program admits students in the Fall and Spring semesters. Applications for admission to the program will be considered only from candidates that fulfill the minimum entrance criteria as described below:

- **Academic qualifications:** Prospective students should be holders of a Bachelor degree in Law or in another relevant field (political science, public administration, international relations, European studies etc). The grade and reputation of the accrediting university of the first degree will be seriously taken into account during the admission process.
- Two recommendation letters and a letter by the prospective student expressing his/her interest in following the program, sketching out his/her research profile and mentioning his/her expectations from the programme, regarding his/her personal development and professional perspectives.
- Students satisfy the English language requirements if their first degree was taught in English. Otherwise, they would need to present an average TOEFL score of 500, GCSE "O" Level with minimum "C" or IELTS with a score of an average 5.5-6, or a score placement at the ENGL-100 level of the University English Placement Test. The University offers English courses at various levels to help students reach the required standard for admission to a graduate program.
- Personal statement: A letter where the individual skills and qualifications of the candidate, cv and aspirations will be detailed.

The criteria for evaluating candidates are the following:

1. Academic qualifications (grade and reputation of accrediting institution of first degree, field of first degree and specialization, and if any, other post-graduate studies).
2. Professional experience
3. Satisfactory knowledge of at least one additional foreign language. Knowledge of more than one foreign language will be considered an asset.
4. Recommendation letters and quality of personal statement.
5. Research potential of the candidate.

Appendix B

Course Title	European and International Protection of Human Rights				
Course Code	MLAW-531DL				
Course Type	Elective (Required for concentration Human Rights and Social Justice)				
Level	Postgraduate – 2 nd Cycle of Studies				
Year / Semester	Any				
Teacher's Name	Dr. Christos Papastylianos				
ECTS	10	Lectures / week	1	Laboratories / week	1
Course Purpose and Objectives	<p>The purpose of the course is the examination of mechanisms of protection of rights in Europe and internationally, namely the relation between the national constitutions, the ECHR and EU law and global protection of human rights, and specifically their supplementary relation. Special thematic blocks of the course concern the judicial bodies responsible for the implementation of the ECHR and the EU law, the binding force of their rulings, the accession by the European Union to the ECHR, and the clauses regarding the implementation of provisions providing the highest possible protection of rights, as well as international and global regional protection of human rights.</p>				
Learning Outcomes	<p>After completion of the course students are expected to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Understand the basic notions which constitute the subjects of their examinations 2. Demonstrate knowledge of the fundamental principles governing the subjects in question 3. Analyze theoretical issues with regard the subjects in question 4. Solving practical problems with regard the subjects in question. 				
Prerequisites	None	Required	None		
Course Content	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The protection of human rights in EU law before the Charter of Fundamental Rights. 2. Basic elements of the system of protection of rights according to the Charter of Fundamental Rights. 3. Basic elements of the system of protection of rights according to the ECHR. 				

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. The relation between ECHR and EU law, the accession by the European Union to the ECHR. 5. Protection of rights, in the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the ECHR. 6. The relation between the national Constitution and the EU law, the common constitutional traditions of the member- states, the protection of the constitutional identity of member- states in EU law ant the CJEU jurisprudence. 7. The relation between the national constitution and the ECHR, the obligation of the Courts to implement the ECHR, the binding force of the interpretative precedent of the rulings of the CJEU . 8. The notion of constitutional pluralism and the relation between the national constitution with the EU law and the ECHR. 9. The protection of property rights in ECHR and EU law. 10. The «measures necessary in a democratic society» clause of ECHR 11. The principle of proportionality as a means of balancing in the CJEU jurisprudence and the ECHR. 12. International protection of human rights 13. Global regional protection of human rights
Teaching Methodology	Lectures, Individual projects, Group project, Personal guidance, Case-study analysis, Video-streamed courses, Forum, Final exam
Bibliography	<p>Recommended Handbooks</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sybe de Vries, Ulf Bernitz & Stephen Weatherill, <i>The Protection of Fundamental Rights in EU after Lisbon</i>, Hart Publishing, 2013 2. Kanstantsin Dzehtsiarou, Theodore Konstadinides, Tobias Lock, Noreen O'Meara, <i>Human Rights Law in Europe: The Influence, Overlaps and Contradictions of the EU and ECHR</i>, Routledge, 2014 3. O de Shutter, <i>International Human Rights Law</i>, CUP, 2014.
Assessment	Interim individual study, Final essay/Final exam
Language	Greek/English