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Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance
and Accreditation in Higher Education,
Chair of the Council, Prof Mary Koutselini
Nicosia, Cyprus

18th July 2017

Dear Professor Koutselini,

Subject: Master of Business Administration (MBA) Distance Learning - External Evaluation Report, following 22nd May 2017 evaluation visit

Herewith a revised response with reference to your Evaluation Report for MBA DL (dated 25th May 2017) and your explanatory note on Re-Evaluation (dated 11th July 2017).

We ask that you please review this response in the light of the fact that UCLan UK and UCLan Cyprus offer dual degrees on the basis of inter university collaborative programmes. All programmes acquire accreditation at UCLan UK which abides fully with UK Quality Assurance Agency that is a member of the European Network of Quality Assurance.

In your recent explanatory note on Re-Evaluation you advise that it is essential that we demonstrate compliance with the following two factors, namely:

- (a) To include in the title of the award, Masters of Business Administration the wording (Distance Learning)
- (b) To submit full module information pack outlining on a weekly basis, the study plan and self-assessment activities to be undertaken by students.

Herewith, in summary, is our position – with respect to the two additional conditions governing the re-evaluation of the MBA via Distance Learning

- (a) Revise Title: The title cannot change from MBA (Masters of Business Administration) as this in line with best practise of leading universities including UK Open University, Cyprus Open University and other local Cyprus University providers.

We reiterate that the UCLan Cyprus and UCLan UK MBA Distance Learning is an inter-university programme and we cannot introduce changes unilaterally as this contravenes Quality Assurance Principles.

- (b) The Module Information Packs are attached as Appendix A, Supporting Documents. The review of the module information packs and module descriptors, demonstrate how coherent the delivery is, supporting student engagement for enhanced learning across semesters. Assessment of student learning is currently based on activities and assignments, which allows students to practically apply their learning in real life projects.

The university systematically reviews courses following feedback from students, faculty, external examiners and other stakeholders (including professional bodies) and thus we continuously refine the structure, learning methodologies and assessment techniques in line with QA policies and best practise. Your suggestions and recommendations have been registered for coordinated action with UCLan UK and other academic partners-stakeholders and in line with QA principles. UCLan Cyprus in consultation with UCLan UK is embarking on the coordinated adoption of mix assessment methods.

Certain action in terms of revisions in assessment strategy cannot be instituted [αυθιμερόν] given the time frame that Quality Assurance Offices and Committees operate especially when we have an inter-university partnership model involving more than one university, operating across frontiers and QA jurisdictions.

The UCLan Cyprus team is very grateful for the supporting report by the visiting team, arising from the external evaluation event for our Master of Business Administration (MBA) via Distance Learning. We also welcome the recommendations provided by the team, seeking to refine and strengthen the programme and its market appeal. This document presents our reply and comments, following the structure of your Report.

3. RESEARCH WORK AND SYNERGIES WITH TEACHING

- Research Teaching Synergies

'In general, there is persuasive evidence of synergy between research and teaching, and the claim that teaching is research-led is supported by evidence. However, the committee felt that there is a need for staff to engage more in research activity that can have beneficial effects on teaching and the reputation of this Program and UCLan Cyprus.'

Recommendation is answered in next section, paragraph 1.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS OF THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION COMMITTEE

'In short, the Committee felt that the Program although at its first year of operation is of high standards, but also believed that areas for improvement may include:

1. Research time and provision of resources and incentives for research to resident staff would need to be enhanced (and have to be included in the work allocation model). This would increase the research-led dimension of the Program and the research profile of UCLan Cyprus institution.'

UCLan Cyprus is a research led University, and there is an increasing investment in the professional development of the relatively early career research faculty. There is in operation the Research and Innovation Committee charting research strategies and priorities, and orchestrates a mentoring /coaching scheme so that our faculty develop a research portfolio: research initiatives, research bidding, research publications in highly ranked journals. Our workload model, allows top performing faculty to use research income (including REF income) to 'buy' teaching time. Of course as UCLan Cyprus becomes more established and sustainable, more resources will be invested in building our research capability.

We will strengthen the integration of research into teaching and engage our master's scholars in more research projects that can help document more state of the art impact cases that demonstrate how research enables best practises and inform policy debate at all levels, team, enterprise, sector and micro/macro level.

It is axiomatic that our Innovation and Enterprise strategy is increasingly more successful in engaging with industry and stakeholders and thus we can engage more our students and other associates in developing practical research and documenting case studies. This is valuable input into our teaching and training programmes.

2. The Program of study currently includes only compulsory modules and we believe that introduction of elective modules can add to the diversity of options that the student could take. This would also enhance the quality of the online Program.'

In line with Quality Assurance and Course Planning procedures we periodically review courses and subsequently file major/minor changes. Thus there is the operational flexibility to introduce electives for the MBA programmes (conventional and distance learning mode) .

At this stage, and in line with the recent Periodic Course Review of the Part-Time MBA, we will reduce the size of the dissertation from 30 ECTS to 20 ECTS, and Strategic Management from 10 ECTS to 5 ECTS. This can allow us to dedicate the 15 ECTS for optional modules that will include:

- Innovation & Entrepreneurship (5 ECTS)
- Management Coaching (5 ECTS)
- Data Analytics (5 ECTS)
- Leadership (5 ECTS)
- Family Business Management (5 ECTS)

3. *The fact that currently only online units of assessment take place to assess the performance of the students in each module constitutes a possible area for improvement in this Program. We recommend that physical examinations occur in UCLan Cyprus or approved examination centres in several countries (at home countries of the students) so as to increase the learning experience of students and add to the quality standing of this online MBA Program.'*

Currently, the assessment strategy for the majority modules of the conventional Master in Business Administration (Full and Part time), is based on assignments. This method allows more practical application of learning in real life scenarios. In the case of the MBA distance learning programme, in addition to assignments, students are assessed via online 'classroom' discussions and engagement. This practise is also pursued by other international and UK universities e.g. University of Sussex, University of Liverpool.

In line with DIPAE directives and your aforementioned recommendations we are in coordination with UCLan UK for the adoption of ***mix mode assessment method in which a physical examination is part of the assessment.***

However, since UCLan Cyprus and UCLan UK MBA Distance Learning is an inter-university programme we cannot introduce changes unilaterally, as this contravenes Quality Assurance Principles. The university periodically reviews courses following feedback form students, faculty, external examiners and other stakeholders and refines the structure, learning methodologies and assessment techniques in line with QA policies and best practise.

In the next academic year, in order to enhance our students learning experience we plan to introduce for our future cohort attendance for specific actions of the programme via physical or skype presence. During the induction week we offer three master-classes (face to face and via recorded mode), as follows:

- *All About Accounting,*
- *All About Finance*
- *All About Economics*

These master classes are geared primarily for those that are new in the business management field. Once the course starts, we will also offer additional two more workshops, namely:

- *All about Professional Academic Writing*
- *All About Statistics –with SPSS workshop.*

For the next academic year and in cooperation with MBA Alumni we are planning to organize enhancement activities including fieldtrips abroad in order to increase cultural awareness, to gain local knowledge, to network and explore international career opportunities. These fieldtrips will be open to all our MBA scholars. Some of the exchange forum sessions by local stakeholders e.g. Doing Business in Bulgaria, will be recorded for dissemination to all MBAs.

Quality Standards and Indicators

1. EFFECTIVENESS OF TEACHING WORK – AVAILABLE RESOURCES

1.1	Organization of teaching work	Rating
1.1.3	<i>The organization of the educational process safeguards the quality implementation of the program’s purpose and objectives and the achievement of the learning outcomes. Particularly, the following are taken into consideration:</i>	
1.1.3.5	<i>The procedures for the conduct and the format of the examinations and for student assessment</i>	4
1.1.8	<i>Control mechanisms for student performance are effective.</i>	4

‘The evaluation for each module is solely based on only one or two assignments without including any final exams. Although this is also done by other institutions offering online Programs, it may be that an inclusion of a final examination in modules can provide a more comprehensive evaluation and assessment of the student’s understanding.’

We reiterate that UCLan Cyprus and UCLan UK MBA Distance Learning is an inter-university programme and we cannot introduce changes unilaterally, as this contravenes Quality Assurance Principles. The university periodically reviews courses following feedback form students, faculty, external examiners and other stakeholders and refines the structure, learning methodologies and assessment techniques in line with QA policies and best practise.

In the attached file we offer Module Information Packs which include a weekly plan for teaching and learning and module assessment strategy. Following consultation with UCLan UK, we are in coordination for the adoption of ***mix mode assessment method in which a physical examination is part of the assessment.***

1.3	Teaching Personnel	Rating
1.3.2	<i>The members of teaching personnel for each course have the relevant formal and fundamental qualifications for teaching the course, as described by the legislation, including the following:</i>	
1.3.2.2	<i>Publications within the discipline.</i>	3
1.3.9	<i>The academic personnel’s teaching load does not limit the conduct of research, writing, and contribution to the society.</i>	4

'The online Program is currently supported and delivered by resident staff, who are mostly in the early stages of their academic careers. There may be a need in the future to have the online Program delivered and taught also by more experienced staff and practitioners.

Existing staff are research active. Nonetheless, publications of teaching staff can increase in the future both in terms of quantity and quality. This will increase the research-led teaching aspect of the online Program.

The Program director has the appropriate background and experience to provide leadership and to run the online Program.'

For the professional development of UCLan Cyprus faculty, we offer a mentoring /coaching scheme and all faculty go through a rigorous appraisal scheme (on annual basis). Moreover, we operate a workload model. We will strengthen the integration of research into teaching and engage our masters scholars and PhD scholars in more research projects that can help document more state of the art impact cases that demonstrate how research enables best practises and informs policy debate at all levels; team, enterprise, sector and micro/macro level.

With the growth of the MBA DL, coupled with our commitment to accredit the conventional MBA by international professional bodies, we will certainly recruit more faculty, especially in the areas of entrepreneurship/innovation and strategy. With the flexible delivery of certain modules (including block delivery), we have lined up visiting international faculty in order to enrich our teaching expertise and enhance international exchange and collaboration.

2. PROGRAM OF STUDY AND HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS

2.2	Structure and Content of the Program of Study	Rating
2.2.7	<i>The number and the content of the program's courses are sufficient for the achievement of learning outcomes</i>	4
2.2.9	<i>Flexible options / adaptable to the personal needs or to the needs of students with special needs, are provided.</i>	4

Recommendation is answered in previous section (CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS OF THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION COMMITTEE), paragraph 2.

Our current thematic areas have a broad applicability orientation and cover a wide range of managerial and business topics, including accounting and finance, HR management, operations, marketing and international business strategy. Certain emerging topics we do incorporate in existing modules e.g. business planning, management of change, entrepreneurial growth as part of the consulting project.

In line with the panel’s advice, we have already embarked on the formal process of including more explicit quantitative research methods including statistical analysis and data analytics. In fact, we offer additional workshops e.g. All about statistics –SPSS workshops, for all master’s programme, across each semester.

Our approach is to integrate quantitative and qualitative research methods in existing modules e.g. MD4002: Management Learning and Research and MD4992: Dissertation, rather than introducing an entirely new module.

3. RESEARCH WORK AND SYNERGIES WITH TEACHING

3.1	Research - Teaching Synergies	Rating
3.1.4	<i>The results of the academic personnel’s research activity are published in international journals with the peer-reviewing system, in international conferences, conference minutes, publications etc.</i>	3
3.1.5	<i>External, non-governmental, funding for the academic personnel’s research activities, is compared positively to the funding of other institutions in Cyprus and abroad.</i>	4
3.1.6	<i>Internal funding, of the academic personnel’s research activities, is compared positively to the funding of other institutions in Cyprus and abroad.</i>	4
3.1.7	<i>The policy for, indirect or direct, internal funding of the academic personnel’s research activity is satisfactory.</i>	4
3.1.8	<i>The participation of students, academic, teaching and administrative personnel of the program in research activities and projects is satisfactory.</i>	3

‘Overall research-training synergies are very good. Research-led teaching appears to be at very satisfactory levels. Staff can be given more research time and space to publish in high-quality journals so as to further enhance the quality of the Program as to the its research-led delivery (see also Section 1.3.2.2).’

Recommendation is addressed in previous section 1.3.2.2

5	DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMS	Rating
5.4	<i>Student performance monitoring mechanisms are satisfactory.</i>	4

'The distance learning MBA Program is based on a very efficient platform (Blackboard) and the teaching, administrative staff, and students are well-equipped to utilize this platform. In general, the infrastructure for distance learning education is well-designed and implemented in UCLan Cyprus.'

We believe that Blackboard currently consists of the most effective and evolutionary e-learning platform environment to deliver distance learning course delivery and is used by the top academic institutions worldwide.

'The online Program currently is based on a student performance solely on assignments. These do not require the physical presence of the student. The increase the credibility and marketability of the new online Program, we suggest that examinations have to be introduced in either the UCLan Cyprus centre or approved exam centres around the world. Introduction of these examinations can be introduced in several key modules of the MBA online Program (i.e. it might be that some courses with very practical content do not require such a physical presence exam)'

Please refer to our comments in previous section (CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS OF THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION COMMITTEE), paragraph 3.

FINAL REMARKS – SUGGESTIONS

'The Program overall is of very good standing, although it has started very recently. The UCLan UK know-how and standards effectively enhance the pedagogical experience of the students. Some areas of improvement have been identified above (See 'Conclusions and Suggestions of the External; Evaluation Committee).'

We are very grateful for the overall comments of the visiting team which we find very encouraging. The MBA Distance Learning programme is a flexible and coherent course that is tailored for career oriented scholars and working professionals, operating across frontiers, with no need to attend lectures on campus. With the DIPAE validation, the programme will increase its catchment across regions and tap into the growing international market.

Following on going consultation with stakeholders, we are committed to continue to further refine all MBA our programmes in order to prepare for professional accreditation by other international bodies, such as, the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD-EPAS).

We feel that we are fully equipped to grow the MBA programme and enhance the positioning of our School, UCLan Cyprus and Cyprus as international education hub. We remain at your disposal for any further questions and clarifications, in relation to our responses.

Yours sincerely,

**Professor Panikkos Poutziouris,
Acting Rector, UCLan Cyprus**

**Assistant Professor Panayiotis Kontakos
Director of MBA Distance Learning Programme.**

*Cc: Mr Floros Voniatis
Chair, UCLan Cyprus Council*