Doc. 300.1.2

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Higher Education Institution's Response

E-Learning Programme of Study

Date: Date

- **Higher Education Institution:**
  Frederick University
- **Campus: Nicosia**
- **School:** School of Health Sciences
- **Department / Sector:** Department of Life and Health Science
- **Programme(s) of study under evaluation Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)**

Programme

In Greek: Αθλητιατρική: Άσκηση και Υγεία (4 ακαδημαϊκά Εξάμηνα, 95 ECTS, Μάστερ (MSc), Εξ αποστάσεως)

In English: Sports And Exercise Medicine (4 academic semesters, 95 ECTS, Master (MSc), Distance Learning)

Language(s) of instruction: Greek/English

- **Specializations (if any):**

  In Greek:
  In English:

Programme's Status: New

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

A. Guidelines on content and structure of the report

- *The Higher Education Institution (HEI) based on the External Evaluation Committee's (EEC's) evaluation report (Doc.300.3.1) must justify whether actions have been taken in improving the quality of the department in each assessment area.*

- *In particular, under each assessment area, the HEI must respond on, without changing the format of the report:*

    - *the findings, strengths, areas of improvement and recommendations of the EEC*
    - *the deficiencies noted under the quality indicators (criteria)*
    - *the conclusions and final remarks noted by the EEC*

- *The HEI's response must follow below the EEC's comments, which must be copied from the external evaluation report (Doc. 300.3.1).*

- *In case of annexes, those should be attached and sent on a separate document.*

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

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

Sub-area		***Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant***
1.1	Policy for quality assurance	**Compliant**
1.2	Design, approval, on-going monitoring and review	**Non-Compliant**
1.3	Public information	**Compliant**
1.4	Information management	**Compliant**

Areas of improvement and recommendations

a. EEC Comment

The evaluation committee has several major concerns that require attention and modification:

1: The aim of the program is in a scientific context extremely broad. Topics are well outlined in the provided materials. Examples of topics included:

- *medicine related subjects (physiotherapy; exercise epidemiology).*
- *cognitive sciences (psychology, motor learning).*
- *biological focused topics (biochemistry, exercise physiology, nutrition).*
- *biomechanical related topics (kinematics)*
- *performance analyses (tracking devices)*
- *support topics (statistics)*
- *the possibility of doing your own research.*

The committee is convinced that a required in depth understanding of these topics cannot be achieved in a 2 year program. The committee wishes to highlight that comparable MSc programs in Europe are more focused and aims to provide students with the possibility for achieving in depth knowledge in selected areas. It is typically so that the profile of a program is supported by staff profiles that are highly esteemed researchers in that area. This approach allows students to understand how science is developed; to train critical thinking and obtain a methodological skill set. All in all, students are equipped to engage in other topics on their own based on the deep-learning examples completed during the master of science training. The committee strongly suggests focusing the program on the available skillset among the most central researchers to the program. It is also the opinion of the committee that a clear ambition to have interaction with physiotherapy and possibly also engineering would be beneficial, since these topics are all-ready established strongholds of the department. Working with potential employers to identify skills gaps is also important.

2: The pure online delivery of the program

Please also refer to the section specifically addressing the online platform suggested. In a scientific context, the topic specialists in exercise science are concerned that required methodologies usually obtained through laboratory exercises are extremely difficult to achieve in an online environment. However, based on inputs from the e-learning expert of the panel the topic specific members accept that the proposed online program may be feasible.

3: Overall conclusion

In summary, the committee recommends that the program scope is narrowed; that ways of physical interaction with focus on laboratory work are considered; that the program is built around central research profiles in the group of applicants. These elements are central to the rating of 'non-compliant' in section 1.2 in the below table.

Sub-area 1.2 Response

Response to Comment 1.

All recommendations of the EEC regarding the programme structure and the content of the courses have been adopted, resulting in a renewed programme structure (see Annex 1.1) that is followed by a thorough revision of course contents (see Annex 2.1). We have complied, making the following key modifications to the program, as per the recommendations:

1. We prioritized focus on the structure and course content towards two core areas; namely, biomechanics and exercise physiology. This narrows the breadth of the program and focuses on the 'available skillset' of the department faculty involved with the program.

2. We enhanced the integration of physiotherapy with 2 dedicated courses, delivered by faculty in the department with appropriate expertise.

3. We have revised the teaching staff profile to (a) reduce the number of faculty involved in the delivery in order to allow for more depth rather than breadth, and (b) improve the balance of relevant, research-active department staff and highly esteemed visiting professors supporting the program.

4. We have introduced a practical training component specifically focused on exercise physiology and biomechanics. This on-site session, integrated into the curriculum, provides students with hands-on experience to deepen their knowledge and skills in these critical areas, ensuring they gain essential practical competencies alongside their theoretical knowledge.

To ensure the success of those initiatives, we have implemented a six-fold strategy:

- DLSEM502 – “Athletic Mastery”. The content of the course DLSEM502 (so far entitled “Athletic Mastery” is fundamentally revised. The course – now entitled “Advance Sports Performance Enhancement” – has a clearer focus, covering in more depth dimensions, on sports training and optimizing performance through the practical application of exercise physiology and biomechanics. By strategically removing cognitive sciences content, we've streamlined the course to better align with our program's focused approach on core disciplines.
- DLSEM504 – “Injury Prevention, rehabilitation and return to exercise”. The content of course DLSEM504 so far entitled “Injury Prevention, rehabilitation and return to exercise” is fundamentally revised. The course – now entitled “Advanced Sport Injury rehabilitation” – sharpen its focus on addressing trunk and limbs rehabilitation injuries more comprehensively and strategically unscaled the focused in clinical reasoning on this course.
- New compulsory course – DLSEM521 – “Clinical reasoning and rehabilitation planning”. In response to the need for enhanced interaction in physiotherapy and to ensure the retention of critical knowledge, we have introduced a new compulsory course: DLSEM521, titled "Clinical Reasoning and Rehabilitation Planning." This course is designed to delve deeper into the topics previously covered in DLSEM504. It focuses on differentiating normal and abnormal findings, evaluating clinical reasoning, formulating treatment plans, and reflecting on practice transformation. The course is delivered by Dr. Manolis Papadopoulos and Dr. Christos Sava, esteemed core faculty members with extensive expertise in physiotherapy. Their detailed CVs are available in Annex 4. Their invaluable insights and profound knowledge ensure that students receive specialized and advanced training in these essential areas.
- New compulsory course – DLSEM541 – “Practical training”. While the Committee acknowledged the feasibility of fully online delivery, we have decided to address these concerns by introducing a practical training as a fourth-semester component. This practical training session will allow students to participate in lab classes and interactive sessions with the teaching team, focusing on exercise physiology and biomechanics. The session will add 5 ECTS to the program of study, span over 2 weeks, and include 46 contact hours, offering students the flexibility to choose between 2-3 available slots. Assessment will comprise a practical performance evaluation, a reflective journal, and

a data analysis report. The CIP description can be found in Annex 2.1, DLSEM541 – Practical training. The complete course manual and study guide are currently being developed and will be ready before the program begins

- DLSEM505 - "Physical Activity and Health: Public Policy and behavioral Transformation". We have removed the "Physical Activity and Health: Public Policy and Behavioral Transformation" course from our compulsory track and placed it in the elective courses. This change aims to strengthen the compulsory track of the master's program by focusing more on our core disciplines and enhancing the physiotherapy component, while still allowing students to tailor their education by choosing it as an elective.
- Reduced the number of faculty and research from 24 to 11: We have strategically reduced the number of faculty and researchers contributing to the program to enhance its quality and focus. Our approach emphasizes leveraging our research-active resident faculty, who possess deep expertise in our key areas of specialization. Their consistent involvement ensures a strong and cohesive foundation for the program, promoting academic excellence and continuity. In addition to our resident faculty, we have integrated specialized external experts, including highly esteemed visiting professors. These external contributors bring a wealth of industry experience and cutting-edge knowledge, enriching our program with diverse perspectives and practical insights. This balanced approach allows us to maximize the contributions of our research-active department staff while benefiting from the invaluable insights provided by our visiting professors. This collaborative model ensures that our program remains at the forefront of academic and industry developments, providing students with a comprehensive and well-rounded education. More details on the revised faculty and research staff could be found Annex 1.1, Table 4.

As a result of the aforementioned changes and as recommended by the EEC, every topic in the updated program’s structure is meticulously designed to focus on biomechanics and exercise physiology, thereby significantly narrowing the scope to deepen expertise in these critical areas. Each topic is explored as a critical issue to investigate, a strategy to employ, or a tool to utilize within these key areas of our core disciplines. This is facilitated through various interprofessional education experiences (e.g. simulations, patient-centred case studies, problem-based approaches) grounded in the comprehensive international literature for such programs and the World Health Organization's framework (Brukner et al.,

2017; Fletcher et al., 2017; Ulrich et al., 2022; WHO, 2010). With the current structure of our refined elective courses, we clearly allow students to tailor their education more precisely to their interests and career goals. The updated curriculum prominently features specialized tracks that deeply integrate biomechanics and exercise physiology. These tracks are tailored for Clinical Exercise Science and Health and Sports Performance and Rehabilitation, highlighting the pivotal role these disciplines play in each pathway. A detailed mapping of how each elective course aligns with these tracks can be found in Annex 1.1, Table 5.

Response to Comment 2.

The EEC's suggestion was adopted. Please see response 1.2 - Comment 1 for details.

2. **Student – centred learning, teaching and assessment**

   (ESG 1.3)

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

Areas of improvement and recommendations

a. EEC Comment

The topic specific experts of the evaluation panel were very concerned about the lack of practical skills training that could be delivered by an e-learning only program. Whilst simulation is helpful, in view of the sports science experts in the evaluation panel, it is difficult to replace hand-on laboratory experience in, for example, physiology and biomechanics laboratories. We would ask the faculty team to consider offering for example, periodic

residential visits for focused periods of practical training. This is the reason for the non-compliant decision in Section 2.2.

The panel was concerned about the idea that MSc students, who selected that option, would be required to submit their dissertation projects to an academic journal. We felt this was a very bad idea and risked institutional and individual reputational damage. In our experience the gap between what is submitted for an MSc dissertation and the standard required for publication is cavernous. This policy should be overturned and only the best projects should be considered for publication with direct support and intervention from the students' academic supervisor(s). This is the reason for the partially compliant decision in section 2.3.

Department's Response:

***Sub-area 2.2 Response* - Practical training**

The EEC's suggestion was adopted. Please see response 1.2 - Comment 1 for details.

***Sub-area 2.3* Response - Student assessment**

We acknowledge the panel's concerns regarding the requirement for MSc students to submit their dissertation projects to an academic journal. While our intention was to provide students with advanced experience in the scientific publication process, we recognize the significant disparity between the typical MSc dissertation quality and the rigorous standards required for journal publication. In light of the committee's feedback, we have decided to revise this policy. No submission to a journal will be necessary to complete students' requirements from their MSc dissertation. Annex 3 contains the revised policy on this matter for your review.

3. Teaching staff

(ESG 1.5)

Sub-area		***Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant***
3.1	Teaching staff recruitment and development	Partially compliant

3.2	Teaching staff number and status	Partially compliant
3.3	Synergies of teaching and research	Partially compliant

Areas of improvement and recommendations

a. EEC Comment

● *As outlined in previous sections of the report, to enhance the master's program at Frederick University, we recommend a more focused approach, narrowing the program's breadth to align more closely with existing research strengths. This may help to reduce the current extremely large number of faculty and researchers who are expected to actively contribute, which will improve teaching coherence and support a shared mission among those finally contributing.*

● *An active search committee should be established to recruit staff internationally, not limited to Greece, targeting specifically experienced researchers who align with the program's refined focus. This strategy could also attract high-potential postdoctoral researchers who have already made significant contributions to international research.*

● *Additionally, integrating more experienced, possibly senior researchers to mentor and support younger colleagues at the early stages of their careers will ensure their development and success, reinforcing the program's quality and focus.*

● *The outlined procedures for onboarding academic staff in relation to e-learning were convincing. However, we highlight the importance of this element especially related to the usual practical nature of such programs. Thus, experienced researchers must be sufficiently supported in developing adequate online materials as they are likely to not necessarily possess these skills.*

Department's Response:

Sub-area 3.1 – 3.3

Response to Comment 1

The EEC's suggestion was adopted. Please see response 1.2 - Comment 1 for details.

Response to Comments 2 & 3

We welcome the reviewers' comments on the recruitment of international staff and the utilization of senior researchers as mentors. Initially, our recruitment strategy has been focused on Greek-speaking staff, aiming to address the significant regional demand by offering the program exclusively in Greek for the first two years. This approach is particularly important as our program is the first in the region to leverage the specialized knowledge of Sports and Exercise Medicine. However, our university has established policies and procedures to facilitate the recruitment and development of teaching staff for future program expansion into English (See Annex 1.2). Evidence of our university's capability to recruit international staff is demonstrated by several accredited programs currently running effectively in English language.

Furthermore, we accept the proposal for engaging postdoctoral researchers to enhance the program delivery. Additionally, we have enhanced our faculty by establishing an international advisory board dedicated to the MSc program. This board comprises members from various international universities, bringing a diverse mix of academic and practical experience, as well as expertise in curriculum development and quality assurance. Notably, these members also participated in the revision of the program as suggested. With our research advisor and committee chair, Prof. Dimitris Patikas, the advisory committee plays a pivotal role in several key areas. They continuously review and provide feedback on the curriculum, ensuring it remains current, rigorous, and aligned with international standards. The board oversees quality assurance processes, maintains high academic standards, and assists in recruiting high-caliber faculty by leveraging their international networks. Additionally, they offer strategic advice on the program's long-term goals, facilitate partnerships with academic institutions and industry organizations, and serve as mentors to faculty and students. By fulfilling these roles, the board addresses concerns about staff support and recruitment, ensuring the program attracts and retains top talent while maintaining high academic standards. Details of the advisory committee members, including their Scopus metrics, are provided below, with their detailed CVs available in Annex 5.

Name	Discipline	Organization	Metrics
Dr. David Montero	Exercise Physiology	Hong Kong University, Faculty of medicine, Hong Kong China	Citations: 2275 Documents: 108 h index: 24
Prof. Lucy Avraamidou	Curriculum Development, Program Development and Quality Assurance	University of Groningen, Center for Learning and Teaching, Netherland	Citations: 1310 Documents: 67 h index: 19
Prof. Boullosa, Daniel Alexandre	Sport and Exercise Science	Universidad de León, Faculty of Physical Activity and Sports Spain	Citations: 2637 Documents: 175 h index: 29
Prof. Dimitris Patikas	Neuromuscular control	Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, School of physical education and sport science, Greece	Citations: 1686 Documents: 78 h index: 23

Response to Comment 4

We appreciate the reviewers' acknowledgment of our onboarding procedures for academic staff in relation to e-learning. In response to your concerns about the need for experienced researchers to develop adequate online materials, we would like to highlight the following measures:

- The newly established Centre for Professional and Personal Development at Frederick University is responsible for supporting the professional and personal growth of our staff. This includes improving pedagogical techniques, training on new technologies, and disseminating policies and procedures.
- We place great emphasis on staff training and development, particularly for distance learning programs. Since the introduction of our Distance Learning programs, we have provided regular training sessions. The Distance Learning Committee (DLC), in collaboration with the Learning Support Unit (LSU) and the Center for Innovation and Excellence in Teaching (CIET), organizes and delivers these sessions. Initial training

for new distance learning instructors is scheduled at the beginning of each semester, with follow-up sessions throughout the term. These sessions are tailored to the needs of both new and experienced staff, addressing technological and pedagogical advancements.

- To further support academic staff, we have developed a DL Instructors Portal, an Induction Course, and Sample Distance Learning Courses in our LMS. Educational materials, videos, tutorials, and guidelines are made available through these resources. Additionally, academic staff are encouraged to attend other professional development training sessions offered by the University. The DLC and CIET will continue to organize regular professional development trainings and provide ongoing pedagogical and technical support to DL instructors. These efforts ensure that experienced researchers are well-supported in developing adequate online materials, addressing the practical nature of our programs and enhancing their e-learning skills.

4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

(ESG 1.4)

Sub-area		***Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant***
4.1	Student admission, processes and criteria	Partially compliant
4.2	Student progression	Compliant
4.3	Student recognition	Compliant
4.4	Student certification	Compliant

Areas of improvement and recommendations

a. EEC Comment

- *It is a challenge that many different professions will be allowed to enter the program. It is of importance to secure a relevant academic skill set of the applying students. It was unclear how this would be handled which is the reason for the 'partial compliant' rating . We are aware that other programs in sports and exercise*

science allow a variety of backgrounds in their programs (ie in the UK). Relevant information of selection criteria could likely be found in such programs.

- *It is noted that a diverse background of students can be a challenge in teaching due to differences in background knowledge as well as in student collaborative efforts, again related to diversity in knowledge, and especially in academic and sport/exercise-related practical skills.*
- *The ambition to recruit up to 50 students yearly seems overly optimistic. We recommend building the program structure around 10 students at least for the initial years.*
- *Regarding student recognition, certification and assessment, the panel recommends against advertising the option that MSc students to submit theses for publication in international research journals, noting a significant quality gap and potential reputational risk.*

Department's Response:

Sub-area 4.1 Response

Response to Comments 1 & 2.

We agree and adopt the reviewers' recommendation to enhance our selection criteria to ensure that all incoming students possess the necessary academic skills for our program. In response, we have refined our admission requirements to better align with those used in similar programs internationally, particularly in the UK, where diverse academic backgrounds are common. We have introduced the following two specific criteria to our admissions process:

- Academic Preparation: Applicants must demonstrate successful completion of courses in human anatomy and human physiology on their academic transcripts. This requirement ensures that all students have a foundational understanding of essential biological and anatomical concepts before entering the program.
- Practical Experience: Candidates with practical experience working with patients, athletes, or general population interventions will be given preferential consideration during the admissions process. This experience is invaluable as it ensures that students not only bring theoretical knowledge but also real-world insights and skills that can enrich peer learning and enhance the overall educational experience.

We believe these enhancements to our selection criteria will secure the academic integrity of our program and align with best practices observed in comparable international programs.

Response to Comment 3.

Our aim is to attract around 50 students (two cohorts) at the program's steady state. We agree with the EEC's recommendation that given the start of the program and the challenges this entails, we pose a limit of a single cohort. We however feel that a limit of 10 students would be counterproductive as very small cohort sizes are often problematic in relation to communication and interaction within a distance learning environment. We therefore propose a cap of 20 students instead.

Response to Comment 4.

The EEC's suggestion was adopted. Please see response 2.3 for details.

5. Learning resources and student support

(ESG 1.6)

Sub-area		*Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant*
5.1	Teaching and Learning resources	Compliant
5.2	Physical resources	Compliant
5.3	Human support resources	Compliant
5.4	Student support	Compliant

Areas of improvement and recommendations

a. EEC Comment

For the highly specialized simulations there is a dependency on one supplier, it would be advised to look whether there are other suppliers available to reduce the risk of this single supplier dependency.

Department's Response:

Sub-area 5.1 Response

Response to Comment 1

We appreciate the EEC's observation regarding our program's reliance on a single supplier for highly specialized simulations. We recognize that diversifying our supplier base could enhance both the quality and variety of the virtual environments available to our students In response, we have identified two additional suppliers with whom the University has had extensive collaborations, ensuring they are capable of providing these services effectively (VasLabs - Game Development Company & Cartedo).

6. Conclusions and final remarks

a. EEC Comment

Firstly, the evaluation team is very thankful to the Frederick University faculty and student member representatives that we interacted with over the 2-day visit. We were made very welcome and were very grateful for the friendly and engaging interactions throughout the visit. We felt that the proposed Master (e-learning) was an interesting and innovative program which, based on market research, had been designed for practitioners in full or part-time employment. We felt that the business-case was built on solid foundations, and our e-learning expert panel member had no doubt that Frederick University could deliver the program based on their e-learning delivery experience on other programs and current IT infrastructure. However, there was skepticism from the sports and exercise science experts in the evaluation team regarding the programs current scope, level, and proposed programme formatting which we believe requires further consideration and in some cases revision and modification.

We would like the team to consider what distinguishes masterly level learning from the bachelor's level. We consider it of importance to reflect upon existing international standards for the MSc level.

We felt that the program was very broad in its current format and felt that the program required greater focus. We felt that the Faculty needed to re-think more clearly about the skills, knowledge and experience of the students likely to be on the program, where gaps existed, and perhaps by working with potential local employers identify which skills and knowledge should be enhanced. Working with central researchers within the Faculty and coalescing around "islands" of research excellence will be key to the success of the program. We advise that the revision of the program is done in close interaction with very well-established international senior researchers.

We were also concerned about the challenge of learning skills and gaining adequate training for practical and technical skills in, for example, the physiology and biomechanics laboratories. Whilst, for example, online-simulations are useful for learning they cannot replace the hands-on experience of real-world working environments.

We felt that one of the strengths of the Frederick University students' that we articulated with was a clear sense of identity via a very strong academic community and we were concerned that this may be lost via an e-learning only model. We would like the faculty to consider how they can develop this strong identity and community engagement with the proposed program. For example, periodic residential visits where students can gain hands-on laboratory experience. We feel that further revisions to the proposed e-learning program are required and would like to invite the Frederick University faculty team to carefully consider the challenges highlighted in this report and provide a modified response in light of these concerns.

Department's Response:

We sincerely appreciate the detailed evaluation and constructive feedback provided by the team during your visit to Frederick University. We are grateful for the positive comments and

recognition of the strengths and innovative aspects of our proposed Master's program in Sports and Exercise Medicine. The EEC's recognition of our adherence to a robust higher education framework, complete with all necessary policies and support structures, is highly encouraging. We are especially pleased to receive commendations for our creative and innovative methodologies for student interaction, including app-based kinematic analyses and virtual laboratories. The Committee noted the program's development by enthusiastic staff, many of whom have well-established research achievements and extensive experience in higher education. The strong support from university management in developing this novel and highly innovative program was also highlighted. Additionally, the program's ambition, student-centered approach, and excellent interactions between students, teachers, and support staff were recognized. We value the recognition of our motivated, positively spirited, and well-coordinated team of researchers and lecturers, who were excellently prepared for the site visit and presented initiatives that exceed core requirements. The presence of beacon groups within our permanent staff was identified as a major strength. The committee also acknowledged our experience in offering e-learning master's programs with a high success rate and minimal dropout rates. Our adequate distance teaching facilities, learning resources, and the deployment of the Distance Learning Pedagogical Framework for all DL programs and courses were positively noted.

In response to the concerns and recommendations made by the EEC we accept and agree and we believe we have taken the necessary actions to fully adopt and comply with the directions given. Specifically:

- We prioritized focus on the structure and course content towards two core areas: biomechanics and exercise physiology via the implementation of a six-fold strategy to ensure concentrated curriculum design, refined course content, and tailored elective tracks
- We enhanced the integration of physiotherapy with two dedicated courses, delivered by faculty with appropriate expertise.
- We revised the teaching staff profile to reduce the number of faculty involved in delivery, enhancing quality and focus by leveraging resident faculty expertise and enriching the program with insights from esteemed visiting professors.
- We introduced an international advisory board to oversee curriculum development, quality assurance, staff recruitment, strategic guidance, and mentoring.

- We introduced a practical training to complement online delivery, providing hands-on experience and enhancing skills and knowledge in our core disciplines.
- We revised the dissertation policy, eliminating the requirement for MSc students to submit their projects to academic journals.
- We refined our admission criteria to ensure incoming students possess the necessary academic skills and practical experience.
- We proposed a cap of 20 students per cohort to ensure effective communication and interaction in the distance learning environment.
- We diversified our supplier base for specialized simulations to enhance the quality and variety of virtual environments.

We are committed to ensuring that the skills, knowledge, and experience of our students align with industry needs. In fact, the program has been meticulously updated to align with the needs of potential employers and professionals in Sports and Exercise Medicine. Conceptualized through market research and personal experiences of staff with researchers and healthcare providers globally (Cyprus, Greece, Qatar, Hong Kong, UK), and existing collaborations with potential employers in Cyprus. A survey of current undergraduates, one of the main target groups, revealed a skills gap at the intersection of medicine, physiotherapy, and sports science. The proposed MSc aims to bridge this knowledge gap and enhance collaboration in science and the labor market. Lastly, we thank the reviewers for highlighting the importance of distinguishing Master's level learning from Bachelor's, in line with international standards. We ensured this distinction through a fourfold strategy:

1. **Inverted Bloom's Taxonomy**: We developed and structured the learning outcomes using an inverted Bloom's taxonomy, emphasizing higher-order skills to ensure coherent and integrated learning experiences for the program (see Annex 2.2) (Kordi et al., 2005; Newton et al., 2020).
2. **European Qualifications Framework (Level 7)**: Our program aligns with Level 7 standards, as recommended by the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education and is reflected in our study guides (*Description of the Eight EQF Levels | Europass*, n.d.).
3. **Research Focus:** Our MSc curriculum seamlessly integrates research and teaching. It features the latest scholarly articles, active faculty research projects, and advanced

coursework that includes independent research activities. Learning outcomes are aligned with the latest research developments.

4. **Comparative Curriculum Analysis**: Our Master's curriculum emphasizes critical appraisal and analysis, contrasting with the knowledge acquisition focus at the Bachelor's level. In annex 2.3 we are giving an example of this strategy.

In conclusion, we wish to thank the External Evaluation Committee for the constructive dialogue and their insightful and thoughtful remarks. These comments have provided a valuable foundation for the program coordinators, along with the team of DL instructors and all colleagues involved in the Sports and Exercise Medicine distance learning Master's Program, to reflect on the program's core principles and implement significant enhancements. These changes aim to improve and enrich the overall quality and learning experience for our students. We look forward to the accreditation of the proposed program, which, as noted by the Committee, is central to the development of our newly established department and essential to fulfilling its mission.

References:

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B. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

Name	*Position*	*Signature*

Date: Click to enter date