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Date: 13/6/2023

External Evaluation Report (E-learning programme of study)

- **Higher Education Institution:** CIM Cyprus Business School
- **Town:** Nicosia
- **School/Faculty (if applicable):** School/Faculty
- **Department/ Sector:** Department/Sector
- **Programme of study- Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)**

In Greek: Εξ' Αποστάσεως Διοίκηση
Επιχειρήσεων, (18 Μήνες, Μεταπτυχιακό)
Programme Name

In English: Distance-Learning Business
Administration (18 Months, Masters)
Programme Name

- **Language(s) of instruction:** English
- **Programme's status:** New
- **Concentrations (if any):**

In Greek: Concentrations
In English: Concentrations



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 2021 [L.136(I)/2015 – L.132(I)/2021].

A. Introduction

This part includes basic information regarding the onsite visit.

Following the invitation by the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education (CYQAA), the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) had the opportunity to evaluate the “Distance Learning Master of Business Administration” (hereafter DL MBA), which is a distance-learning Master programme provided by the CIM Cyprus Business School in Nicosia (hereafter CIM). The programme is not running at the moment and the proposed starting date is January 2024.

The EEC consisted of four academics and a student representative: the Chair of the Committee, Associate Professor Christos Kolympiris (Warwick Business School, University of Warwick, U.K.), the members Professor Periklis Gogas (Democritus University of Thrace, Greece), the DL expert Professor Christothea Herodotou (The Open University UK), Professor Dionisis Philippas (ESSCA School of Management, France) and the student representative Mr. Georgios Nicolaou (Cyprus University of Technology).

The evaluation for the programme took place at the CIM premises on 12th of June 2023. Prior to the site visit, as well as during the visit, the EEC was provided with comprehensive documents and PowerPoint slides that were presented during the day of the site. The EEC met with the senior management team, the academic faculty responsible for delivering the DL master programme, the administrative and other support staff, and a number of students who are currently at the MBA conventional, face to face, programme offered by CIM.

Specifically, during the site visit, the EEC met: the CEO of CIM Yangos Hadjiyannis, the Dean and Head of Quality Assurance Unit Dr Christos Hadjiyannis, the Head of e-Learning Dr Roman Puchkov, the External DL Studies Consultant Dr Konstantinos Kalligiannis, the Director of Research Dr Costantinos Costantinou, the responsible for Student Affairs Dr Georgia Thrasyvoulou, the Academic Director in Nicosia Dr Myria Kkali, the Programme Coordinator Dr Christiana Charalambidou, and the administrative staff responsible for the functionality of CIM. Additionally, the EEC met with faculty members who will be teaching in the program, with some present in person and others connected via Zoom.

During the sessions, the senior management team of CIM presented the Business School, and the proposed DL MBA programme. The discussions covered various aspects of the programme under review, including its structure, academic issues related to the programme, staff workload and organisation, assessments, and available resources. The EEC also had a separate meeting with lecturers of the proposed programme without the presence of the Dean, the CEO and other members of the executive team. In the afternoon sessions, the EEC had the opportunity to meet with students currently studying at CIM, for the face-to-face MBA, who shared their experiences. The subsequent session involved the Director of Student Affairs presenting the Quality Assurance and student support processes, along with associated tools. The final session comprised a meeting with members of the senior management team to address any remaining questions and seek clarifications.

After each presentation, the EEC was given the opportunity to ask questions and gather further information through a Q&A session. The questions posed by the EEC were specifically related to the new programme, including topics such as the learning objectives (ILOs), programme structure, delivery methods, assessment approaches, assurance of learning (AoL), IT support, faculty, and the broader institutions involved. In addition, additional evidence was provided in relation to Quality Assurance measures, student support services, scholarship opportunities, examples of assessments, information about the provided materials, and other learning methodologies. Lastly, the EEC inquired about the program's sustainability and the management's strategic plan for its future.

The EEC would like to express its gratitude to Mr. Costas Constantinou, the CYQAA coordinator, for his efficient management of the process and for his preparation for the evaluation day.



The EEC reviewed and examined the accreditation report and materials regarding the DL MBA programme provided by the CIM. As we detail below, we find that the DL MBA programme can operate in compliance with the stated criteria and standards. The EEC offers suggestions below to further strengthen the programme.

To preempt some of discussion that follows the EEC finds the proposed program to be consistent with CIM's stated goals to be a boutique business school. That is, there is a focus on student quality, there is work in progress already for the programme to run (e.g., the GATE platform is up and running) and the lecturers either have existing experience teaching online or are being trained. The EEC also notes some areas that afford improvement or/and further development such as attention to potential competition between the proposed DL MBA and the existing face-to-face MBA programme.

B. External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>University</i>
Christos Kolympiris	Associate Professor	Warwick Business School, University of Warwick
Periklis Gogas	Professor	Department of Economics, Democritus University of Thrace
Christothea Herodotou	Professor	The Open University UK
Dionisis Philippas	Professor	ESSCA School of Management
Georgios Nicolaou	Student representative	Cyprus University of Technology

C. Guidelines on content and structure of the report

- *The external evaluation report follows the structure of assessment areas.*
- *At the beginning of each assessment area there is a box presenting:*
 - (a) sub-areas*
 - (b) standards which are relevant to the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)*
 - (c) some questions that EEC may find useful.*
- *The questions aim at facilitating the understanding of each assessment area and at illustrating the range of topics covered by the standards.*
- *Under each assessment area, it is important to provide information regarding the compliance with the requirements of each sub-area. In particular, the following must be included:*

Findings

A short description of the situation in the Higher Education Institution (HEI), based on elements from the application for external evaluation and on findings from the onsite visit.

Strengths

A list of strengths, e.g. examples of good practices, achievements, innovative solutions etc.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

A list of problem areas to be dealt with, followed by or linked to the recommendations of how to improve the situation.

- *The EEC should state the compliance for each sub-area (Non-compliant, Partially compliant, Compliant), which must be in agreement with everything stated in the report. It is pointed out that, in the case of standards that cannot be applied due to the status of the HEI and/or of the programme of study, N/A (= Not Applicable) should be noted.*
- *The EEC should state the conclusions and final remarks regarding the programme of study as a whole.*
- *The report may also address other issues which the EEC finds relevant.*

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

Sub-areas

- 1.1 Policy for quality assurance
- 1.2 Design, approval, on-going monitoring and review
- 1.3 Public information
- 1.4 Information management

1.1 Policy for quality assurance

Standards

- *Policy for quality assurance of the programme of study:*
 - *has a formal status and is publicly available*
 - *supports the organisation of the quality assurance system through appropriate structures, regulations and processes*
 - *supports teaching, administrative staff and students to take on their responsibilities in quality assurance*
 - *ensures academic integrity and freedom and is vigilant against academic fraud*
 - *guards against intolerance of any kind or discrimination against the students or staff*
 - *supports the involvement of external stakeholders*

1.2 Design, approval, on-going monitoring and review

Standards

- *The programme of study:*
 - *is designed with overall programme objectives that are in line with the institutional strategy and have explicit intended learning outcomes*
 - *is designed by involving students and other stakeholders*
 - *benefits from external expertise*
 - *reflects the four purposes of higher education of the Council of Europe (preparation for sustainable employment, personal development, preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies, the development and maintenance, through teaching, learning and research, of a broad, advanced knowledge base)*
 - *is designed so that it enables smooth student progression*
 - *is designed so that the exams' and assignments' content corresponds to the level of the programme and the number of ECTS*
 - *defines the expected student workload in ECTS*
 - *includes well-structured placement opportunities where appropriate*
 - *is subject to a formal institutional approval process*
 - *results in a qualification that is clearly specified and communicated, and refers to the correct level of the National Qualifications Framework for Higher*

Education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area

- *is regularly monitored in the light of the latest research in the given discipline, thus ensuring that the programme is up-to-date*
- *is periodically reviewed so that it takes into account the changing needs of society, the students' workload, progression and completion, the effectiveness of procedures for assessment of students, student expectations, needs and satisfaction in relation to the programme*
- *is reviewed and revised regularly involving students and other stakeholders*

1.3 Public information

Standards

- *Regarding the programme of study, clear, accurate, up-to date and readily accessible information is published about:*
 - *selection criteria*
 - *intended learning outcomes*
 - *qualification awarded*
 - *teaching, learning and assessment procedures*
 - *pass rates*
 - *learning opportunities available to the students*
 - *graduate employment information*

1.4 Information management

Standards

- *Information for the effective management of the programme of study is collected, monitored and analysed:*
 - *key performance indicators*
 - *profile of the student population*
 - *student progression, success and drop-out rates*
 - *students' satisfaction with their programmes*
 - *learning resources and student support available*
 - *career paths of graduates*
- *Students and staff are involved in providing and analysing information and planning follow-up activities.*

You may also consider the following questions:

- *What is the procedure for quality assurance of the programme and who is involved?*
- *Who is involved in the study programme's design and development (launching, changing, internal evaluation) and what is taken into account (strategies, the needs of society, etc.)?*
- *How/to what extent are students themselves involved in the development of the content of their studies?*
- *Please evaluate a) whether the study programme remains current and consistent with developments in society (labour market, digital technologies, etc.), and b) whether the content and objectives of the study programme are in accordance with each other?*
- *Do the content and the delivery of the programme correspond to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)?*
- *How is coherence of the study programme ensured, i.e., logical sequence and coherence of courses? How are substantial overlaps between courses avoided? How is it ensured that the teaching staff is aware of the content and outputs of their colleagues' work within the same study programme?*
- *How does the study programme support development of the learners' general competencies (including digital literacy, foreign language skills, entrepreneurship, communication and teamwork skills)?*
- *What are the scope and objectives of the foundation courses in the study programme (where appropriate)? What are the pass rates?*
- *How long does it take a student on average to graduate? Is the graduation rate for the study programme analogous to other European programmes with similar content? What is the pass rate per course/semester?*
- ***How is it ensured that the actual student workload is in accordance with the workload expressed by ECTS?***
- *What are the opportunities for international students to participate in the study programme (courses/modules taught in a foreign language)?*
- *Is information related to the programme of study publicly available?*
- *How is the HEI evaluating the success of its graduates in the labor market? What is the feedback from graduates of the study programme on their employment and/or continuation of studies?*
- *Have the results of student feedback been analysed and taken into account, and how (e.g., when planning in-service training for the teaching staff)?*
- *What are the reasons for dropping out (voluntary withdrawal)? What has been done to reduce the number of such students?*

Findings

A short description of the situation in the Higher Education Institution (HEI), based on elements from the application for external evaluation and on findings from the onsite visit.

Conditional on approval, CIM expects to launch the DL MBA in 2024. The proposed DL MBA programme is a 1.5-years programme. The language of instruction is English. The award of the DL MBA programme requires successful completion of 90 ECTS points, part or full time, consisting of 4 thematic core modules, with each core thematic module having 12 ECTS, a compulsory Capstone project which is worth 18 ECTS and two elective courses (out of 6 offered) which worth 12 ECTS each.

The EEC examined all information regarding the admission criteria, course learning outcomes (LOs), the instruction method of the courses, the assessment tools and procedures, as well as the main DL features of the online learning environment, as demonstrated by the members of the Business School. The EEC also had the opportunity to meet with academic staff involved in the coordination and teaching of the programme as module coordinators and instructors.

The EEC found the admission criteria to be highly appropriate and in line with the requirements set by the Cypriot authority. The assessment system and criteria regarding student performance are communicated to the students clearly. Overall, the programme under review is carefully designed with learning objectives that align with CIM's strategy and international practices. The purpose, requirements, and LOs are well-aligned with the mission of the programme as well as the needs of Cypriot and international job markets. The curriculum has a disciplinary focus, with its structure and content comprising four main thematic modules in line with international MBA practices, along with a Capstone project that holds great importance within the programme.

The EEC identified that there are internal policies and procedures in place to ensure the quality of the programme. Evidence of quality assurance procedures, as part of an ongoing review and development, was provided by CIM. The quality assurance mechanisms are in place and aligned well with international standards.

The faculty of the programme involves academics who act as the lecturers, online instructors and interact regularly with the students. The staff from CIM involved in the new programme is mostly permanent staff and some adjunct faculty in the form of collaborating academic faculty from other Universities.

Strengths

A list of strengths, e.g. examples of good practices, achievements, innovative solutions etc.

Strengths include the following:

1. Some lecturers have experience teaching online and this is a significant plus as face to face and online teaching require different skills and training.
2. Some training in using GATE has been offered to lecturers. There is a plan to further train lecturers to teach online and for this to be a continuing process.
3. The programme is already shaping up well. The GATE platform is up and running, subject to improvements, the allocation of modules to lecturers is completed and the like.
4. The proposed DL programme is broadly aligned with the strategy and overall philosophy of CIM to be a selective boutique business school.
5. Quality assurance is in place with specific steps outlined from the onset.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

A list of problem areas to be dealt with, followed by or linked to the recommendations of how to improve the situation.

Areas of improvement include the following:

1. The pilot of the GATE platform appears to be functional and largely aligned with expectations. At present, it is structured in a way that students proceed to forthcoming material horizontally by clicking on a "next" arrow. This is not always user friendly. Instead, CIM may consider changing the layout to a "scroll down" option where new information is presented vertically. This is typically more user friendly and indeed this is the approach adopted by leading DL programs abroad.

2. The Entrepreneurship and Innovation module is offered as an elective. However, matching the practical importance of innovation and entrepreneurship, most leading DL programmes include such module as required. CIM is encouraged to consider following suit.

Please select what is appropriate for each of the following sub-areas:

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

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

Sub-areas

2.1 Process of teaching and learning and student-centred teaching methodology

2.2 Practical training

2.3 Student assessment

2.4 Study guides structure, content and interactive activities

2.1 Process of teaching and learning and student-centred teaching methodology

Standards

- *The e-learning methodology is appropriate for the particular programme of study.*
- *Expected teleconferences for presentations, discussion and question-answer sessions, and guidance are set.*
- *A specific plan is developed to safeguard and assess the interaction:*
 - *among students*
 - *between students and teaching staff*
 - *between students and study guides/material of study*
- *Training, guidance and support are provided to the students focusing on interaction and the specificities of e-learning.*
- *The process of teaching and learning supports students' individual and social development.*
- *The process of teaching and learning is flexible, considers different modes of e-learning delivery, where appropriate, uses a variety of pedagogical methods and facilitates the achievement of planned learning outcomes.*
- *Students are encouraged to take an active role in creating the e-learning process.*
- *The implementation of student-centered learning and teaching encourages a sense of autonomy in the learner, while ensuring adequate guidance and support from the teacher.*
- *Teaching methods, tools and material used in teaching are modern, effective, support the use of modern educational technologies and are regularly updated.*
- *Mutual respect within the learner-teacher relationship is promoted.*
- *The implementation of student-centred learning and teaching respects and attends to the diversity of students and their needs, enabling flexible learning paths.*
- *Appropriate procedures for dealing with students' complaints regarding the process of teaching and learning are set.*

2.2 Practical training

Standards

- *Practical and theoretical studies are interconnected.*
- *The organisation and the content of practical training, if applicable, support achievement of planned learning outcomes and meet the needs of the stakeholders.*

2.3 Student assessment

Standards

- *A complete assessment framework is designed, focusing on e-learning methodology, including clearly defined evaluation criteria for student assignments and the final examination.*
- *Assessment is consistent, fairly applied to all students and carried out in accordance with the stated procedures.*
- *Assessment is appropriate, transparent, objective and supports the development of the learner.*
- *The criteria for the method of assessment, as well as criteria for marking, are published in advance.*
- *Assessment allows students to demonstrate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved. Students are given feedback, which, if necessary, is linked to advice on the e-learning process.*
- *Assessment, where possible, is carried out by more than one examiner.*
- *A formal procedure for student appeals is in place.*
- *Assessors are familiar with existing testing and examination methods and receive support in developing their own skills in this field.*
- *The regulations for assessment take into account mitigating circumstances.*

2.4 Study guides structure, content and interactive activities

Standards

- *A study guide for each course, fully aligned with e-learning philosophy and methodology and the need for student interaction with the material is developed. The study guide should include, for each course week / module, the following:*
 - *Clearly defined objectives and expected learning outcomes of the programme, of the modules and activities in an organised and coherent manner*
 - *Presentation of course material, and students' activities on a weekly basis, in a variety of ways and means (e.g. printed material, electronic material, teleconferencing, multimedia)*
 - ***Weekly schedule of interactive activities and exercises (i.e. simulations, problem solving, scenarios, argumentation)***
 - *Clear instructions for creating posts, discussion, and feedback*
 - *Self-assessment exercises and self-correction guide*
 - *Bibliographic references and suggestions for further study*
 - *Number of assignments/papers and their topics, along with instructions and additional study material*
 - *Synopsis*
- *Study guides, material and activities are appropriate for the level of the programme according to the EQF.*

You may also consider the following questions:

- *Is the nature of the programme compatible with e-learning delivery?*

- *How do the programme, the material, the facilities, and the guidelines safeguard the interaction between students, students and teaching staff, students and the material?*
- *How many students upload their work and discuss it in the platform during the semester?*
- *How is it monitored that the teaching staff base their teaching and assessment methods on objectives and intended learning outcomes? Provide samples of examination papers (if available).*
- *How are students' different abilities, learning needs and learning opportunities taken into consideration when conducting educational activities?*
- *How is the development of students' general competencies (including digital skills) supported in educational activities?*
- *How is it ensured that innovative teaching methods, learning environments and learning aids that support learning are diverse and used in educational activities?*
- *Is the teaching staff using new technology in order to make the teaching process more effective?*
- *How is it ensured that theory and practice are interconnected in teaching and learning?*
- *How is practical training organised (finding practical training positions, guidelines for practical training, supervision, reporting, feedback, etc.)? What role does practical training have in achieving the objectives of the study programme? What is student feedback on the content and arrangement of practical training?*
- ***Are students actively involved in research? How is student involvement in research set up?***
- *How is supervision of student research papers (seminar papers, projects, theses, etc.) organised?*
- ***Do students' assessments correspond to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)?***
- *How are the assessment methods chosen and to what extent do students get supportive feedback on their academic progress during their studies?*
- *How is the objectivity and relevance of student assessment ensured (assessment of the degree of achievement of the intended learning outcomes)?*

Findings

A short description of the situation in the Higher Education Institution (HEI), based on elements from the application for external evaluation and on findings from the onsite visit.

The EEC found CIM Business School to offer a student – centered learning environment. The contents of the various modules as well as the criteria for student assessment are well-described and follow international standards. Study guides are well-developed and all relevant information are communicated clearly to students via the intranet and the GATE platform.

Indeed, the modules feature a significant dimension of independent learning and students are exposed to material standard in leading MBA programmes, both face to face and online.

Students of the already running face-to-face programme expressed satisfaction with CIM and the EEC expects the same to take place in the DL programme. For example, the students appreciate the links with industry, the fact that their concerns are heard and that extra help is offered if needed. These are important qualities for any educational programme but become even more relevant for CIM as it offers programmes to professionals who typically have busy schedules already so in essence, they need bespoke programmes so that they are given the opportunity to successfully complete their studies. The EEC found that CIM offers

such experience and that manifests in many ways including only evening classes while also allowing space for students to communicate with instructors.

Strengths

A list of strengths, e.g. examples of good practices, achievements, innovative solutions etc.

Strengths include the following:

1. CIM runs a successful face to face MBA programme and this has provided a number of insights that are being transported to the DL version. For example, the modules offered are well thought off and consistent with expectations.
2. Students are involved in research to the degree possible. For example, they are encouraged to publish their work in the in-house CIM journal.
3. There is pastoral care for students when needed. There are specific protocols but at the same time there is also personal touch and flexibility.
4. Student feedback is taken seriously and responded to.
5. The students are exposed to more recent research and this allows them to appreciate the latest tools, theories and frameworks. This is achieved via the quality assurance process which evaluates syllabi and module material for every module. That said, as noted below there is space for improvement on that front.
6. The capstone project appears carefully designed, exploits the rich network of CIM and offers practical training to students.
7. There is an induction video in place for students.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

A list of problem areas to be dealt with, followed by or linked to the recommendations of how to improve the situation.

Areas of improvement include the following:

1. The proposed program is set up in a way where students enrol in multiple modules (3 or 4) per term. While such choice offers some flexibility it is also likely that it confuses students as they have to cover different material concurrently. Instead, CIM may want to consider offering modules sequentially, within the same term, in a compact manner. For example, a module may run for 4.5 weeks where students can enrol in 3 modules per term. That way, they can zoom in on the taught material of one module without having to juggle between material of different modules. Indeed, this is common practice in leading DL programs abroad.
2. The proposed program is set up in a way where recorded lectures are presented to students separately to asynchronous material such as case studies (both in the GATE platform but not part of the same narrative). This may present an obstacle in that there is no seamless integration between the different components of the taught material and students may not see the links between them. An alternative way would be to integrate the recorded lectures within the asynchronous material text. For example, there could be 15 minutes of recording followed by a case study, then another chunk of recorded lecture followed by asynchronous material and the like. This approach is likely more challenging as it requires alignment between asynchronous material and recorded lectures but it is also more likely to boost student learning.
3. The online forum does offer opportunities for students to network. That said, CIM may consider additional opportunities for online students to meet each other and create networks. There are some efforts towards that end already such as events but more would be welcome as arguably the main limitation of nearly any DL programme is the limited networking between students.

4. The EEC encourages CIM to further boost the research efforts of its faculty members as a means to inform their teaching. The research budget and the opportunities offered by CIM are noteworthy but the course guides indicate that faculty bring in little, if any, of their own research, in their modules. To the degree possible, this can be remedied. For example, CIM may sponsor research trips of their faculty visiting lecturers from abroad (perhaps from universities that CIM has contacts already) for joint research.

Please select what is appropriate for each of the following sub-areas:

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

3. Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

Sub-areas

- 3.1 Teaching staff recruitment and development**
- 3.2 Teaching staff number and status**
- 3.3 Synergies of teaching and research**

3.1 Teaching staff recruitment and development

Standards

- *Institutions ensure the competence of their teaching staff.*
- *Fair, transparent and clear processes for the recruitment and development of the teaching staff are set up.*
- *Teaching staff qualifications are adequate to achieve the objectives and planned learning outcomes of the study programme, and to ensure quality and sustainability of the teaching and learning.*
- *The teaching staff is regularly engaged in professional and teaching-skills training and development.*
- *Training, guidance and support are provided to the teaching staff focusing on interaction and the specificities of e-learning.*
- *Promotion of the teaching staff takes into account the quality of their teaching, their research activity, the development of their teaching skills and their mobility.*
- *Innovation in teaching methods and the use of new technologies is encouraged.*
- *Conditions of employment that recognise the importance of teaching are followed.*
- *Recognised visiting teaching staff participates in teaching the study programme.*

3.2 Teaching staff number and status

Standards

- *The number of the teaching staff is adequate to support the programme of study.*
- *The teaching staff status (rank, full/part time) is appropriate to offer a quality programme of study.*
- *Visiting staff number does not exceed the number of the permanent staff.*

3.3 Synergies of teaching and research

Standards

- *The teaching staff collaborate in the fields of teaching and research within the HEI and with partners outside (practitioners in their fields, employers, and staff members at other HEIs in Cyprus or abroad).*
- *Scholarly activity to strengthen the link between education and research is encouraged.*
- *The teaching staff publications are within the discipline.*
- *Teaching staff studies and publications are closely related to the programme's courses.*
- *The allocation of teaching hours compared to the time for research activity is appropriate.*

You may also consider the following questions:

- *Is the teaching staff qualified to teach in the e-learning programme of study?*
- *How are the members of the teaching staff supported with regard to the development of their teaching skills? How is feedback given to members of the teaching staff regarding their teaching results and teaching skills?*
- *How is the teaching performance assessed? How does their teaching performance affect their remuneration, evaluation and/or selection?*
- *Is teaching connected with research?*
- *Does the HEI involve visiting teaching staff from other HEIs in Cyprus and abroad?*
- *What is the number, workload, qualifications and status of the teaching staff (rank, full/part timers)?*
- *Is student evaluation conducted on the teaching staff? If yes, have the results of student feedback been analysed and taken into account, and how (e.g., when planning in-service training for the teaching staff)?*

Findings

A short description of the situation in the Higher Education Institution (HEI), based on elements from the application for external evaluation and on findings from the onsite visit.

The EEC met with the programme coordinator and the faculty members, including both permanent and adjunct staff, who are involved in the new programme. The main findings are as follows:

(i) The EEC is confident that the programme is supported by qualified faculty members, who all possess extensive academic and professional experience, as well as experience in teaching in DL programmes.

(ii) The teaching staff responsible for the programme's modules are proactive in preparing the corresponding materials specifically tailored to DL course delivery.

(iii) The programme receives strong support from the DL unit and the newly developed internal platform (GATE) within the CIM.

(iv) The teaching staff and the programme coordinator seem to fully understand the issues, challenges and opportunities involved with offering a distance learning course.

Strengths

A list of strengths, e.g. examples of good practices, achievements, innovative solutions etc.

Strengths include:

1. All the faculty members are qualified, experienced academics and professionals.
2. The faculty is familiar with the DL schemes to be presented to the students.
3. The teaching staff provides real-world case studies to the students.
4. There is a direct connection between the faculty and the local industry, bringing real business experience and practical knowledge to the students.
5. There are research budget allowances for the faculty with regards to research output, which is also related to their promotion criteria.
6. Teaching in local universities to enhance the academic experience of the teaching staff seems to be acceptable and welcomed by the administration.
7. The student to teaching staff ratio of approximately 8:1 (300 students and 36 permanent, full and part-time lecturers) is adequate for a boutique business school.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

A list of problem areas to be dealt with, followed by or linked to the recommendations of how to improve the situation.

Areas of improvement / suggestions include the following

- The EEC encourages CIM to
 - provide further clarity with regards to promotion criteria and research requirements for permanent faculty. The criteria must be clear, objective and well communicated to all staff old and especially the new ones.
 - provide further clarity on its hiring strategy. That is, is there a mid- or long-term (2-4 years) plan for recruitment or is hiring managed primarily on an *ad hoc* basis?
 - enrich the training for the permanent and adjunct faculty and tailoring it to the specific areas of the programme, such as platform applications, platform management, and module requirements. There is already work towards that front, including the induction video, but more would be welcome. For example, all teaching staff involved with the proposed (and possibly future) DL programme could attend a short training course that would inform and clarify to the participants the issues involved in DL, the main ideas behind it and more importantly the differences of DL learning with respect to traditional learning. This can be offered internally by the DL coordinator. This training should be updated and repeated yearly for all staff to keep up with changes and improvements in DL.

- encourage faculty to continuously update the material provided to the students and involve their own or other state-of-the-art research in the coursework and assessments. It is important at the master's level that students have an adequate exposure to research, academic journal papers and application of the new ideas in their studies, assignments, and projects. Again, there is effort towards that end primarily via the quality control assurance but further efforts would help. That is, while, as described above, faculty tend to update material with recent research, they do not bring in their own research heavily into that material.

Please select what is appropriate for each of the following sub-areas:

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

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

Sub-areas

- 4.1 Student admission, processes and criteria
- 4.2 Student progression
- 4.3 Student recognition
- 4.4 Student certification

4.1 Student admission, processes and criteria

Standards

- *Pre-defined and published regulations regarding student admission are in place.*
- *Access policies, admission processes and criteria are implemented consistently and in a transparent manner.*

4.2 Student progression

Standards

- *Pre-defined and published regulations regarding student progression are in place.*
- *Processes and tools to collect, monitor and act on information on student progression, are in place.*

4.3 Student recognition

Standards

- *Pre-defined and published regulations regarding student recognition are in place.*
- *Fair recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, are essential components for ensuring the students' progress in their studies, while promoting mobility.*
- *Appropriate recognition procedures are in place that rely on:*
 - *institutional practice for recognition being in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention*
 - *cooperation with other institutions, quality assurance agencies and the national ENIC/NARIC centre with a view to ensuring coherent recognition across the country*

4.4 Student certification

Standards

- *Pre-defined and published regulations regarding student certification are in place.*
- *Students receive certification explaining the qualification gained, including achieved learning outcomes and the context, level, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed.*

You may also consider the following questions:

- *Are the admission requirements for the study programme appropriate? How is the students' prior preparation/education assessed (including the level of international students, for example)?*
- *How is the procedure of recognition for prior learning and work experience ensured, including recognition of study results acquired at foreign higher education institutions?*
- *Is the certification of the HEI accompanied by a diploma supplement, which is in line with European and international standards?*

Findings

A short description of the situation in the Higher Education Institution (HEI), based on elements from the application for external evaluation and on findings from the onsite visit.

The EEC met with current students (two students via Zoom and two students in person) from the conventional MBA programme. EEC inquired students about their experiences during their years of study, their motivation to choose CIM and the conventional programme, what they liked or did not like, as well as how the modules were being delivered in CIM.

The EEC noted that the students were in general very positive about their studies, the programme they followed, and the support received. They pointed out the good brand name of CIM in the local economy, the flexibility of afternoon classes that allows them to combine work and family obligations with their studies, the alumni of CIM, the scholarships provided, and the good communication between students and teaching staff.

The EEC recognizes that the above are important features giving an advantage to the proposed program. All students also pointed out that the programme helped them with their working environment (e.g., career prospects progress, and advancement, understanding tasks better).

The EEC understands that: a) the past placement record of the CIM and b) its established brand name in the local market as it is the first business school that was established in Cyprus 45 years ago, must be significant decisive factors that students seem to take into account seriously when they apply to study at the CIM instead of a larger institution, or a university. The EEC realizes also that the cost of study at the CIM is an important factor for students to apply to the institution. At a cost of €6,500 it is considered very competitive in the local market.

The students mentioned several times the sense of community and collaboration between students. The student representatives came from very diverse backgrounds: journalism, dentistry, law and engineering.

Strengths

A list of strengths, e.g. examples of good practices, achievements, innovative solutions etc.

Strengths include:

- The students had good levels of communication with the faculty who always provided support with regards to the students' assessments or exams.

- The student admission requirements as well as the programme's ILOs seem to be clear to all students and in line with the criteria set by CIM.
- The students felt supported by the CIM, in terms of teaching materials, IT support, and library access.
- The flexibility of the courses is an advantage that is further extended in the new DL programme.
- A diverse group of students in terms of their educational and professional backgrounds.
- There seems to be a scholarships-financial assistance scheme in place that covers fully or partially the tuition fees of some students based on merit.
- The requirement for students to complete a capstone project at the end of the MBA program is a valuable addition.
- Some of the current MBA students in the traditional face-to-face programme expressed their interest in participating in a wholly distant or hybrid programme with lectures that will combine some face-to-face attendance with DL lectures.
- The main reason for this interest was the time wasted for some of them that reside away from Nicosia to drive back and forth for the lectures (2-3 hours per lecture day).
 - This is a strength for the program under consideration and evaluation by the EEC, but it may be a weakness for the traditional MBA programme that may be cannibalized by the new DL MBA.
- The admission of new students seems selective with a goal to maintain a small (approximately 25-30) number of students per programme and an overall student enrolment of approximately 300 students. This is in line with the "boutique", "family-like" feel that the CIM seems proud to identify with and project as a comparative advantage to market of prospective students and employers.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

A list of problem areas to be dealt with, followed by or linked to the recommendations of how to improve the situation.

The EEC can identify minor issues based on discussions with the students.

- The students mentioned that the late courses (20:00 to 22:00) leave them feeling fatigued. A solution is to increase/be replaced with Saturday courses. However, this is something to be carefully considered prior to the launch of the new programme.
- The students emphasized the importance of having a clear understanding of the workload (group projects for example) in advance, so they can effectively manage their personal and professional commitments.
- Although there is diversity in the educational and professional backgrounds of the MBA students, the EEC found no evidence of internationalization in terms of ethnic origins and nationalities beyond Cyprus. This may be the result of the size, and limited advertisement of the program in Cyprus and abroad - there was no interest to advertise and attract students from other countries.
 - This is not necessarily a weakness, due to the small size and local focus of the CIM, but it is a factor to be considered in the strategic development goals of the CIM in the future as Cyprus is a multicultural society and a multinational business environment.

Please select what is appropriate for each of the following sub-areas:

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

5. Learning resources and student support (ESG 1.6)

Sub-areas

- 5.1 Teaching and Learning resources
- 5.2 Physical resources
- 5.3 Human support resources
- 5.4 Student support

5.1 Teaching and Learning resources

Standards

- *Weekly interactive activities per each course are set.*
- *The e-learning material and activities take advantage of the capabilities offered by the virtual and audio-visual environment and the following are applied:*
 - *Simulations in virtual environments*
 - *Problem solving scenarios*
 - *Interactive learning and formative assessment games*
 - *Interactive weekly activities with image, sound and unlimited possibilities for reality reconstruction and further processing based on hypotheses*
 - *They have the ability to transfer students to real-life situations, make decisions, and study the consequences of their decisions*
 - *They help in building skills both in experiences and attitudes like in real life and also in experiencing - not just memorizing knowledge*
- *A pedagogical planning unit for e-learning, which is responsible for the support of the e-learning unit and addresses the requirements for study materials, interactive activities and formative assessment in accordance to international standards, is established.*
- *Adequacy of resources is ensured for changing circumstances (change in student numbers, etc.).*
- *All resources are fit for purpose.*
- *Student-centred learning and flexible modes of e-learning and teaching, are taken into account when allocating, planning and providing the learning resources.*

5.2 Physical resources

Standards

- *Physical resources, i.e. premises, libraries, study facilities, IT infrastructure, are adequate to support the study programme.*
- *Adequacy of resources is ensured for changing circumstances (change in student numbers, etc.).*
- *All resources are fit for purpose and students are informed about the services available to them.*

5.3 Human support resources

Standards

- *Human support resources, i.e. tutors/mentors, counsellors, other advisers, qualified administrative staff, are adequate to support the study programme.*
- *Adequacy of resources is ensured for changing circumstances (change in student numbers, etc.).*
- *All resources are fit for purpose and students are informed about the services available to them.*

5.4 Student support

Standards

- *Student support is provided covering the needs of a diverse student population, such as mature, part-time, employed and international students and students with special needs.*
- *Students are informed about the services available to them.*
- *Student-centred learning and flexible modes of learning and teaching, are taken into account when allocating, planning and providing student support.*
- *Students' mobility within and across higher education systems is encouraged and supported.*

You may also consider the following questions:

- *Evaluate the supply of teaching materials and equipment (including teaching labs, expendable materials, etc.), the condition of classrooms, adequacy of financial resources to conduct the study programme and achieve its objectives. What needs to be supplemented/ improved?*
- *What is the feedback from the teaching staff on the availability of teaching materials, classrooms, etc.?*
- *Are the resources in accordance with actual (changing) needs and contemporary requirements? How is the effectiveness of using resources ensured?*

- *What are the resource-related trends and future risks (risks arising from changing numbers of students, obsolescence of teaching equipment, etc.)? How are these trends taken into account and how are the risks mitigated?*
- *Evaluate student feedback on support services. Based on student feedback, which support services (including information flow, counselling) need further development?*
- *How is student learning within the standard period of study supported (student counselling, flexibility of the study programme, etc.)?*
- *How students' special needs are considered (different capabilities, different levels of academic preparation, special needs due to physical disabilities, etc.)?*
- *How is student mobility being supported?*

Findings

A short description of the situation in the Higher Education Institution (HEI), based on elements from the application for external evaluation and on findings from the onsite visit.

The institution has developed a custom-made platform (LMS) for delivering online courses, called GATE. The platform is maintained by the development company MOTI that offers 24/7 support to users. GATE is connected to the intranet in which general information about registration, support and courses is available to all CIM students. The GATE platform supports functionality for uploading and previewing (within the platform) recorded lectures, videos, and slides, participate in a forum that is linked to each week's material, take and download personal notes while watching and reading material, and complete online activities e.g., quizzes, case-study analysis and forum-based discussions. Synchronous sessions (2h each) take place every two weeks on MS Teams and can be accessed via GATE. These are optional. The design of the GATE platform has been informed by learning theories including cognitive load theory and scaffolding and follows three steps: Investigate by watching recorded lectures, apply by participating in live sessions with a teacher and consolidate through quizzes, padlets, forum discussion and online activities. There is a DL unit responsible for the design and delivery of online learning, with the following members: the Dean, the Director of e-learning, the online MBA programme coordinator, the online MBA support officer, online learning technologists (MOTI team), an external online education expert in charge of quality assurance. The team provides both technical support and support to lecturers in designing and uploading material to GATE.

Weekly interactive activities are not marked at the moment; final course grade is allocated as follows: 40% assignments and 60% final exams (physical attendance). The sample course shown during the visit was the optional course "Academic skills development" which bears no ECTS and aims to support students to develop academic skills prior to starting their studies. There are plans to develop DL MBA courses using GATE in the coming months. There was no written policy as to how the institution will ensure that teachers will use all of the GATE functionality e.g., not only upload video recordings, but also create forum and other activities. It was explained that due to the small size of the institution all material can be checked by the DL unit to ensure compliance with DL requirements before going live.

The institution has a subscription with E-Book Business Collection (renewed on annual basis) and this will be available to online students. Also, it has a subscription with Clarkson Shipping Intelligence Network Database through which books can be ordered. As stated in the material shared, the library has 4000+ books.

An online student support policy document is listing the support available to DL students. This builds on existing support offered to campus students. In addition, online students can contact their lecturer/mentor/dedicated administrator/Director of Student Affairs via the GATE platform and a response should be received within 2 days. There is a Student Affairs Office which supports students with regards to academic and personal issues. Students are assigned a mentor/tutor for their chosen programme. Student attendance and progress are monitored using e.g., an online and 'live' record of student attendance. There is a Disability Policy and an Ethics Policy.

Strengths

A list of strengths, e.g. examples of good practices, achievements, innovative solutions etc.

Strengths include:

1. There is a well-designed platform (GATE) for hosting online material and supporting student interaction and communication. This is accompanied by general study information hosted in the intranet of the institution.
2. The library enables students to access online material for their study.
3. There is a comprehensive plan of student support for both academic and personal issues, including a disability and ethics policy.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

A list of problem areas to be dealt with, followed by or linked to the recommendations of how to improve the situation.

Areas of improvement and recommendations include:

1. The assessment of proposed DL modules needs to be reconsidered; a percentage of the final grade (e.g. 20%) should be allocated to participation and completion of interactive online activities such as forums, online activities.
2. There should be a clear policy (and accompanying training) detailing to lecturers how material should be designed to meet the DL requirements, to ensure consistency between weeks (of a module) and across modules.
3. It is suggested that data analytics from the GATE platform are used to understand how students are interacting with online material (what material they read, for how long etc). This information could give lectures indications of how students are progressing and enable them to provide proactive support when needed.

Please select what is appropriate for each of the following sub-areas:



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

D. Conclusions and final remarks

Please provide constructive conclusions and final remarks which may form the basis upon which improvements of the quality of the programme of study under review may be achieved, with emphasis on the correspondence with the EQF.

The DL MBA is a new programme offered by CIM in Nicosia. It has a 1.5-year content, design, and structure, and provides flexibility for both full-time and part-time study. The EEC acknowledges the significant progress made in preparation for the launch of the new DL programme. This includes the development of a new online platform, infrastructure, utilization of faculty members' expertise, quality assessments, a well-designed programme structure, and a curriculum that aligns with comparable programmes. The programme coordinator, along with experienced academic staff, have leveraged their knowledge and expertise to design the DL MBA programme. Support for the programme comes from CIM's DL Unit and their administrative services.

The reputation of CIM among its students and alumni serves as an advantage prior to the programme's launch. Nevertheless, and in order to establish the sustainability and the competitive advantage of the new programme over the coming years, and taking into account the recent developments, there is room for improvement. Indeed, the EEC recommends further development in areas we have elaborated above.

In summary of the assessment, EEC finds the proposed programme to be a fruitful exercise and to have started to shape up well. There are also areas that can be developed further and in EEC's estimation such improvements are within reach.

The EEC would like to thank all involved in the CIM Cyprus Business School for the high engagement throughout the evaluation process - and for providing a rich set of supporting documents and videos before and during the site visit.

Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to Mr. Costas Constantinou for organising and facilitating the evaluation process.



E. Signatures of the EEC

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Christos Kolympiris	
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Date: 13/6/2023