Date: Date

Feedback Report from EEC Experts

- **Higher Education Institution: Aigaia School of Art & Design**

- **Town: Nicosia**

- **School/Faculty:** School/Faculty

- **Department:** Department/Sector

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

  In Greek:
  Εικαστικές Τέχνες Δίπλωμα (2 έτη, 120 ECTS, Δίπλωμα)

  In English:
  Visual Arts Diploma (2 years, 120 ECTS, Diploma)

- **Language(s) of instruction: Greek and English**

- **Programme's status: Currently Operating**

- **Concentrations (if any):**

  In Greek: n/a
  In English: n/a

A. External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

Name	Position	University
Professor Neil Mulholland	Professor (Chair of EEC)	The University *of* Edinburgh
Professor Xenofon Bitsikas	Professor	University of Ioannina
Professor Susanne Clausen	Professor	University of Reading
Maria Agisilaou	Student	Cyprus University of Technology, Limassol, Cyprus

B. Guidelines on content and structure of the report

The EEC based on the external evaluation report (Doc.300.1.1 or 300.1.1/2 or 300.1.1/3 or 300.1.1/4) and the Higher Education Institution's response (Doc.300.1.2), must justify whether actions have been taken in improving the quality of the programme of study in each assessment area.

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

EEC's final recommendations and comments on the HEI's response

Overall, the EEC is fully satisfied with the HEI's (Aigaia) response. The swiftness, attention to detail and the rigor of their revisions and adjustments is impressive. The changes have been implemented according to the EEC's recommendations and, in some cases, go beyond the EEC's guidance.

1.1.   In particular the HEI has undertaken a review and implemented the following protocols:

- reviewed the program and introduced a common marking scheme (CMS) throughout all grading and assessment activities as suggested.

- established a comprehensive External Examiner structure, including from Pearson and a UK based university. External Examining principles, role, appointment, selection criteria, induction, and report, are outlined according to EEC recommendations.

- reviewed their Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook according to the EEC suggestions.

- fully adopted the EEC suggestions to address the perceived and possible of Conflicts of Interest (CoI) that were identified and are consequently appointed External academic members of staff to its Course Review and Approval Panels.

- All recommendations of the EEC on Assessment including the creation of a Common Academic Framework (attached as Appendix 2) and review of the CMS have been fully adopted and Assessment protocols have been reviewed accordingly.

- The overall program-level objectives have been reviewed, updated and amended

- The Intended Learning Outcomes of the Program of Study, have been reviewed, have been made explicit at program level, and clearly aligned with the Short Cycle, EQF Level 5. They are now described at EQF Level 5 and within the three set of descriptors indicating the

learning outcomes relevant to qualifications at the level in any qualifications system. This has been handled particularly well.

- They have also adopted the EEC suggestion and implemented of an Institutional level Common Academic Framework.

1.2. Here, the EEC commends in particular:

- replacing the previous History of Art courses with Contextual Studies courses that use contemporary art historical tools and methods and draw on examples of current art and art theory.

- that the curriculum and individual courses have been reviewed in context with the recommendations of the EEC, that all learning outcomes are now aligned with the assessment criteria and are now clear for all courses, including their content, reduced number (limit of 5), and the clarity of language used. The HEI is clearly referring to the conditions for Pass, Merit, Distinction which is a really progressive student-centred approach.

- Assessment processes have been reviewed in line with EEC recommendations, with even more emphasis on the procedure of giving formal written feedback now very clear to students

1.7. Aigaia has adopted EEC recommendation and has developed KPIs to be used by the Academic Committee to complete an Annual Programme Review and analysis

1.8. Nothing to comment

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

EEC's final recommendations and comments on the HEI's response
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There is just one thing that needs attention here:

- Aigaia have yet to fully clarify the breakdown of hours within the framework of the ECTS. This is a simple thing to clarify. Each module descriptor will state, in hours, how much direct 'contact time' students should expect (e.g. this could be for one-to-one 'Sitting-with-Nellie' or it could be a large seminar led by one member of staff, or a mixture of approaches…). The time remaining from the ECTS attributed to the module is then 'self-directed' study time. This is all that's required.

Otherwise, the EEC is fully satisfied with the HEI's response and the degree to which revisions and adjustments have been implemented according to our recommendations:

- Courses have been reviewed, updated, and amended according to EEC recommendations.

- A (well chosen) LMS, Canvas, has been introduced after EEC onsite visit and according to EEC recommendations.

- The assessment methods of the HEI have been very thoroughly reviewed and amended according to EEC recommendations. In addition, within the role of external examining is firmly in place as a means to verify that the structure and nature of assessment permits students to demonstrate their level of achievement, i.e the extent to which the intended LOs have been achieved. The use of meaningful pass/merit/distinction grades is excellent and the adoption of alternative to a 'fail' grade is particularly inspired!

- The complaints procedure has been outlined and followed, grounds for complaint etc. are included clearly and in details in the attached reviewed, revised and amended according to EEC recommendations

- Aigaia have registered all of its teaching staff to attend externally provided professional development courses. This will provide excellent additional opportunities for professional

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development and hopefully encourage staff to implement a wider range of assessment methods and consider how to support different learning styles.

- The EEC **commends** the School's commitment to making CPD a core component; this will enable staff to keep developing their critical and reflective teaching practices as HE frameworks change around them.

- The EEC **highly commends** that staff have been allocated development time as part of their employment to ensure this happens.

- Aigaia have introduced a special policy section in the Handbook which beings to recognise actual, perceived, or potential conflicts of interest (CoI) including, but not limited to, the example just given. Aigaia now has a better idea of how they will _manage_ CoIs.

- Unconscious bias and perceived, or potential conflicts of interest will _always_ exist in any institution; so it is admirable that Aigaia recognise the importance of understanding how to identify it. Having a visible, public-facing, CoI Policy that begins to address actual, perceived, or potential conflicts of interest while thinking through related unconscious bias guidelines/training is evidence of sound institutional governance that instils public confidence.

Notes on HEI's response to the EEC:

Generic Need for CoI Policy in Institutions

- The existence of actual, perceived, or potential conflicts of interest does not imply wrongdoing. In any organisation, private, personal, or commercial interests which give rise to actual, perceived, or potential conflicts of interest must be recognised, disclosed and either eliminated or properly managed. For example, the CYQAA _require_ that EEC recognise and disclose any perceived, or potential conflicts of interest. A perceived conflict of interest recognised and disclosed by the EEC is Aigaia _having members of the same family_ as members of the same committees. A family relationship is _the_ most common form of relationship cited as an example of potential CoI in HE CoI Policies and, indeed, in _any_ institution. A family relationship is a form of relationship that any reasonable person would

perceive would influence the objectivity of, in this example, an HEI committee member entrusted to make financial or non-financial decisions. This is *perceived* conflict of interest is one that has *potential* to generate an *actual* conflict of interest. Denial of perceived or potential conflicts of interest is always counterproductive since it serves only to exasperate the perceived CoIs and potential CoIs by not addressing then eliminating or managing them.

Learning Styles

- The EEC note that our report referred to the main institutional "learning style", not to a (misquoted) 'teaching style'. This is based both on the institutional documentation provided to the EEC by the HEI (which notes direct 'contact time') and the EEC's direct observation of teaching the curriculum. As *a learning style*, teacher-presence is widely called 'sitting-with-Nellie' in the standard literature on education in both K-12 and HE contexts. Irrespective of *how* teacher presence is performed, high teacher presence is a singular approach to learning that is distinctive from, for example, the student-led or autonomous learning styles that the ESG 2015 recommend HEIs also adopt. 'Sitting-with-Nellie' has no bearing upon the individual who is teaching, rather it is a neutral description of the *learning style* enabled by teaching presence. 'Sitting-with-Nellie' is a term that is particularly well understood as a learning style used in ADM education and thus will be familiar to Aigaia. It's worth also noting that the HEI's insistence that "Learning and teaching art cannot be approached any other way", is demonstrably false. It can be and is. Autonomous learning is just one example of another way; Connectivism is another. The EEC hope that engaging with training in HE practices provided externally will help to dispel some of these ingrained assumptions that result from unconscious bias and begin to both clarify and deepen staff knowledge of core and emerging educational principles and discourses.

- The EEC wish to clarify that while HEIs are free adopt whichever learning styles they wish to adopt, high-teacher presence style is commonly seen as more appropriate for a Diploma Level 5 programme, particularly in the first year of such a programme. It would not, on its own, be adequate for a BA programme wherein students are required by the EQF to be capable of greater learner autonomy, a style of learning that requires *lower* teacher presence.

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<u>Professional Development and Qualifications of Teaching Staff</u>

- The EEC notes that the HEI is compliant with Cypriot HE laws.

- The EEC highly commends that all staff have been enrolled on external Teaching and Learning Development training courses. While the EEC recognise that all staff *are* indeed practicing artists, we repeat here that this does not automatically qualify staff as being up to date with methods of Higher Education teaching and learning as outlined in the EEC comments. This is widely recognised as an issue impacting on all areas of Higher Education across the world: disciplinary expertise does not necessitate *learning and teaching* expertise. Indeed, this is a key point underlying the existence of *ESG 1.5.* Moreover, training needs change as staff develop their careers – so staff training is something that must be kept up to speed (CPD – continual professional development). This is simply a truism in any profession. (see next section on Teaching Staff *ESG 1.5*).

3. Teaching staff
(ESG 1.5)

<u>*EEC's final recommendations and comments on the HEI's response*</u>
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- A Staff Mentoring Scheme is provided for all new staff, including a valuable induction and the early flagging of staff development needs.

- Training of every member of Staff in QAE is provided as part of contract (for new staff) and as a % of their workload. Again, this is highly commendable as a commitment to a Diploma level programme team which the HEI must be congratulated on.

- The EEC notes that HEI operates is in line with the provisions of the respective national Law ("Οι περί Σχολών Τριτοβάθμιας Εκπαίδευσης Νόμοι του 1996 (67(1)/1996) έως 53(I) του 2013") However, the EEC emphasise the fact that HEIs in the EU are required to provide employees with continued professional development training (CPD). It is not possible for Aigaia to provide training that is "comprehensive", since *no* organisation can offer staff comprehensive training. Aigaia offer very good introductory training and also provide invaluable in-house mentoring. Insourced training however, is, ultimately, limited in

organisation. Moreover, in any given organisation, staff will eventually exhaust in-house training as their needs change and they require a greater variety of input and support. These are the reasons why *all* organisations must engage their staff with *externally* provided training (outsourcing). Identifying new and ongoing training needs of staff (CPD) is vital in this respect and being able to outsource this training from other credible and relevant sectors of Higher Education is essential. Aigaia has signed up staff to the courses suggested as exemplars by the EEC, which is a good approach. However, it's worth clarifying that the suggested courses are just that, suggestions. Aigaia and its staff, ultimately, need to determine which training courses are best for their needs as their needs change.

- The HEI has further reviewed their "Recruitment and development Policy" to ensure that it addresses out Conflicts of Interest and unconscious bias as much as possible. Updating these Policies in alignment with best practice in the EHEA should be an ongoing process.

- 3.2 Regarding Teaching Staff **number** (aside from status), there remains need for some further clarification since this information is required by the CYQAA in the correct format. The response from the School clarifies what the EEC already knew, that the HEI has 8FTE permanent staff. The CYQAA need to know what *proportion* (%) of this 8FTE is allocated **_only_** to the Diploma programme (i.e. <u>not</u> used for teaching any other programmes or awards at the HEI). The EEC assume that answer must be *lower* than 8FTE since, as we understand it, the permanent staff do not exclusively teach on the Diploma.

    o NB: FTE = Full time equivalent. 8FTE is based on the School stating that it has x7FTE and x2 0.5FTE (part-time) staff in permanent employment. If this is not correct, then please calculate the correct HEI FTE.

- 3.2 Visiting lecturers are indeed an asset to any educational programme. Visiting lecturers, however, are distinct from staff employed more regularly by HEIs using *impermanent* contracts (often called 'zero hours', adjunct, or para-academic staff). Staff who are regular contributors to a programme that are on impermanent contracts suffer from employment precarity and poverty of opportunity that cannot be fixed by changing the ECTS of courses they may contribute to (albeit that this change *might* mitigate what *might* have been an unconscious impact of previously having 3 ECTS modules).

clarify, in 3.2 the EEC draw attention to the repeated use of *impermanent* contracts (which is a common problem in HE), asking that Aigaia identify the *impact* of such contracts on employees, address their findings and find the best way to manage what they find out. The School should bear in mind that, as HEIs grow, they continue to engage Visiting Lecturers but equally aim to employ more members of staff on *permanent* contracts set at as high an FTE as is affordable (0.5FTE or above).

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

EEC's final recommendations and comments on the HEI's response

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The EEC notes that the term Short Cycle, EQF Level 5 has been introduced in the title of the Program by the Institution according to EEC recommendation.

5. Learning resources and student support
(*ESG 1.6*)

EEC's final recommendations and comments on the HEI's response

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The EEC have no areas of concern of recommendations here.

6. Additional for doctoral programmes
(ALL ESG)

EEC's final recommendations and comments on the HEI's response
N/A

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7. Eligibility (Joint programmes)
(ALL ESG)

EEC's final recommendations and comments on the HEI's response
N/A

C. Conclusions and final remarks

The EEC must provide final conclusions and remarks, with emphasis on the correspondence with the EQF.

EEC's final conclusions and remarks
Click or tap here to enter text.

The EEC concludes that our recommendations have been mainly understood, carefully followed, reviewed and implemented. This further includes:

- *The* QAE has been reviewed, updated and amended according to all relevant EEC recommendations included in its External Evaluation Report all of which have been adopted and implemented in detail.

- The HEI has extensively reviewed its Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook (attached as Appendix 1) which includes specific Quality Assurance and Enhancement Policy and clear related processes.

Further to this EEC **highly commends** that, in order to create a research culture, all staff will be allocated remunerated time in order to develop a research profile. This goes above and beyond what's generally expected for Diploma level staff in the sector and is a fantastic signal to staff, students and the broader public that the HEI is seriously committed to being an important provider of art education in Cyprus.

The HEI has stated its commitment to continue to take into account constructive recommendations either internally and/or from external stakeholders, especially those relevant recommendations from the EEC under the evaluation process of CYQAA.

Given the level of change and implementation of EEC recommendations, including the review of course content and delivery, we believe that the institution is on an good path to grow and to develop the overall educational level of the students and professional expertise of its staff.

Agaia has done a really great job here in all. The EEC would like to congratulate the HEI on its progress and wish it all best for its future development!

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D. Signatures of the EEC

Name	Signature
Professor Neil Mulholland	
Professor Xenofon Bitsikas	
Professor Susanne Clausen	
Maria Agisilaou	

Date: 21 November 2022