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Date: 14.5.2021

External Evaluation

Report

Educational Sciences, MA, Distance Learning

- **Higher Education Institution:**
Open University of Cyprus (OUC)
- **Town: Nicosia**
 - **School/Faculty (if applicable): Faculty of Economic Sciences and Management**
- **Department/ Sector: -**
- **Programme of study- Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)**

In Greek:

Μεταπτυχιακό Πρόγραμμα Σπουδών «Επιστήμες της Αγωγής»
(3 ακαδημαϊκά εξάμηνα, 90 ECTS)

In English:

Educational Sciences (3 academic semesters, 90 ECTS, Master of Arts), Distance Learning

- **Language(s) of instruction: Greek**
- **Programme's status: Currently Operating**
- **Concentrations (if any):**

In Greek: Εκπαιδευτική Ηγεσία και Πολιτική, Εκπαίδευση για την Κοινωνική Δικαιοσύνη, Ειδική Εκπαίδευση, Τεχνολογίες Μάθησης και Επικοινωνίας

In English: (a) Educational Leadership and Policy, (b) Social Justice Education, (c) Special Education, and (d) Instructional Technology



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. Introduction

The relevant documentation was delivered in time for the evaluation. A full days virtual/distance site visit was conducted on the 12th of May 2021. The personnel and students were prepared and the atmosphere was very positive and constructive. In addition to the material provided in advance, the in site presentations offered insights into the Faculty and the programme to be evaluated.



B. External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>University</i>
Patrik Scheinin	Chair, Professor	University of Helsinki
Hanno van Keulen	Member, Professor	Windesheim University of Applied Science
Hans Hummel	Member and DL expert, Professor	Open University of the Netherlands
Maria Anastasou	Student Member	University of Cyprus

C. Guidelines on content and structure of the report

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.*

Findings

- The University Quality Assurance System follows the external regulations. There is a University Internal Quality Assurance Committee in which the Vice Rector, faculty members, and students participate. Students have the opportunity to give feedback on programme, course and tutor. This feedback is taken into account, e.g., in programme development and in recruitment.
- The Academic Director (Zembylas) has been appointed to oversee the study programme design, development and management, which he does with much passion and inspirational leadership.
- The Quality Assurance seems in place to internally monitor the quality on a regular basis, on aspects such as: programme standards, performance of teaching and administration staff and student learning experiences. Some members (like Vice-Rector Manolopoulos) were present during a site visit session to further explain these procedures. The EEC noticed they had scored the programme on all aspects as good to excellent.
- The purposes of the programme of 90 ECTS are clearly defined with 4 specializations, namely (in order of introduction since the year 2007): leadership and policies, social justice, special needs, and learning technologies in education. The main intended job contexts are teacher, educational developer, and policy maker where most students are already working.
- UOC houses three faculties with this online Master of Educational Sciences being part of the faculty of Economics and Management. The Faculty Dean was not present during the site visit.
- Funding of the UOC and Master under study is 45% public funding, 50% from matriculation fees (about EUR5000 per program), and 5% from externally funded research projects. About 33% of staff time is expected to be dedicated to teaching, 33% to research, and 33% to 'administration'.
- The programme of study is designed with overall programme objectives. However, it is not altogether obvious that it is in line with the institutional strategy on the University or Faculty level. The University has goals of being among the 100 top universities in Europe "OUC has emphasized the vital importance of research for promoting the University in the international scientific community". Likewise, the first aim of the programme is "conducting research in pedagogical sciences with particular emphasis on the areas of organisation, leadership, administration, evaluation and curricula in education, as well as in the areas of special education and learning technologies". The programme is also said to be "academic" and not "professional".
- In some contrast with these previous goals, the students are allowed to choose if they do a Master's Thesis. Around 90% of the students choose not to. Similarly, only few of the teaching and research staff are full time professors. Most of them have an adjunct status. A tenure track system and more permanent positions, as well as resources and time allotted to research are warmly recommended, if the strong emphasis on research is seriously intended.
- Some questions were not conclusively answered: Do the teachers have enough time for the research relevant for an Academic programme as part of their job description? And: are the students involved in this research? The Faculty's goal is to have research in the areas of the program. Is there?

- The possibility of teaching the programme in English was discussed. This would make it more easily accessible for students outside of Greece and Cyprus. This could help with funding. It would also make global recruitment of faculty a realistic option, which could bring new strength to the instruction and research of the Faculty.
- The programme is subject to a formal institutional approval which involves the Faculty and Senate.
- Considering the documents, teaching staff and student interviews, the programme seems to be appropriate, leading students to progress in their studies. The dropout rate of the students does seem to be reasonable in the circumstances. The student's assignments are consistent with the courses' ECTS, though several students spoke about being unable to keep up with the optimal study tempo. The reasons given were work and family.
- The qualification system is clear and well delimited, and in accordance with regulations. Feedback is provided to the students appropriately.
- Students have support to help them with different kinds of problems (disabilities, emotional issues, etc.).
- The courses involve different types of student-centred methodologies and activities to develop students' skills. The students spoke warmly of their satisfaction with the DL courses' methods and content.
- The assessment typically includes exams, presentations, exercises, individual and group works, etc.
- In their presentation, the Faculty reported about 80% of employability rates. This seems rather high, but may be quite adequate given the recent economic situation in Greece and Cyprus.

Strengths

- Recently appointed (about 5 months ago) Rector (Pashiardis) and Academic Director appear to have a long lasting, mutually confidential and productive working relation. Both belong to the fixed staff of OUC since 2007 when this ES Masters programme was introduced.
- Both the Rector and Academic Director have solid academic track records in their fields (educational leadership and curriculum studies), as well as strong connections to relevant research beyond the UOC. The EEC noted, however, that the CV-section had repetitions and was rather unstructured. We would recommend using one of the internationally accepted standards to give structure and bring out what is essential in future evaluations, recruitment etc.
- Ambition for research-informed teaching was evident.
- During the site visit we noticed an open, constructive and friendly climate where every staff member felt free to speak out.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- According to the standards, it is necessary to include information about graduate employment support and key performance indicators on the website so that this can be consulted by the general public and especially potential candidates for student and faculty recruitment. This should be included for the programme. The University publishes programmes, selection criteria, intended learning outcomes, course descriptions, etc. On the website, there is also information about the campus and facilities at the University.
- The website does not seem to provide public information (key figures/performance indicators) about e.g. selection pressure, pass rates, length of studies, student feedback/satisfaction, student-teacher ratio, dropout rates, graduate employment rates or changes in these (trends).
- Key performance indicators, including career paths of graduates for the programme, maybe also the subprogrammes, should be collected and properly processed, and analysed thoroughly. Data analysis is one of the best resources to improve programmes and plan next steps in a changing Higher Education scenario. The Faculty should periodically collect and analyse such data and the possible explanations of the results in order to improve in the future.
- The career path of alumni should be studied, and more detailed information collected. The entrance to the job market depends on several factors, and good rates also enhance the reputation of the University.
- During the course presentations, the team of teachers demonstrated they are to some extent encouraging students to apply their knowledge in professional practice through practical exercises. However, most of this good practice was not explicit in the documents (which emphasized knowledge acquisition). The EEC suggests that the relations with professional practice could be intensified to better prepare the students for the demands of future work environments. The case studies presented (on request of the EEC) did not always reflect the full complexity of the professional context the graduates are getting (better) prepared for. Here the DL environments presents some challenges, but may also confer advantages when used creatively.
- Textbooks and existing theories are still the main sources of teaching content. Courses could benefit from the use of research data and case studies, and from immersing students in the process of knowledge and theory construction, e.g. through projects staff are involved in (also beyond the UOC). This is a concern raised by the EEC members since the programme claims to be of academic nature and to be research based.
- For an academic master, the *voluntary* character of doing a master's thesis as the final proof of mastership in research and/or innovation skills is problematic. Especially since only about 5% of the students opt for a master's thesis of 30 ECTS, and most instead take two elective courses of 15 ECTS each. The quality of that 5% graduates with thesis appears excellent with many continuing their path a PhD student. The EEC realizes this choice option by students is compliant within *national* governmental regulations, but at the same time questions whether 95% of graduates would fully qualify as having an academic master level within the EQF standards. We fully appreciate the time constraints of students in the work life with families of their own - and the capacity limits of a currently small teaching staff that

have led to this arrangement with the voluntary choice for the thesis study. At the same time we do not see these reasons as valid from an academic quality perspective, in which setting up and executing independent research is an essential part (especially for the Research component of the Dublin descriptors at EQF7/8 levels). In most Universities (including Open) writing a master's thesis is therefore mandatory. The EEC suggests relabeling the electives path of the programme as 'professional master' and the path including a thesis as 'academic'. The path chosen should then be expressed in the diploma. This would be clear, open, and fair to the students and to organizations considering recruitment of the students for professional work or further academic studies and careers.

- We recommend to consider if the relevant amount of work required and ECTS given for each course unit should be the same ('one size fits all'), independent of content. From an administrative perspective we understand the practicality, but from the academic perspective we feel there could be more variety in needs, and more mutual alignment between courses. This might also introduce more options for the students with the same amount of work for the teachers. This also applies to the way units are being assessed upon completion. For example, assessment of the knowledge presented in the courses on research methodology could be relegated to other courses, in which this knowledge is to be applied.
- There is a big discrepancy between intended research time (33%) and funding received from research (5%) within UOC, and we recommend bridging the gap by finding ways of encouraging the staff to do more research together within UOC.
- The EEC would strongly recommends considering ways to increase the tenured teaching-research staff. The EEC acknowledges, that there are serious risks involved, but the future is built with people. If the University and Faculty are serious about improving the University's visibility and reputation, and making the University more attractive in the future recruitment of staff and students, the Faculty should have the resources and room to maneuver, coherent with its role and responsibilities.
- The EEC had a good opportunity talk about the governance structure at UOC. The Rector explained that financial/administrative processes were externally checked by a national inspector, and that academic affairs were monitored by the Senate (in which the deans are a part, checking upon themselves). There is no external body for academic checks and balances in case of (potential) internal reorganizations or disputes about mission and vision on the university level. The EEC feels it would be good to have such a supervisory board with (neutral) representatives from society, professions and external academics of high reputation, as it is in many public universities in Europe.
- The 'model' selected and imposed by the Ministry of Finance puts limitations to the growth of the academic nucleus (from about 25 to 100 both researching and teaching staff members). The Rector explained this would be good middle ground between 'still flexible and small' and 'more static and bureaucratic with bigger numbers'. This seems to be a thoughtful approach in the political context of the university. We as EEC would like to express our support the Rector and his management in this endeavour for the upcoming 4 years of his rectorate.



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**

Findings

- The teaching methodology is conventional and leans on (virtual) class lectures with additional (online) teaching materials and assignments to be done in practice, typically the workplace of the students. The pedagogical model provides a generic setup of 6 courses (semesters 1-2), and a semester with electives or a thesis (semester 3). All courses more or less have the same structure. This allows for easy organization and administrative support.
- The EEC noted sufficient variety in teaching methods, partly reflected and specified in the study guides we received.
- The emphasis is on development of knowledge. Skills development and practical training with regard to the development of skills play a minor role.
- Students have to do assignments and hand in results. Assessment is based on these assignments, on active participation, and on a final exam. Procedures are clear.
- There is sufficient interaction between the student and the teacher in a course. Students also collaborate with each other. This is facilitated with educational technology.
- Also, we received sufficient evidence that current research is used to enrich teaching and learning.
- The study guides reflect some evidence of educational activities which encourage students' active participation in the professional practice (again discussion of case studies, analysis of applications in your own context, some actual implementation of the various components of the educational reality, etc.).
- Regarding thesis support and assessment, no other information about the methodology of supervision and evaluation criteria is available than a short policy document. The rubrics for 'scientific assignments' in courses and dissertation research are procedural and do not contain research quality criteria (research design, operational research questions / hypotheses, APA criteria for writing and lay out, et cetera). Some students in the panel mentioned they did not know what will be expected from them when they have to do thesis research.

Strengths

- The EEC appreciated meeting an enthusiastic Academic Director and teaching staff (at least those that were present).
- The well-structured Programme with some professors of high reputation in their field attracts students.
- Current and pioneering topics for the Programme like social justice attract and inspire the students.
- An ambition for research-informed teaching was evident.
- Flexibility and organization of the DL programme attracts (working) students, and makes them get back for other programs.
- Learning activities, exercises and projects are designed to promote collaboration among students. A variety of digital tools are used to support collaborative online learning
- The EEC found good coverage of some important and timely topics in Educational Sciences.
- There is clear evidence of good use of peer-assessment and formative assessment during courses.
- The use of external experts in some specialist courses was also well done.
- Good tutor-student relationships were reported both by teachers and students that were present. The instructors work in close contact with the students providing the guidance and the encouragement needed especially in distance learning settings.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The formulation of the learning objectives follows Bloom's taxonomy and has projected outcomes for all levels. This is unnecessary. The lists are too long and some objectives are too general or use verbs that are inherently vague ('appreciate'). The EEC checked this with the student panel: none of the students reads this or could reproduce one outcome. We recommend to rethink the course objectives, reduce the number of outcomes and formulate five or six outcomes that really matter.
- The courses are rather 'stand alone'. It is not clear how they build upon each other nor how all required competence areas of the European Quality Framework (Dublin descriptors) are distributed over the courses. However, during the site visit the committee heard intentions and ideas to align courses and include missing competences and introduce more innovative instruction formats. The pro-active and receptive attitude of the Academic Director (Zembylas) and some enthusiastic and more innovative approaches presented by staff (Klerides, Fragkaki, and others) made us more confident that more is achieved than what the application on paper suggests.
- Look for better integration of teaching methodologies with individual needs and learning strategies.
- Incorporate current research in course material on an intensified level.
- Include more opportunities for students to take an active role in knowledge construction.
- Include hands-on experience where applicable.

- Strengthen teaching and practice interconnections at least in some suitable courses.
- Strengthen relationships with the educational professions and use students' access to educational setting for mutual data collection and professional development.
- Further opportunities for international experiences for the distance learners should be explored.
- We recommend considering more diversity in final course assessments. Each course is now completed with a final exam that the students have to take (physically under non-Covid circumstances) at approved examination centers. Alternatives could be the design of interventions, games, lesson plans, et cetera, and ask for additional proof in the form of videos, portfolios, results of questionnaires, et cetera.

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	Partially compliant
2.3	Student assessment	Partially compliant
2.4	Study guides structure, content and interactive activities	Partially 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.*

Findings

- The structure of the staff is somewhat problematic: A small amount of fixed staff (2) with a large amount of part-time tutors (about 20). For the whole UOC this is 26 faculty members and 260 tutors (also 10%-90% ratio).
- For some staff working now (2021) we did not receive CVs with the application (CVs dated 2019 and not updated since) which was somewhat confusing during the site visit. The EEC understands this is due to the procedures of the evaluation process. Similarly, half of the listed teaching staff in the documentation were not present during the site visit (and some probably do not work at UOC anymore). This would indicate rapid changes, which may not, in the longer run, be good for the wellbeing and co-operation of a group of experts such as the teaching staff.
- Inspired by the previous, the proper authority (Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education) could make some changes in the procedures, also including a modern and proper format for the CV.
- Candidates for teaching are assessed “on their distance teaching expertise and ability to use state-of-the-art technology” (page 23 of application), and (mandatory) workshops are offered on e-didactics to keep them up-to-speed.
- The Staff is generally active in European collaborations.

Strengths

- The number of permanent academic staff (full time) is very low, but the subject areas are sufficiently covered by contracting part-time tutors (with workload of about half a day a week, usually for one course).
- All teaching staff are PhD holders.
- The course coordinators approve the final exam questions. This is not common in universities, but provides an opportunity for discussions about the content and form of the exams, e.g. avoiding using the same type of assessment many times.
- New faculty positions for the next period will probably be approved. This is warmly encouraged by the EEC. The synergy and stability (in case of unforeseen situations) of the Faculty is improved by having enough permanent expertise.

- The establishment of the Laboratory of Educational Material and Methodology which aims to improve distance learning experience in OUC.
- The supporting staff enables mandatory professional development for teachers, especially in the area of distance education technologies. In case tutors fail this course, temporarily contracts are not renewed.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Some, but not all, teachers contribute to the knowledge base in their domain of expertise and use cases from their own professional or academic experience in their teaching. Some, but not all, courses offer opportunities to students to contribute to the research of the teacher. Hence, the alignment of teaching and learning with research could be strengthened. Changing this means that the structure of the academic staff needs to be reconsidered.
- The research output for about half of the academic staff that teach in the programme is not published in international journals.
- The nucleus of fixed staff needs to be extended for generating research output with UOC members as principal investigators, even for a relatively small faculty and students of the master's programme. Currently, there is lack of tenure tracks and high risk of losing high potentials when no career perspective can be offered. Internal research nuclei are absent but considered necessary in the future.
- Professional development opportunities with respect to teaching methods, such as case studies, simulation, data driven assignment, active learning, etc., should be provided to the teaching staff on a more regular basis, in order to make the programme (even more) practice oriented. The support personnel is enthusiastic and knowledgeable, so the possibilities are there.

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	Partially compliant
3.2	Teaching staff number and status	Partially 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.*

Findings

- Admission criteria for the programme under evaluation are clearly stated in the regulating documents. Also, student disciplinary regulations (Annex 6b) are set clear, as well as internal regulations (Annex 6a).
- From the beginning of the master's programme there have been 11.700 applications of which about 2.000 qualified and enrolled. In early years selection was heavy because of limited staff; in the last years all students that formally qualify are accepted. This is partly also due to the drop in the number of applications and students taking the offered position. Of these 2.000 about 1.400 graduated (current alumni) with acceptable yearly drop-out rates of about 15%, and around 90 graduating per year. Currently about 300 enrolled in the Master ES, on a total of around 3000 students enrolled at UOC. It needs to be said, that the figures on the recent situation asked for by the EEC, do not lead to so positive an interpretation.
- Students have full access to the online library and online learning platform e-Class, where lectures, video conferences, assignments, self-evaluations and forum (chatbot) are available, for effective communication among other students and teaching staff. Direct links to research projects appear to be (largely) missing.
- Students from other programs are generally enthusiastic about their learning experience at OUC, mainly because of the good organization and effective relationships with the teaching staff. Teaching staff encourages questions during lectures and is available to students for further questions through office hours (3 hours a week) and email.
- The students in the panel are extremely happy with the programme and convinced us on many aspects. We can only hope and will assume they were a representative selection from the total population of master students. In the future, an overview of the feedback of the students for the EEC would be most valuable.
- There are academic advisors monitoring the student's progress on a regular basis, while the University offers counselling, psychotherapy, sports and other student facilities.
- The reasons students give to choose the UOC are clear and convincing. Many students explained to us that they chose this programme due to its reputation. Programmes in English would enhance the reputation and visibility and help in international recruitment.
- During our discussion with some students of the programme they said that they manage adequately with their workload but some of them were part time students, at the end of their studies and did not choose to do a master's thesis. They believe that writing a master's thesis is a highly demanding task, and they did not want to fail. Most of them are employed teachers and unable to take the workload for more than two courses in a semester. In addition, they referred to difficulty of having final exams of all the courses at the end of each academic year.

- Students' feedback is collected through an anonymous survey for evaluating the quality of the thematic units, the teaching quality of their tutors, the effectiveness of the educational process, and the e-learning infrastructure. Students' data are taken into consideration by the Laboratory of Educational Material and Methodology, responsible for designing training workshops and seminars for tutors. In this way, academic staff is supported on topics that students consider as weak and improve their skills and knowledge.
- The administrative staff (Erato Sarri, Elena Gregoriou and colleagues) impressed us with their knowledge on various numbers and procedures, which could be delivered on the fly.
- There is some concern within administrative staff about tutors coming and going, which involves extra workload to explain procedures to newcomers. According to the Rector this concerns a minority of tutors.

Strengths

- The interactive online teaching and learning environment seems to work smoothly and allows for the delivery of content and interaction.
- Small class sizes enables quality education and support to each student.
- The feedback to students on assignments is effective and relevant.
- Students participate in the evaluation process.
- Good combination of cooperative-learning activities with individual learning tasks. This motivates the students to put in the necessary effort.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The relationship between teaching staff and students is productive but could be more challenging in character.
- Students should be stimulated to become self-guided and independent innovators and/or researchers. This involves recruitment of more permanent staff with active research projects, to which students could contribute. A tenure track system would mean that there are researchers at different stages of their academic career, which is also inspiring for students in the MA and PhD programmes. Such a staff is also more robust in the long run.



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.*

Findings

- Laboratory facilities, library and learning materials are provided at satisfactory level, and are at times used in relation with the courses for this Master of ES. The EEC feels that the potential of labs is not fully exploited in this master's programme, esp. regarding the EdTech Lab and courses on learning technologies (e.g. 514 and 524). On page 210 of the application there is mention of the presence of virtual labs and simulations at the campus, but these seem to be mainly used for other Masters (like those on biological conservation and terrestrial ecosystems).
- The same underuse within ES Master seems to apply for available software at UOC, as for video imaging and authoring in education (Paropto, Camtasia, Vyoud, Articulate), and interactive learning experiences (Unity, Vuforia). UOC received 'Best Learning Experience' award since 2019, but it was not clear for which Master's programme.
- The e-Class platform (ELS) is functionally in good condition and a backup server is available. There is sufficient support for exchange, groupwork and student monitoring.

- A good range of textbooks and journal articles are readily accessible to students and staff.
- The pedagogical model provides a general and rather traditional setup of 6 courses (semesters 1-4), with or without thesis research (semester 4), but does not provide a clear description of how these components build up in order and complexity, nor how they contribute to all required competence areas of the European Quality Framework (Dublin descriptors) and levels for the program. The objectives and learning objectives presented were rather knowledge-oriented. There were many of them, but many were also vaguely expressed. The students did not seem to bother with the expressed goals – which is not optimal – especially in a programme in Education. However, during the site visit the committee became more convinced of the programme’s intentions and ideas to make this include other missing competences and more innovative instruction. The pro-active and receptive attitude of the Academic Director (Zembylas) and some enthusiastic and more innovative approaches presented by staff (Klerides, Fragkaki, and others) made us more confident that the actual programme is better than what the application and curriculum presents.
- The e-Class environment is potentially a LMS (Learning Management System) enabled to support socio-constructivist learning, but mainly used here as electronic blackboard to provide digitised content (syllabi, articles/books) with virtual classes with the teacher explaining content and students asking questions. Students confirm they communicate with each others about their studies, and occasionally real collaboration takes place through e-Class. There are existing examples where courses contain case-based material and/or explanatory animations/video on which students need to apply their knowledge. We did not encounter any examples of real project-based, collaborative or research-driven activities through e-Class, besides some small examples from practice. We did see use of audiovisuals and wikis, as well as quizzes and groupware within the ES Master. Some of the teaching staff claim to have knowledge of serious gaming (e.g., Gouscous), but seem not to include this in their courses for this programme, according to the application received. Here again, our discussions and the ideas and presentations provided by staff during the site visit have made the committee more positive in this regard.
- The course outlines all mention understanding and awareness of concepts (knowledge) as main learning objectives. There is some mention of evaluation and discussion activities, but not operationalised how they could contribute to problem solving or decision making skills and attitudes. The staff has confirmed this indeed is what they intend to achieve.
- Regarding thesis support, no other information about the methodology of supervision and evaluation criteria is available than a short policy document received. The rubrics for ‘scientific assignments’ in courses and dissertation research are rather ‘procedural’ and do not contain research quality criteria (research design, operational research questions / hypotheses, APA criteria for writing and lay out, et cetera). Some students have also mentioned they do not know what will be expected from them when they have to do Thesis research.
- Especially for DL programmes, controls for fraud should be in place. This is an ongoing development of which the programme is aware and takes measures (they use Ephorus software for plagiarism detection).

- It was mentioned that all staff are ‘certified DL experts’. However, taking a yearly seminar (mentioned in the site visit) will not be sufficient. During the site visit there was no mention of a specific DL unit with knowledge on pedagogical methods for delivering DL, but that there is an administrative support unit that caters for this. The pedagogical design, selection and development of interactive teaching should better be initiated by fixed staff with affinity with more innovative ICT (Information and Communication Technology). ICT from a more technical perspective was of high quality according to the Rector, which enabled the UOC to extend functionalities of e-Class as required for teaching.
- In the session with the students, we asked them about possible reasons for dropout, and they reported that students leave because they weren’t able to complete the required assignments, and in other cases the reasons were the tuition fees.
- We did not see data on student feedback. However, the students in the panel were impressively positive about their programme and the teachers.

Strengths

- To use the Learning Management System to provide students free library access to the most important databases is a strong point of this approach (although we did not have information on satisfaction results and usage of the library resources).
- We had the pleasure to encounter a pro-active Academic director, thoughtful and accessible Rector, and some enthusiastic staff members who presented more innovative ideas (and actual examples) of how the programme should address competences like critical thinking, problem solving and carrying out research, that were not contained in the application we had to review before the site visit. The committee feels this responsive attitude will work well for continuous learning and improvement. To have a larger fully employed staff will help generate a collaborative workforce for enabling more effective and innovative DL programs in the future, especially when supported by a dedicated DL and research unit.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- What are the competence areas (related to the QF-EHEA, Qualification Framework for the European Higher Education Area on the second, master level cycle of qualification, using Dublin descriptors), especially regarding communicative, critical thinking and research skills?
- In the application we did not encounter any e-learning in the sense of dedicated interactive media designed by the faculty, that for instance supports students to apply their knowledge in a simulated professional environment. The interaction which is stated as important is therefore focusing on consuming PowerPoint slides and textual information, listening to teachers, and some occasional application tasks. During the site visit we could hear about plans to include real interactive e-learning programs where students experience content, apply knowledge in more authentic contexts.

- We had an extensive discussion of ideas how to improve the research quality of both staff and student within the program, an important quality aspect for university programs. We understand the practical conditions that might be limiting here.
- In respect to controlling for fraud we recommend looking for DL improvements, taking in account recent technologies (pattern/handwriting/iris recognition) and proctoring during exams.
- To address the concerns we have for the DL to support the desired competences, a real DLU should contain more substantial and more dedicated expertise for instructional methods and interactive e-learning, in order to design and develop a more active and experiential program, needed to achieve some of the higher order competences in HE (see other comments). It appears recently new staff with more ICT and innovation affinity was contracted, but this is an ongoing process.
- There should be internal units for research (plan but not operational still), for DL, and standardized liaisons with the working field (already operational), to guarantee support from science, innovation, and practice. This way the university can truly aim to be great in academic excellence, innovation, research and experience as Top100 university (stated ambition by Rector).

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

The EEC is thankful for the trust placed in us. The opportunities to observe and talk with the students, faculty, and staff of the OUC have been frank and eye-opening. We have learned a lot.

The present situation is quite good, but not unproblematic. Finding a way to attract good students to the programme, as well as a way to keep them till graduation are of the essence. There is also much that is promising. Offering the programme in English would provide opportunities for student recruitment. This in turn could provide opportunities for expansion, further development of the personnel (larger, more varied and especially more international) and could enhance the visibility and reputation of the the programme and the University. This would help the University reach its strategic goals. The balance between risks and possibilities is not an easy one, and the EEC fully understands that none of us has had the same circumstances. Strong cooperation within Cyprus and internationally could further deepen and broaden the content and quality of the programme. The EEC would also suggest, that the potential for merging some of the many universities and programmes in Cyprus be seriously considered.

The EEC encourages the programme to follow up on the recommendations made in the other sections. Instruction and research of tomorrow will need investments in infrastructure and personnel. The Department is also well placed to provide inspiration for other Faculties at the University and more globally to find new and efficient methods and technology for DL and instruction. Much is changing in instruction and research. With flexibility in how resources are allocated, many innovative solutions are found daily in the Universities around the world.



E. Signatures of the EEC

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>
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Date: 14.5.2021