

Doc. 300.1.1/2

Date: 26/4/2023

# External Evaluation Report (E-learning programme of study)

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

**In Greek:**

Λογιστική και Χρηματοοικονομική

**In English:**

Accounting and Finance

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

Following the invitation by the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education (CYQAA), the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) has evaluated the “Accounting and Finance Master (hereafter AF master programme)”, an e-learning master programme provided by the Open University of Cyprus (hereafter OUC), which is a new Distance Learning (DL) program in Nicosia (Cyprus). The EEC reviewed and examined the accreditation report and materials regarding the AF e-learning master programme provided by the OUC. The EEC consisted of four academics: the Chair of the Committee, Professor Dionisis Philippas, the members Professor Evangelia Kopanaki (University of Piraeus), the DL expert Professor Christothea Herodotou (Open University, UK), and the student member Ms Zoi Aggeli (Cyprus University of Technology). The evaluation for the programme took place at the OUC premises on the 25th of April 2023. Prior to the site visit, but also during the visit, the EEC was supplied with comprehensive additional documents and other relevant documentation, as well as all the PowerPoint slides that were presented during the day of the site visit. The EEC utilized digital communication tools in facilitating the preparation of the site visit and the evaluation. The EEC met with the senior management team i.e., including the Rector, the Dean and academic permanent or adjunct faculty responsible for delivering the DL AF master programme, the administrative and other support staff from OUC, several students (current and graduates) who joined the programme.

During the site visit, the EEC met: the OUC Rector Prof. Petros Pashiardis, the Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Management Prof. Michalinos Zembylas, the Program Coordinator Prof. Robert Duval Hernandez, and the administrative members of Internal Quality Assurance. Moreover, the EEC met the members responsible for the distance learning unit (Q&A session), a number of permanent and adjunct faculty, current and graduate students of the existing programme, and the administrative personnel: the Head of the Academic Affairs and Student Welfare Services Elena Gregoriou, the librarian Panagiotis Themistokleous, the Coordinating Officer of the Quality of Assurance Office and Member of the University’s Internal Quality Assurance Committee Erato Ioanna Sarri and the member of the Quality Assurance Office Styliani Hasikou.

Starting the sessions, the senior management team of OUC presented the University and the new DL AF master programme under review. Then, the EEC met the members of the DL Educational unit, the faculty members, the students and, finally, the administrative personnel. The discussions covered the program under review, its structure, academic issues related to the programme, staff workload and organization, assessments, and resources. During the site visit, the EEC met with students who shared their experiences at OUC, and specifically for this programme. In addition, the EEC has watched recordings of online lectures, explored the learning management system Moodle and associated tools. The last session was the meeting with members of the senior management team for final questions and clarifications. After the presentations in each session, the EEC had the opportunity to ask questions and collect further information (Q&A). Specifically, the EEC asked questions related to the new programme (e.g., learning objectives (LO), program’s structure, delivery methods, assessments approaches, quality of learning (QoL), infrastructure and IT support, etc.), faculty, and the institution more broadly. Additional evidence was also provided with regards to information on industry placements and how it works with distance learners, example/s of assessments, information about open access material, platforms and other learning technologies, the learning management system and the infrastructure for supporting e-learning. Lastly, the EEC asked questions about the changes that the OUC proposes for the new programme (compared to the existing one), as well as about the management’s strategic plan for this programme in the future.

The site visit concluded with a meeting and general discussion with the senior management team (the Program Coordinator) for clarification questions from earlier sessions during the site visit. The EEC members found the discussions to be fruitful and informative. The EEC would like to thank all parties involved for their cooperation and support during the site evaluation. The EEC would also like to express its gratitude to Mr. Lefkios Neophytou, the CYQAA coordinator, for his efficient way of managing the process. As we detail below, we find that the new DL AF master programme can operate with compliance with the stated criteria and standards, but also subject to some suggestions provided below. The EEC identifies some specific areas of improvement and changes that we recommend improving upon prior to launching the new programme.

## B. External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>University</i>
Dionisis Philippas	Chair and Professor	ESSCA School of Management
Evangelia Kopanaki	Professor	University of Piraeus
Christothea Herodotou	Professor	Open University, UK
Zoi Aggeli	Student Representative	Cyprus University of Technology
Name	Position	University
Name	Position	University



## C. Guidelines on content and structure of the report



ΦΟΡΕΑΣ ΔΙΑΣΦΑΛΙΣΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΠΙΣΤΟΠΟΙΗΣΗΣ ΤΗΣ ΠΟΙΟΤΗΤΑΣ ΤΗΣ ΑΝΩΤΕΡΗΣ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗΣ  
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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)

### **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 OUC launched a DL master's programme in Accounting and Finance in 2012. However, due to several reasons such as the duration, structure, content, and decreasing number of candidates and graduates, an upgrade to the existing



DL programme was necessary. The newly reviewed DL AF master's programme will be launched in the coming year if accredited and will be in line with the continuously updated OUC strategy. The main findings regarding the new programme are as follows:

The under-review DL AF master's programme is in principle a 1.5-year program, which can be completed in 3 semesters. The language of instruction is Greek. Award of the DL AF master's programme requires successful completion of 90 ECTS points (each core course x 10 ECTS per course with a total of 3 core courses for first two semesters, which correspond to 60 ECTS) and the last semester with elective courses (3 out of 5 elective courses) awarded of 30 ECTS. This programme has no overlaps with any other existing programme offered by the OUC in master level. The EEC finds that an update of the old existing programme is needed, and it is within the overall (good) strategy of OUC. The EEC examined all information regarding the admission criteria (bachelor's degree from a recognised/accredited university), course learning outcomes (LO), 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 OUC's DL unit. The EEC found the admission criteria to be adequate and in line with those required by the Cypriot authority. The EEC also had the opportunity to meet with academic staff involved in the design and teaching of the program, as well as with students from the existing old DL programme. The assessment system and criteria regarding student course performance are clear and adequate to be communicated to the students. In general, the programme under review is carefully designed with learning objectives in line with the OUC's strategy and international practice. The purpose, requirements, and learning objectives are aligned to the mission of the programme but also with the local job market's needs. The structure and content include appropriate core courses and elective courses, as well as the option for an industry placement for students located in Cyprus.

The EEC identified that there are internal policies and procedures in place to assure the quality of the program. Evidence of quality assurance procedures, as part of an ongoing review and development, was provided by the University. The Quality Assurance mechanisms are put in place and are well-aligned with international standards. The DL unit practices are organized and established across the University's programs. The programme will be a part of the Faculty of Economics and Management. However, the programme's topics have an accounting oriented disciplinary character covering mostly the firms' accounting and financing practices, e.g., accounting, IFRS, institutions, and so on, with an optional industry placement. Thus, the new DL AF master programme covers many fields of accounting and finance in an interdisciplinary manner. However, the aim of the programme should be to offer knowledge and best practices of accounting and finance in international practice and moreover, to cover the demanding job market in corporate finance and accounting.

The faculty involved with the programme (permanent/adjunct staff) is well experienced academic professors. They are the instructors' offering lectures and interact regularly with students. The assessment standards are in line with the OUC's assessment policy and the Quality Assurance to cover the corresponding learning outcomes. The total course grade results consist of 2 written assignments (30%) with questions on material covered and given feedback within 2 weeks, a Final exam (60%) with feedback in 4 days, as well as interactive exercises (10%) with feedback within 2 weeks. The programme coordinator reassured the EEC that instructors and programme's faculty redesign and update the syllabi and the programme regularly and, if necessary, revise it accordingly. The OUC also demonstrated evidence of continuous academic training in DL teaching in the respective fields.

### Strengths

The EEC believes that the program is in good standing and could be revised in ways that result in better learning offering. The programme has some important strengths, as follows:

The programme builds on the established processes and the DL Unit of the University thereby offering continuity in learning processes.

The learning and operational processes and the IT infrastructure meet learning expectations.

The University is committed to expanding and upgrading distance learning education that is institutionally well-grounded.

Management, faculty, and administrative staff appear to be committed to the planning and execution of the new programme.

The programme can be sustainable to the good brand name of the University.

The programme offers a range of learning modules that cover the key topics in accounting and finance adequately.

The programme provides the necessary background knowledge and requisite skills to students enabling them to cope with future work requirements in their respective fields and/or to realize career advancement in their current sector work environment.

The student performance assessment process, as presented by members during the visit, is in line with the expectations of a DL program, featuring both final exams and interactive assessment activities for each module.

The faculty members that teach this programme's modules are qualified academic professors with years of teaching experience in the field and research expertise that meet the new program's expectations.

An elaborate quality assurance system, regularly executed, is put in place with improvements on the way.

There are no overlapping online programmes in Cyprus offered from public universities.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

The EEC believes that the programme coordinator and teaching staff should consider certain improvements in the programme's design, structure, and delivery. The suggestions made below could inform the improvement process, resulting in a clearer learning offering and hopefully a more sustainable programme, given the growing competition in the provision of educational services. These suggestions include the following:

1. The new programme has excluded the offering of a master thesis dissertation as mandatory or optional. In turn, the OUC programme coordinator has replaced this with the offering of more elective courses for students. Even though the courses are interesting and well-designed, covering some important topics and fields, the EEC believes that a master thesis can be incorporated, at least as optional, along with fewer elective courses in the 3rd semester. A modification to the structure of the courses (keeping the same content and headlines) can benefit the programme, while a flexible choice between a Master's thesis and elective courses can enhance the programme dynamics and enable student needs for alternative assessment options. Lastly, a master dissertation would enable learning of new skills and competencies such as critical thinking and reinforce students to work on new things, related to both research methodologies and their working environment. In this setting, some courses in the 2nd and 3rd semesters can be slightly modified. In addition, and if the OUC incorporates the EEC's suggestion on this issue, we also have some minor suggestions such as:

(i) the students should be allowed to choose the supervisor professor who will be closer (as research field) to the topic of their thesis; (ii) a pool of dissertation topics should be available to students in advance to do their research, however, the students should not be forced to choose a topic at the 1st semester of their studies but rather later, and after completing some of the fundamental core courses; (iii) the OUC should motivate and encourage the students to choose the master thesis as an option to their studies, emphasizing the benefits this can bring to their professional development; (iv) datasets can be provided from professors' research on OUC internal cloud.

2. A reorientation of learning modules (with proper rebalancing between core vs elective courses), linked more closely to the accounting and finance job market procedures as well as to the local operations and practices, would benefit the program. The rebalancing could include e.g., real life examples, recent data, new or practices, the different accounting policies between Cyprus and other countries (e.g.,Greece).
3. Certain revisions in the curriculum content could be envisaged for the future. Such revisions may include (but not limited to) a course module on 'Ethics' (see the CFA and ACCA practices); the motivation through proper incentives of more students to choose the writing of a Master's thesis as a graduation requirement; material and presentations or asynchronous webinars covering specific topics of highly ongoing interest (e.g., disaster management, ESG and sustainability compliance, energy management, green accounting, etc.).
4. The DL Unit should be further developed, in terms of both human capital and funding, to support instructional design, integrate latest educational technologies and to offer faculty professional development in online teaching and learning (more details are provided in section 5), but also to promote students' educational interests along with relevant subjects such as how to write a master thesis, how to conduct further analysis.
5. The EEC believes that further funding should be put on marketing and communication activities to enhance the promotion of the new programme, as part of the OUC's marketing and communication strategy.
6. The EEC strongly recommends the OUC to execute the fruitful discussions and implement what is ongoing process or "coming soon" projects with regards to international bodies of accreditations and international bodies of certifications also related to this programme.

**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



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## 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**

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

#### Standards

- *The process of teaching and learning supports students' individual and social development.*
- *The process of teaching and learning is flexible, considers different modes of 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 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

- *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 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.*

### Findings

A study guide was provided for each course with learning objectives, weekly material to be studied and structure. Some indicative interactive activities were also provided, yet the great majority of them required students to collect, assess, write information, and share with the teacher, with the exception of a few cases where students were allocated into groups for role playing and forum activities for a debate. As mentioned during the visit, there is a plan to elaborate further on proposed activities, when the programme is approved, and ensure that interactive elements are present across all weeks as required. There is also the intention to provide teleconferences to students aligning with OUC's existing approach.

In terms of synchronous meetings, the students will be required to have 5 to 6 meetings with each instructor per semester, where progress and plans are also discussed.

In terms of practical training, there are several instances of learning applications to practice in the study guides. Also, students located in Cyprus are given the opportunity for an industry placement during which they can gain practical experience relevant to their studies.

The student assessment framework provided in the material ahead of the visit had a provision of 60% exams and 40% assignments and activities. During the visit, and in one of the staff presentations, this was elaborated as follows: 60% exams, 30% assignments and 10% interactive weekly activities. Assignments, activities, and exams are marked by one examiner. There is a formal procedure in place for student appeals.

### Strengths

Study guide structure and content are appropriate for the proposed programme of study.

Student assessment, as presented during the visit, aligns with the eLearning methodology.

The eLearning methodology includes a series of teleconferences, access to material online, ways of uploading assignments online, and ways of communicating with peers and staff.

There are several opportunities for practical training in the completion of activities and the opportunity for an industry placement.

We asked for the students' views on their programme experience (the existing programme). Positive student feedback was linked to the consistency of instructors' support.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

There are no major recommendations at this point. However, the EEC believes that there should be more opportunities for group work and collaboration online such as forum debates, role playing, and engagement with interactive elements such as online quizzes, simulations, and games.

**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	Compliant
2.2	Practical training	Compliant
2.3	Student assessment	Compliant



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### 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.*
- *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 EEC met the programme coordinator and the permanent/adjunct faculty members involved in the program. The EEC believes that the new programme will be supported by qualified faculty members, all of whom are experienced academics.

The faculty is involved in high level research activities.

The external staff members of the existing programme have been active in preparing the new programme's material and syllabi.

The programme is well supported by the DL Unit of the University and administrative services.

### Strengths

The EEC finds the following strengths during the Q&A session with the faculty members:

1. All the faculty members are well experienced academics.
2. The faculty is familiar with the promotion scheme, the workload, technology required and new practices to be presented to the students.
3. There is a well-balanced collaboration between administrative personnel and teaching faculty.
4. The new offering is benefiting from the previous experience of staff in teaching a similar programme for over a decade.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

There are no major suggestions in this session. However, the EEC encourages the OUC to promote and assist professors involved in the new programme with access to more datasets. This can be achieved with a Data Cloud internally for both students and professors, derived from past papers, studies, and so on.



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	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

The student admission, processes and criteria are established and published on the OUC website. Regulations regarding student progression are in place. Furthermore, pre-defined and published regulations regarding student certification exist.

The EEC met 5 students, coming from DL AF master programme. The EEC asked them about their experiences during and after graduating, why they chose OUC and the programme under review, and what they like (or don't like), as well as how the courses are/were delivered in a DL mode. Some findings are found below:

- The EEC noted that students are very positive about their studies, the programme they followed and the support received.
- The student admission requirements as well as the programme's outcome seem to be clear to all students and in line with the criteria set by the HE framework. These are clearly communicated by the University to prospective students.
- The students appear to be supported by the University in terms of teaching materials, IT support, and library access in existing programmes.
- Among the primary motivations of students in studying at the DL AF master programme was the distance learning (flexibility) and the OUC brand.
- The student selection has an open approach allowing applications from different fields. This increases the interdisciplinary focus of the programme.
- Most students were satisfied with their dissertation journey, yet they would like to be able to choose their topic after they have completed a number of courses and also have the option of who their supervisor is.
- Reflecting on the online delivery of teaching, they were overall happy they could study when and how they wanted, yet they noted very few opportunities for peer interaction and communication within courses.

### Strengths

Based on the existing programme and general OUC's strategy, there are adequate processes for admission, monitoring, and certification of student progress and achievements.

The students pointed out the flexibility of the DL programme and this is a feature that gives advantage to the new programme under review.

A very good level of communication with the teachers who always provided support with regards to the students' assessments or exams or dissertations.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

Some students pointed out that the master thesis should be optional. However, after the discussion we had with them, the EEC believes that the problem with the master thesis (for the existing programme, which should not be followed

in the new programme) was twofold: (i) there was no option for choosing their supervisor and (ii) the topics were given too early at the beginning of the programme. Hence, the option of a master thesis should be given to students with some modifications as suggested above.

As the EEC has pointed out above, and if the OUC modifies the curriculum and keeps the master thesis as optional choice for students, these technicalities should be resolved in advance, providing better flexibility and motivation to students.

**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**

- *Adequate and readily accessible teaching and learning resources (teaching and learning environments, materials, aids and equipment) are provided to students and support the achievement of objectives in the study programme.*
- *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 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

Physical resources, i.e., premises, libraries, study facilities, IT infrastructure, are all in place and adequate to support the study programme. Students receive training about the availability of resources before they start their studies and support is in place throughout their studies in these areas. Also, human support resources including staff, counsellors, and qualified administrative staff, are in place and adequate to support the study programme.

During the visit, members of the staff clarified their intention to include weekly interactive activities per each course, as this is the offering of a new programme. Some example activities were found in the study guides such as a debate in a forum, role playing, and problem-solving exercises applied to real-life settings. A pedagogical planning unit for e-learning with qualified staff is responsible for the technical side of learning as well as the provision of eLearning training and support to staff when designing their courses.

### Strengths

Both physical and human resources are in place and adequate.

There is a pedagogical planning unit for e-learning with qualified staff that works closely with the programme coordinator for the delivery of e-learning methodology, provides training and organises and delivers webinars.

Student support is provided at the start and during the studies and is adequate.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

The EEC has the following recommendations:

a) there should be a minimum requirement of yearly training by all teaching staff such as attending at least one webinar per year about new methods of teaching and learning (in addition to the induction training offered to all new teaching members) to ensure the staff is informed about developments in the area of distance learning and are able to apply these to their teaching practice.



b) as orally presented during the visit, all new courses need to include weekly interactive activities that will enable ongoing peer learning and interactions such as structured forum discussions, online quizzes, use of simulation and accounting apps as applicable.

c) the presentation of material on eClass - now mainly used as a repository of material - needs to be redesigned to enable direct interaction with text, slides, videos, audios etc without the need to download and open files - the creation of an online template by the DL unit can bring consistency across all courses and help teaching staff to design their courses in alignment with the above requirement.

d) there should be a policy document detailing ways the teaching staff should proactively interact and communicate with students to ensure they are aware of their progress and support is provided as needed (even if the student does not make a request for help). This should include a schedule of email communications between teaching staff and students and regular checking of the eClass tracking system showing students' engagement with online material.

**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 DL Master Program in Accounting and Finance is a new program that replaces a similar existing one. It has an 18-month content, design, and structure, and it will be delivered by the OUC. The EEC appreciates that significant progress has been made on the existing DL program at OUC since 2012. This progress includes drawing upon external expertise, quality assessments, and program structure consistent with comparable programs. The program coordinator has drawn upon experience and expertise in designing and running the new DL AF Master program, along with the current academic staff involved with considerable experience in DL platforms and teaching.

The academic staff members of the faculty, as well as external academics, have been active in delivering the existing program and contributed to the design of the new one. The new program is also supported by the Distance Learning Unit of the university and administrative services. To establish the sustainability of the new program over the coming years, and taking into account the recent developments, there is always room for improvement. Indeed, we have identified some areas where we see that further development is recommended, and we have elaborated on those in each section above.

### Key Recommendations

1. Suggestions for improvement with regards to the design, structure and delivery of the programme (see section 1).
2. Additional funding for marketing and communications activities as well as for human capital.
3. DL Unit processes and outcomes (see Section 5).

The EEC also recommends that the Quality Assurance Unit of the University makes the quality assurance policy and manual publicly available. It also recommends they include a more systematic review and measurement of their key performance indicators in their internal assessment.

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

Finally, we would like to thank Mr. Lefkios Neophytou for the smooth organization of the evaluation process.



## E. Signatures of the EEC

Name	Signature
Dionisis Philippas	
Evangelia Kopanaki	
Christothea Herodotou	
Zoi Aggeli	
Click to enter Name	
Click to enter Name	

**Date:** 26/4/2023