Doc. 300.1.1/2

Date: 20/12/2024

External Evaluation Report

(E-learning programme of study)

- **Higher Education Institution:**
  Open University of Cyprus
- **Town: Latsia, Nicosia**
- **School/Faculty (if applicable): Faculty of Pure and Applied Sciences**
- **Department/ Sector: N/A**
- **Programme of study- Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)**

  In Greek:

  Αλληλεπίδραση Ανθρώπου - Υπολογιστή (3 ακαδημαϊκά εξάμηνα, 90 ECTS, Μεταπτυχιακό, Εξ Αποστάσεως)

  In English:

  MSc Human-Computer Interaction (1.5 academic years, 90 ECTS, Master of Science, E - Learning)
- **Language(s) of instruction: English**
- **Programme's status: New**
- **Concentrations (if any):**
  In Greek: N/A
  In English: N/A

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].

B. External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

Name	*Position*	*University*
Mauro Cherubini	Full Professor of Information Systems	University of Lausanne (UNIL), Switzerland
Maurizio Caon	Full Professor and Leader of Digital Business Center at School of Management of Fribourg	University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland (HES-SO)
Marije Kanis	Associate professor, Digital Media & Creative Industry department & research centre	Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, The Netherlands
Josep Maria Duart Montoliu	Professor in the Psychology and Education Sciences Department	Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC), Spain
Marilena Lemonari	PhD student, Computer Graphics / Machine Learning	University of Cyprus (UCY)

A. Introduction

This part includes basic information regarding the onsite visit.

The evaluation panel visited the Open University of Cyprus on December 19th in Latsia, Cyprus to conduct assessment activities. The visit was efficiently organized and facilitated by the Cyprus Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency (CyQAA), who we wish to thank for their assistance and professionalism through the process. During the visit, we met staff from all levels of authority across the university, all of whom we found to be helpful and forthcoming with regard to our programme evaluation activities, including various requests for additional information.

The programme evaluation committee consisted of five individuals: three professors with expertise in research and teaching of Human-Computer Interaction topics, a professor with expertise in best practice of distance learning and educational technologies, and a student member who was able to offer specific insights into the nature of the Cypriot context of education. Three of the team had previous expertise in programme evaluation for the CyQAA.

The team had introductory/briefing meetings with the representative of the CyQAA online, before arrival in Cyprus. Members of the team also met for planning and orientation purposes several times before the site visit.

A comprehensive agenda was offered for the site visit. Given that numerous of the planned activities involved presentations and a recorded lecture that could be gleaned by the panel from online materials, several of these were compressed, or not required, to allow a greater period of time for targeted questions.

Key aspects of the site visit included:

- Presentation by the Vice-Rector and discussion about the university, department and strategic issues. The internal member of the QA office and the head of the UOC academic affairs attended this meeting as well.
- Short presentation by the dean of the faculty of Pure and Applied Sciences. The Prof. Styliani Kleanthous and the internal QA officer also attended this meeting.
- Short presentation by the dean Prof. Otterbacher in her capacity as director of the new MSc "Human-Computer Interaction". The Prof. Styliani Kleanthous and the internal QA officer also attended this meeting.
- A summary meeting and presentation regarding e-learning aspects of the distance learning programme with relevant members of staff.
- An online meeting with two stakeholders: an associate professor at the university of the Aegean and a group leader at CYENS, a research excellence center in Cyprus.
- A hybrid meeting with three students of the university, two perspective PhD students and one PhD student working in the lap of Prof. Otterbacher.
- A meeting with prospective Adjunct Faculty Tutors of the new programme. The Prof. Otterbacher and Prof. Kleanthous also attended the meeting.
- A meeting with the Internal Quality Officer.
- A final series of questions, fielded by Prof. Otterbacher, programme coordinator.

It would have been helpful to meet also with existing students of the other master programs and with additional staff members of the university to have a more diverse set of perspectives.

Throughout the day, additional material were requested by the panel to supplement assessment, including data, a sample of dissertations, information on student workloads and calculations, examples of learning materials in addition to course guides, master thesis evaluation guidelines, criteria for promotion at all levels, examples of weekly feedback on teaching activities and example of diplomas issued in other masters.

This information would have been helpful to have been received prior to the site-visit, as part of the document provided by the institution.

C. Guidelines on content and structure of the report

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

Findings

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

Strengths

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

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

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

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

Sub-areas

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

1.1 Policy for quality assurance

Standards

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

1.2 Design, approval, on-going monitoring and review

Standards

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

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

1.3 Public information

Standards

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

1.4 Information management

Standards

- *Information for the effective management of the programme of study is collected, monitored and analysed:*
  - *key performance indicators*
  - *profile of the student population*
  - *student progression, success and drop-out rates*
  - *students' satisfaction with their programmes*
  - *learning resources and student support available*
  - *career paths of graduates*

- *Students and staff are involved in providing and analysing information and planning follow-up activities.*

You may also consider the following questions:

- *What is the procedure for quality assurance of the programme and who is involved?*
- *Who is involved in the study programme's design and development (launching, changing, internal evaluation) and what is taken into account (strategies, the needs of society, etc.)?*

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

Findings

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

The Open University of Cyprus (OUC) has established a dedicated organizational unit to oversee the quality assurance of its programs. The Quality Assurance Office is responsible for monitoring the overall quality of programs as well as the individual modules within them. OUC has implemented clear and explicit quality assurance policies at multiple levels: University/School level, program level, and module level. These policies actively involve a diverse range of stakeholders and incorporate external evaluations to ensure comprehensive and objective assessments of quality.

Regarding the involvement of stakeholders, the EEC had the opportunity to interview two external stakeholders during the on-site visit, who provided valuable insights and highlighted the alignment of the program with the needs of their respective entities. However, it is important to note that both stakeholders represented organizations whose primary

focus lies within research and development (R&D). While this confirms the program's relevance to this specific category, it does not address the broader needs of Cyprus's diverse ecosystem. Cyprus's ecosystem extends beyond R&D and includes a variety of companies specializing in digital solutions, such as software development and digital services. Neither the reviewed documentation nor the on-site discussions revealed evidence of direct engagement with industrial stakeholders. Moreover, the EEC could not find any evidence of direct involvement of students in the design of the course.

The EEC identified a lack of publicly accessible information regarding measures to prevent intolerance or discrimination against students and staff. Following a detailed review of the HEI's documents and website, the EEC found that while contact details for the Offices of Academic Affairs and Student Welfare Services are provided, covering areas such as Alumni, the Liaison Office, and the Counselling and Guidance Office, there is no specific contact information available for the Student and Staff Complaints and Appeals process.

According to the OUC submission to the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education (CYQAA) and discussions with University representatives, including the Vice-Rector, the staff member responsible for the internal quality assurance committee, and the Academic Coordinator of the Master's program under evaluation, OUC has a well-defined and formally established process for the design and approval of new Master's courses. This process involves key bodies within OUC, including the Schools, Senate, Studies and Scientific Committees, and the University Council, ensuring a thorough review and decision-making process before the proposal is submitted to CYQAA for final approval. A similar structured process is applied for implementing relevant changes to existing programs of study. Regular monitoring and review are conducted both internally and externally. Internal evaluations are performed annually, while a more comprehensive review is undertaken every three years. OUC also ensures transparency by making its internal regulatory documents on various aspects publicly accessible on its official website, available in both Greek and English.

This Master's program requires students to complete six courses (five compulsory and one elective) along with the development of a Master's thesis. The current version of the program includes five compulsory courses and the choice between two elective options. Each course is designed to provide 10 ECTS, while the Master's thesis carries 30 ECTS. This design raises two key issues. The first concerns the distribution of the workload across courses. Some courses, such as "User Research and Evaluation," are designed to equip students with essential foundational skills to work in HCI. However, this course covers both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, making it particularly dense and potentially overburdened. In contrast, other courses focused on more specialized, niche topics (e.g., "Human Computation and Crowdsourcing") appear to have lighter content yet still carry 10 ECTS.

The name of the program should accurately reflect its scope and covered material. HCI typically encompasses the design, development, and evaluation of tangible interfaces. However, this program does not currently include any courses that provide the necessary knowledge, skills, or equipment for tangible interface design. This discrepancy could lead to misaligned expectations for students and stakeholders.

The EEC requested to see the regulation of the HEI concerning research integrity and ethics. This directive is currently only available in Greek. A summary was provided in English. Also, the EEC noted that the HEI currently does not have any directive concerning the involvement of human subjects in research conducted by academics and students and refers to the Cyprus National Bioethics committee. While these committee provide ethics approval, they might not have the capacity to guide on best research practices.

Strengths

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

The recent advancements in digital technologies make the proposal of this Master's program in HCI both timely and essential. The Master's program in HCI has been thoughtfully designed to serve as an attractive alternative for computer science professionals seeking to develop expertise in the conception, development, and evaluation of interfaces, areas not typically addressed in Bachelor's programs in computer science. While another Master's program in "Interaction Design" exists at the Cyprus University of Technology, the OUC program distinguishes itself by shifting the focus from system development to advanced concepts such as social data analytics, crowdsourcing, fairness, accountability, transparency, and ethics in AI systems, as well as project management.

Moreover, the program directors bring extensive experience in artificial intelligence, which enhances the program's relevance and depth. During the visit, the co-directors noted that the program design currently under evaluation was submitted two years ago. Since then, significant advancements in machine learning, particularly the rise of generative artificial intelligence, have profoundly impacted society. These developments underscore the importance of equipping HCI professionals with the skills to design interfaces that integrate such transformative technologies. In alignment with this vision, the program directors expressed a strong intention to leverage their expertise by introducing a course dedicated to trustworthy artificial intelligence into the curriculum. This initiative is enthusiastically welcomed by the EEC, as it aligns with the evolving demands of the field and enhances the program's alignment with current societal and technological needs.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

Based on the standards outlined in the ESG 2015 and the findings reported in the previous sections, the EEC presents the following recommendations for improvement:

- Given the critical importance of equipping students with skills relevant not only to R&D but also to the broader industry, the EEC strongly recommends that the HEI actively engage with key stakeholders in Cyprus's industrial landscape, including representatives from SMEs, large companies, governmental organizations, entrepreneurial associations, and chambers of commerce. By fostering direct dialogue with these stakeholders, the HEI can ensure that the program is designed to meet the needs of the industrial ecosystem as well, providing students with a comprehensive education that prepares them for diverse career opportunities. Moreover, it is important that also students will be involved in the design of this program in order to include their perspective and ensure meeting their expectations.

- To ensure the prevention of intolerance or discrimination against students and staff, the contact information for the ombudsperson must be publicly and easily accessible to all students and staff. The EEC strongly recommends that the HEI establish clear and transparent procedures for managing Student and Staff Complaints and Appeals. These procedures, along with the relevant contact information, should be publicly published on the institution's website to ensure accessibility and to foster a supportive and inclusive environment for all members of the academic community.[1]

[1] See https://help.open.ac.uk/documents/policies/complaints-and-appeals-procedure, last retrieved 20th of December 2024.

- The EEC requires the HEI to translate the code of ethics in English before the opening of the program. Furthermore, the EEC recommends the HEI to develop a directive to conduct research involving human subjects.2

- The EEC recommends reevaluating the allocation of ECTS to ensure a more balanced workload. One approach could be to reduce the ECTS for specialized courses while increasing the ECTS for "User Research and Evaluation." Alternatively, the content of the specialized courses could be expanded to justify their 10 ECTS, and "User Research and Evaluation" could be unpacked into two distinct courses to distribute its content more effectively.

- Another potential improvement to the current course design concerns the number of elective courses. Expanding the selection of elective courses would offer students greater flexibility in tailoring their learning experience. Additionally, it could facilitate the integration of courses from other Master's programs, allowing students to select electives that align with their interests and are relevant to HCI (e.g., a course on cybersecurity or usable security). This approach would not only enrich the curriculum but also promote interdisciplinary learning opportunities.

- From the EEC's perspective, the HEI has two viable options to address the discrepancy between the title of the program and the content actually covered: 1) Rebrand the program to reflect its focus on digital media; 2) expand the curriculum to include courses on tangible interaction and digital fabrication. The latter would involve providing the necessary equipment and infrastructure, potentially through partnerships with fab labs and makerspaces, as well as developing methods for online feedback and assessment tailored to such courses. These adjustments would ensure that the program aligns more closely with its domain and possibly better meets the expectations of students and stakeholders.

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

Sub-area		*Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant*
1.1	Policy for quality assurance	Partially compliant
1.2	Design, approval, on-going monitoring and review	Partially compliant
1.3	Public information	Compliant
1.4	Information management	Not applicable

[2] See https://provost.harvard.edu/use-human-subjects-research, last retrieved 20th of December 2024.

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

Sub-areas

2.1 Process of teaching and learning and student-centred teaching methodology
2.2 Practical training
2.3 Student assessment
2.4 Study guides structure, content and interactive activities

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

Standards

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

2.2 Practical training

Standards

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

2.3 Student assessment

Standards

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

2.4 Study guides structure, content and interactive activities

Standards

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

You may also consider the following questions:

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

Findings

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

The Open University of Cyprus has a lot of experience in offering online education. Given the particular practical, hands-on nature and context of HCI, the e-learning methodology is not entirely appropriate for this particular programme of study. However, this is a challenge that could be overcome by adopting suitable, engaging and innovate learning methods, and novel HCI approaches. The 'HCI' focus also clearly needs to be communicated to the (prospective) students.

Strengths

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

The dean of the faculty, Jahna Otterbacher, seems very well experienced, equipped and open to develop a program that is suitable to students' needs. Together with the other staff, they are very dedicated to their on-line educational mission and research –which seems also attractive to the students the committee spoke to.

-The HCI and research-led perspective seems to be attractive and fill a need to students.

- Students are involved in the research topics of the staff, and there are opportunities to further develop and implement this

- Basic tools and resources for e-learning are provided. There is dedicated staff and an extra vacancy to (technically) support this and potentially explore this further.

- Students at the HEI are said to be mature and feel confident enough for raising potential concerns early in the process, so that issues can be taken care of in an easy and efficient manner.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

An online HCI program poses particular physical and online challenges for students, such as in terms of the practical, social and local implications. This is an interesting challenge that should be better addressed. Tangible, physical, social and human interactions are an important part of the HCI profession. Although basic support is in place, for this type of e-learning and HCI thematic, students should be better supported and educated to be able to make the right conscious decisions for their profession and output.

In addition, the educational program and offered approaches should better match with students' individual and professional desired outcomes and demonstrate what is aspired. As the program is not entirely well-balanced (e.g. lot of focus on crowdsourcing), some knowledge and support that students desire might be missing (for example on tangible interfaces, physical fabrication level and developing prototypes, and conducting studies with users in the field). Further knowledge and expertise from the professional and creative design field is also needed for making better assessment (e.g. industry standards), developing and open-supporting student culture, and pushing the innovative boundaries which HCI and student-centred online learning requires.

Collaboration, interactivity & engagement, and methodology are key for dealing with (potential) problem areas.

A couple of recommendations for addressing and overcoming these challenges from the EEC are:

Collaboration & engaging stakeholders

- Encouraging and strengthening collaboration with external stakeholders on a local and international level would help students, also in taking professional initiatives and developing professional attitudes needed to become successful in the field.

- Inviting and detailing guest speakers and specifying when and what they contribute is a welcoming step into this direction.

- Taking advantage of what is already there, but strengthening it, such as links with UK universities, Design academies (the one mentioned in Linz, Austria) and local organizations may help widen students' horizon and offload pressure

on the staff. In this way, students will have wider access to more resources and perspectives that are needed to become successful in the field.

- Further detailing of a specific plan for encouraging social interactions, student feedback and developing an active community among students (and alumni) will be helpful for safeguarding student wellbeing and support, which is particularly important when overcoming on-line barriers. This could include setting particular physical events, conferences and online means of communication, providing feedback and presenting student work.

Methodology & assessment

It is particularly important for HCI students to be able to motivate their research and (interactive) design decisions. Further clarification and detailing on how this is assessed is needed. This will provide much needed clarity to students, as well help (future) staff in reaching common agreement on assessing students' work such as interactive prototypes and master thesis.

- Educating students on the various methodologies and suitable deployment is crucial in this process.

Online/ physical *Design* method toolkits might be useful to consider, such as these:

https://www.creativeresearch.nl | https://toolkits.dss.cloud/design

The EEC further recommends a better assessment of what is desired and needed within the professional field, society and region (employment and career potential), and developing matching professional attitudes (such as supporting critical thinking, reflection and interactive solution-oriented design thinking), and developing specific skills (such as for becoming a web designer or UX researcher).

-In addition, it would be helpful if students are encouraged to also define their own individual learning goals from the beginning, so to better support these during, and assess these at a later stage.

Physical and real world examples

Even in the case of on-line education, students and staff should not become hesitant or afraid to deal with the non-online world. More focus on motivating, developing and deploying appropriate and innovative strategies for student engaging with the real non-online world should be taught and encouraged.

- Further building and learning from other HCI and related on-line learning worldwide, as well as approaches by the HCI community during Covid-19 are recommendable.

- The way practical training is organised in terms of crucial HCI matter, namely developing and evaluating interactive systems (developing digital and physical prototypes, conducting user studies) in line with achieving the objectives of the study programme should be further detailed.

An example of successful hybrid worldwide education on digital fabrication from MIT:

https://fabacademy.org

- The EEC did not see real examples of desired student output. Even though this is a new course, this is important for assessing the level of quality that is expected and desired, but also for inspiring the students.

The recommendations are to develop a stronger & unique perspective and level of quality that is needed to become more attractive and sustainable from a student perspective.

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

Sub-area		*Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant*
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	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

3.1Teaching 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

4. *The number of the teaching staff is adequate to support the programme of study.*
5. *The teaching staff status (rank, full/part time) is appropriate to offer a quality programme of study.*

6. *Visiting staff number does not exceed the number of the permanent staff.*

3.3 Synergies of teaching and research

Standards

7. *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).*
8. *Scholarly activity to strengthen the link between education and research is encouraged.*
9. *The teaching staff publications are within the discipline.*
10. *Teaching staff studies and publications are closely related to the programme's courses.*
11. *The allocation of teaching hours compared to the time for research activity is appropriate.*

You may also consider the following questions:

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

Findings

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

In terms of recruitment of teaching staff, the HEI identified prospective Adjunct Faculty Tutors (or AFT) through existing collaborations and networking. Academic Personnel (or AP) was, instead, identified through public calls.

For what concerns teacher development, the EEC specifically probed staff about the opportunities available to them for upskilling and updating their knowledge and competences. Staff confirmed that the HEI provides two mandatory courses to get up to speed with teaching online courses and with processes specific to the HEI. The EEC did not observe additional courses available to teaching staff to improve and grow their teaching competences.

Each AP receives a personal budget that can be spent on professional development, including paying for online courses, and covering fees for participation in international conferences and symposia. Unfortunately, this budget is not available to AFT. This creates a challenge for this staff to upskilling and personal networking.

The EEC probed the staff about the criteria for promotion. Despite several questions, the committee could not obtain consistent and clear answers from AFTs concerning the specific criteria to be hired as AP. On the other hand, AP were aware of the criteria for promotion from one level of the job ladder to the next, but they did not describe these criteria. The EEC specifically requested a written document describing the promotion criteria. The HEI provided a document from the University of Cyprus describing the procedure for promotion, which applies also to the Open University of Cyprus. Unfortunately, this document does not contain the criteria that need to be fulfilled in order to qualify for the next academic rank. For instance, while the promotion process reported in the provided document states that "Articles in journals with an evaluation system" are accepted, the minimum number and types of publications are not specified. EEC could not find any other quantitative or qualitative criteria in this document. None of the staff members, mentioned mobility as a criterion for promotion. More importantly, in addition to this procedure for promotion, the set of criteria that needs to be fulfilled to apply for a promotion is nowhere to be found on the Internet website of the HEI.

The EEC notes that teaching performance is assessed through regular surveys and that a continuous support workflow is in place at the HEI to support course instructors for improvements. However, when it comes to the criteria for promotion, the commission notes that the criteria of the University of Cyprus is extremely vague in terms of requirements and evaluation of teaching performance.

The number of teaching staff has been found to be adequate to support the current list of courses in the programme. The EEC found that the qualifications of the teaching staff are generally adequate to teach the courses which are currently listed in the programme. However, the EEC noted that the majority of the teaching staff is currently employed at AFT rank, which could impact the ability to develop this programme in the long term.

The number of AFT exceeds the number of AP (i.e., 3 vs. 2). One of the core courses of the programme, namely the "Interaction Science" is taught by an adjunct lecturer, which endangers the sustainability of the programme.

The EEC noted that there are no current plans to involve visiting instructors in the proposed program. The EEC also notes that there were no plans to embed other elective courses from other masters of the same institution.

The EEC observed that the teaching staff conducts research within the field of Human-Computer Interaction and collaborate with local research institutions and research excellence centres (e.g., CYENS).

During the visit, the EEC collected anecdotal evidence of cross-pollination between research and teaching. For instance, most tools that are developed in CyCAT are also planned to be used as teaching materials. Master students will be also encouraged to take an active role in research as part of their master thesis. Aside from these two instances, the EEC could not observe good practices (or ideas) of research being used in teaching.

Strengths

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

The EEC found that the teaching staff were enthusiastic about developing and delivering the programme. Faculty members of the EEC described collaborations within the HEI and with partners outside.

The director of the programme noted strong links with industrial partners with which the faculty has established agreements to support research and development.

AP staff members described a fair, transparent and clear processes for the recruitment and development of the teaching staff. Particularly, they indicated that adequate financial resources are made available for the development of staff and for conducting research.

The HEI is interested in developing this MSc programme within the Faculty of Pure and Applied Sciences.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

The EEC indicates four areas for improvement that the HEI should consider to the betterment of the programme. We list these four areas in decreasing order of importance and impact.

1. **Criteria for promotions** at all levels must be measurable, transparent and available to AP and AFT. The criteria of the University of Cyprus were considered by the EEC as too generic, unclear and difficult to access. The commission recommends that a set of criteria should be developed specifically for the OUC, with clear quantifiable standards, and placed on the main Internet website of the university for anybody to access. An example to get inspiration from could be the criteria for promotion of the Technical University of Cyprus[3]. These criteria must also include teaching evaluation standards.

2. **Development of teaching personnel** is of paramount importance. Going forward the HEI must ensure more training courses will be available to the AP and AFT of the institution to upskill teaching methodologies and deal with societal changes in higher education (e.g., ChatGPT). Also, mobility budget must be made available also to AFT in order to allow for professional development and networking.

3. The EEC recommends encouraging staff **mobility** at all levels. Mobility is a fundamental activity for staff to create opportunities for scientific collaboration, to further the professional network and for professional development. Specifically, the HEI should clearly indicate that mobility is a favourable point for promotion and should encourage staff members to take leave (short-term and through the academic sabbatical) to spend time in other institutions and to collaborate with other colleagues.

4. The **core courses** of this new program must be taught by the AP, not by AFT. This will ensure continuity of the program over time. The EEC considered as core courses: "Interaction Science", "User Research and Evaluation", in addition to "User-Centered Design Studio".

5. Going forward the HEI should identify and recruit teaching personnel through **public calls** and announcements done in standard communication channels, social networks, and specialised websites. This will ensure equal opportunities and higher chances of recruiting high-profile instructors.

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

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

[3] See https://www.cylaw.org/nomoi/enop/non-ind/2003_1_198/full.html, last retrieved 20th of December 2024.

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

4.1Student admission, processes and criteria

Standards

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

4.2 Student progression

Standards

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

4.3 Student recognition

Standards

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

4.4 Student certification

Standards

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

You may also consider the following questions:

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

Findings

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

The HEI selects prospective students based on three requirements that are clearly outlined and necessary for the development and progression of their studies, i.e., relevant undergraduate degree, sufficient knowledge of the English language, and evidence of experience in prototype design or application. The latter is reflected by a required short statement of abilities assessed by the Program Coordinator. The admissions process does not have a minimum grade required for the undergrad degree, as per general university policy. The students are given the opportunity to register to individual courses as stand-alone modules, which are then recognised as prior learning, if they decide to proceed with the full program.

The information regarding assessment, e.g., weight distribution of final grade between assignments, exams, and interactive exercises, as well as progression regulations, e.g., eligibility to participate in the final exam, are clearly stated. The final exam comprises 50% of the final module mark, as per university regulations. The students are eligible to take the final exam only if they obtain a minimum of 50% in the combined mark of interactive activities and written assignments. Plagiarism detection software, feedback, and policies for extensions are also in place. The tutors also have access to student profiles enabling them to identify struggling students and approach them to resolve possible issues. Also, there is a school advisor that students can contact to be advised on how many modules to choose per semester, according to their other obligations, e.g., jobs. In addition, all students are given the opportunity to evaluate the program via questionnaires given towards the end of the semester for each module. These include three sections corresponding to evaluating the course, the tutor, and the educational methodology.

This program results in a Master of Science (MSc) qualification in Human-Computer Interaction. The HEI offers programs recognised in Cyprus and Greece. The HEI offers a program with clear learning outcomes and syllabus. As per the general current internal regulations for studies, no grade appears on a master's degree title. A diploma supplement is granted free of charge, upon request. The EEC received an example of the diploma given by the HEI, which did not include the official university stamp. The diploma received by the commission did not include the diploma supplement, so the commission was unsure whether the certificate listed the competences accrued by the students.

Strengths

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

The HEI encourages feedback of the interactive activities and assignments to be comprehensive, and to be given promptly. From feedback examples the EEC has seen of another program as well as a sample of an interactive activity feedback, it can be confirmed that the mark distribution is transparent, and the comments are detailed enough.

Also, this being an interdisciplinary program, incorporating the statement of abilities and degree relevance, as parts of the admission criteria, is a good practice to ensure that prospective students have the relevant background to dive into this master's program.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

It was revealed during the site visit that approximately 40% of students complete the evaluation questionnaires. Perhaps, employing a strategy further encouraging the students to complete the evaluation, would mitigate this. For example, a strategy followed by some other institutions is to allow students to see their final marks earlier, provided they had completed the questionnaire for the relevant course.

Certification recognition in foreign countries, e.g., Greece, can be quite challenging and time-consuming which may negatively affect both student satisfaction and employability, but also prospective students' interest in the program. A marketing strategy targeted to these international students, highlighting the program's long-term benefits, could mitigate this issue.

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

Sub-area		*Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant*
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

18.1 Teaching and Learning resources
18.2 Physical resources
18.3 Human support resources
18.4 Student support

5.1 Teaching and Learning resources

Standards

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

5.2 Physical resources

Standards

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

5.3 Human support resources

Standards

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

5.4 Student support

Standards

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

You may also consider the following questions:

- *Evaluate the supply of teaching materials and equipment (including teaching labs, expendable materials, etc.), the condition of classrooms, adequacy of financial resources to conduct the study programme and achieve its objectives. What needs to be supplemented/ improved?*
- *What is the feedback from the teaching staff on the availability of teaching materials, classrooms, etc.?*
- *Are the resources in accordance with actual (changing) needs and contemporary requirements? How is the effectiveness of using resources ensured?*
- *What are the resource-related trends and future risks (risks arising from changing numbers of students, obsolescence of teaching equipment, etc.)? How are these trends taken into account and how are the risks mitigated?*
- *Evaluate student feedback on support services. Based on student feedback, which support services (including information flow, counselling) need further development?*
- *How is student learning within the standard period of study supported (student counselling, flexibility of the study programme, etc.)?*
- *How students' special needs are considered (different capabilities, different levels of academic preparation, special needs due to physical disabilities, etc.)?*
- *How is student mobility being supported?*

Findings

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

The EEC finds that the academic support document for this program effectively outlines the resources available to students. Additionally, the teaching and learning resources are clearly defined. It is important to provide academic feedback during the learning process to help students improve their academic paths. According to the meeting we had during the EEC visit, tutors, along with the program's academic coordinator, will offer academic support to students.

The online platform eClass, offers a robust and user-friendly interface that allows for seamless navigation and efficient access to educational materials. Additionally, this platform is supported by supplementary academic resources available at the Open University's online library.

The EEC did not have the opportunity to have a meeting with the program's students because it has not been implemented yet. The areas for improvement and recommendations are based on meetings and discussions with the university's technical and support staff.

The EEC did not have the opportunity to review this program's teaching and learning materials because they have not yet been developed. However, the OUC presented during the meeting, teaching materials from other courses. The EEC acknowledges and expects that this program's future teaching and learning materials will adhere to the requirements outlined in the submission document and will receive support from the IT team and other staff members. In particular, the EEC will emphasize that the teaching materials of this program must be student-centred and developed following international accessibility requirements (Universal Accessibility).

During the site visit, the EEC found that there is no Student Representative elected. It was highlighted that having a Student Representative is not mandatory by law.

Strengths

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

The Information Technology (IT) team and support staff team have recognized expertise for integrating resources to provide comprehensive support for both students and educators. Their professional expertise and qualifications are essential for ensuring effective delivery and ongoing assistance in both academic and technical areas.

The support provided by the Lab of Educational Materials and Methodology to faculty staff is remarkable. We would like to highlight the initiative of incorporating innovative ways, such as gamification into the teaching and learning process. This approach combines technological resources with innovative teaching strategies to enhance engagement among faculty and students. By encouraging active participation, creativity, and a dynamic learning experience, this initiative reflects an interesting approach to education which we would like to see developed further.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

According to the submission document, the EEC confirms that a pedagogical planning unit exists that provides support for online course development (eLearning, digital learning) according to the European and international standards of learning materials production. We highly recommend having a well-structured e-learning design, student-centred, that facilitates the student to follow the course and achieve its goals and expected learning outputs.

The EEC recommends giving the opportunity to students to elect a representative to serve as a person of contact for students' concerns and suggestions, and communicate their needs to the appropriate personnel, e.g., the program coordinator.

The basic IT infrastructure for delivering online courses is acceptable and well-organized. However, having well-organized IT resources is insufficient to ensure effective support for students and teachers, particularly from the point

of HCI. A clear vision and strategy based on a well-defined educational model are necessary to provide genuine support. In that sense, we encourage the IT and staff team to be more innovative and offer a comprehensive proposal of tools based on pedagogical principles to support the teaching and learning process beyond a list of PDFs or videos.

To have better and more strategic uses of IT to support teachers and students in their teaching and learning process, the EEC recommend the following improvements:

a) Establishing a strategic educational model or reinforcing what already exists. The IT and support teams should expand their support by offering a more comprehensive proposal that integrates advanced tools and, in particular, interactive resources. By doing that, the OUC will enhance a better and more innovative teaching and learning experience.

b) Developing Institutional Strategy and Position on emerging technologies, namely for Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI): The irruption of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) is an important challenge for Higher Education Institutions nowadays, especially for Open Universities because their interactions and assessments largely depend on text generation. To address these challenges, the OUC should create guidelines and resources that promote the ethical and constructive use of GenAI in academic environments. Additionally, the OUC should implement training programs designed to enhance GenAI literacy among faculty, students, and administrative staff. These initiatives will encourage the integration of GenAI tools to complement traditional learning methods, ensuring a balance between innovation and academic integrity.

c) Having a diversity of Evaluation and Assessment Methods: Currently, the evaluation system is primarily based on final examinations, supported by robust IT tools for student identity verification. The EEC recommends introducing alternative assessment formats, such as oral examinations that support the demonstration of students' interactive work, collaborative group assessments, and project-based evaluations. Additionally, assessments should be designed to enable students to apply their course knowledge by developing prototypes or practical solutions, which will foster critical thinking and real-world application skills. Also, we recommend analyzing the possibility of enforcing the continuous assessment system as formative evaluation to avoid the final exam. The EEC is aware that external restrictions exist to implement that proposal, but we invite the OUC to think about it and implement a feasible future proposal based on educational principles and its experience.

The EEC acknowledges that the institutional support provided to students and teachers by the OUC is similar to that of other online European universities currently providing. At the EEC, we'd like to highlight the job well-done carried out by the Support and IT teams.

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

Sub-area		*Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant*
5.1	Teaching and Learning resources	Partially compliant
5.2	Physical resources	Not applicable
5.3	Human support resources	Compliant
5.4	Student support	Compliant

D. Conclusions and final remarks

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

The MSc Human-Computer Interaction program offered by the Open University of Cyprus demonstrates a commendable alignment with contemporary technological advancements and educational strategies. However, several partially compliant areas highlight opportunities for refinement to ensure the program's quality meets international standards and the expectations of students and stakeholders.

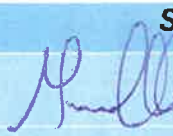
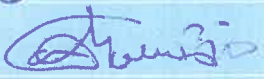
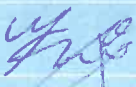
1. **Alignment with Industry Needs**:
   - While the program successfully engages research-oriented stakeholders, it lacks sufficient alignment with the broader industrial ecosystem of Cyprus, including SMEs and larger enterprises. This gap limits the program's appeal and applicability for diverse professional pathways.
   - Recommendation: Establish stronger collaboration with industrial stakeholders, including those in digital solutions, to ensure curriculum relevance. Regular consultation with industry representatives can guide course content and better prepare students for employment in varied professional settings.
2. **Workload and Course Structure**:
   - The current ECTS allocation is uneven, with foundational courses overly dense and specialized courses lighter in content.
   - Recommendation: Balance the ECTS distribution by either dividing comprehensive courses like "User Research and Evaluation" into smaller modules or expanding the content of specialized courses. Increasing elective course options will also enhance curriculum flexibility and student satisfaction.
3. **Program Title and Scope**:
   - The title "Human-Computer Interaction" does not fully align with the program's content, which lacks tangible interaction design and digital fabrication elements.
   - Recommendation: Rebrand the program to reflect its focus on digital media and interaction design or expand the curriculum to include hands-on courses in tangible interfaces and prototyping, supported by appropriate resources and equipment.
4. **Policy for Quality Assurance**:
   - The quality assurance framework, while robust, does not sufficiently address issues like intolerance and discrimination or provide accessible complaint mechanisms.
   - Recommendation: Establish clear, transparent procedures for handling complaints, including publicly accessible contact points for student and staff concerns. These should be integrated into the institutional quality assurance policy.
5. **Teaching Staff Development**:
   - Although adequate support is provided to permanent staff, adjunct faculty face limitations in accessing development opportunities.
   - Recommendation: Extend professional development resources to adjunct faculty, including mobility budgets and access to training. Transparent criteria for promotions and advancement should also be developed and communicated to all teaching staff.

6. **Student-Centered Learning and Support**:
   - The current teaching methodology is not fully adapted to the hands-on nature of HCI, and the student representative system is absent.
   - Recommendation: Introduce innovative teaching approaches that incorporate practical, tangible interaction exercises and field-based studies. Establish a student representative system to ensure their voice in program development.
7. **Integration of merging interactive technologies, namely Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI)**:
   - The emerging importance of GenAI and physical forms of interaction in education have not been fully addressed.
   - Recommendation: Develop suitable strategies to guide the ethical and constructive use in teaching and assessment of such interactive technologies, complemented by training programs for students and faculty.
8. **Assessment Diversity**:
   - The reliance on final exams as a primary assessment method could be complemented by alternative formats.
   - Recommendation: Implement project-based evaluations, oral assessments, and continuous formative evaluations to encourage critical thinking and practical application of skills.
9. **Innovative Use of IT Resources**:
   - While the IT infrastructure is functional, it could be enhanced to support more interactive and pedagogically rich learning experiences.
   - Recommendation: Expand IT capabilities to include simulations, and advanced interactive tools that align with the program's objectives and foster student engagement.

Final Remarks

The proposed improvements aim to address partially compliant aspects of the program while reinforcing its strengths. By bridging gaps in industry relevance, workload balance, teaching methodologies, and support systems, the program can achieve greater alignment with European Qualifications Framework (EQF) standards. These enhancements will not only elevate the program's quality but also ensure it provides a robust and meaningful educational experience for its students.

E. Signatures of the EEC

Name	*Signature*
Mauro Cherubini	
Maurizio Caon	
Marije Kanis	
Josep Maria Duart Montoliu	
Marilena Lemonari	

Date: 20/12/2024