

Doc. 300.1.1/4

Date: Date.

External Evaluation Report

(Joint - E-learning programme of study)

- **Higher Education Institution:**
Open University of Cyprus
- **Collaborative Institution(s):**
Hellenic Air Force Academy
- **Town:** Nicosia
- **School/Faculty (if applicable):** Faculty of Pure and Applied Sciences of the Open University
- **Department/ Sector:** Department of Aeronautical Sciences of the Hellenic Air Force
- **Programme of study- Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)**

In Greek:

Ασφάλεια και Άμυνα

In English:

Joint MSc in Security and Defence (18 months (full time studies)/ 90 ECTS, Master of Science, E-Learning)

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

In Greek: Concentrations

In English: Concentrations



The present document has been prepared within the framework of the authority and competencies of the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education, according to the provisions of the “Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education and the Establishment and Operation of an Agency on Related Matters Laws” of 2015 to 2021 [L.136(I)/2015 – L.132(I)/2021].



A. Introduction

This part includes basic information regarding the onsite visit.

The External Evaluation Committee conducted a comprehensive site visit on 19-20 February 2024. During this period, the committee met with programme staff, administrative staff, the e-learning team and students. The Committee was briefed on all aspects of the programme and how it fits within the broader architecture of both institutions. The Committee had the opportunity to ask questions on any aspect of the programme and related institutional process and procedures, or to request additional documentation as appropriate. The Committee found the programme team and the staff of both institutions to be highly cooperative. They made all efforts to address questions raised and provided detailed responses. The Committee was satisfied that the briefings were comprehensive and addressed all relevant aspects of the review.

The programme team and staff at both institutions should be commended for the enormous amount of work they have devoted to the design of this unique, collaborative programme of study.



B. External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>University</i>
Prof Matthew Moran	Chair	King's College London
Prof Olivier Schmitt	Member	University of Southern Denmark
Prof Nathan Clarke	Member	University of Plymouth
Prof Iordanis Kavathatzopoulos	E-Learning Expert	Uppsala University
Niki Makri	Student Member	University of Cyprus
Name	Position	University

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.

Policy for quality assurance

The programme has a comprehensive set of policies to aid in quality assurance. Whilst a jointly-award programme, the programme, assessment and students will come under the Open University of Cyprus with respect to quality assurance, regulations and processes. These are pre-existing and well-established for use on other programmes. The MoU also provides the additional clarity over responsibilities between the two partners.

In addition, there is an academic committee comprising of full-time staff from both institutions to help guide in programme-specific issues that arise - such as admissions decisions that fall outside of the norm.

There are clear institutional-led policies surrounding students with learning disabilities to ensure no discrimination and to maintain academic integrity.

Design, approval and on-going monitoring

The programme design has been given clear thought - with a good set of relevant and interesting modules that align very well with the academic expertise assigned to them. The design itself goes beyond what a standard MSc Cyber Security degree would typically provide and offers up some very relevant and interesting modules in telecoms, space technologies, asymmetric threats and ethics.

Whilst there was some debate regarding the programme title and its alignment with the curriculum, on balance it was understood why the programme team had taken the decision it had. The review team suggested that a more specific title reflecting the technical nature of the course might help attract relevant students, but this is something that should be considered after the programme launch, when the programme directors get a better sense of the student market.

The modules themselves have been given careful consideration and both the module descriptions and module guides provide for a very detailed account of what they will contain. They provide for a robust and comprehensive curriculum (bordering perhaps on ambitious - however, this is not a bad thing!). It was made clear that full-time academics and the programme lead retain curriculum leadership of the module and programme to aid in consistent delivery and the timely refreshing of materials.

Module outcomes are explicit and appropriate, student progression through the programme is clearly laid out, and exams and continuous assessment are appropriate for the ECTS involved. Ongoing assessment has been carefully designed to ensure that students are kept engaged from week to week.

Public information

Information regarding the programme, its aims and objectives, and learning outcomes were all clear. There was some discussion over ensuring the aims more clearly articulate the technology focus of the programme. It would also be helpful to check the learning outcomes to ensure they address the cyber/electronic aspects that the programme is focused upon.

It was clear on which modules were mandatory and which were elective and the reasons underpinning those decisions. The delivery, assessment procedures and how the programme is managed were also clearly articulated.

Information management

The programme falls in line with existing OUC policies with regards to student performance and effective management of student progress. The use of weekly assessments within each of the modules provides a very effective mechanism for monitoring progress and for students to receive feedback. Modules have a reporting function at the end of modules to feedback into the process in a positive and constructive manner. The Academic Committee have oversight of student performance and the necessary authority to enforce change if required.

Strengths

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

An exciting programme with a very relevant and interesting set of modules that draws in the expertise across both HAFA and OUC.

Very well-defined module descriptions and study packs. This made the review exceptionally simple to understand. A real good mixture of modules for an exciting programme.

Excellent virtual facilities in the cyber range supporting the programme.

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.

Section 1 - Programme Purpose and Objectives - this section should better reflect the more specific technology/cyber/electronic aspects of the programme. At present, this speaks to the more general field of security and defense rather than the more targeted approach taken in this programme.

Whilst the current title of the programme is deemed compliant, the panel did feel that the team were potentially missing out on a wider and more targeted market. Titles that reflected an aspect of cyber or electronic warfare might help to strengthen the proposition.

It would be helpful to see a mapping of the programme learning outcomes mapped to modules in order to help identify how modules contribute towards the overall programme. This will also be a useful aid for managing the programme in the future to ensure the team understand the impact of module changes on the programme learning outcomes.

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

Sub-area	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i></p>
----------	--



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

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

Sub-areas

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

2.2 Practical training

2.3 Student assessment

2.4 Study guides structure, content and interactive activities

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

Standards

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

2.2 Practical training

Standards

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

2.3 Student assessment

Standards

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

2.4 Study guides structure, content and interactive activities

Standards

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

You may also consider the following questions:

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

Findings

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

Process of teaching and learning and student-centred teaching methodology: The OUC has a well-established set of procedures and structures for providing distance education. The institution has a state-of-the-art technological infrastructure. This means that the e-learning setup is well suited to delivery of this online programme. There are a number of activities built in to support communication between students, like discussion forums, icebreaking exercises, and time space for spontaneous discussions among students before the teachers give feedback. These are all subject to regular monitoring and review. Students (and staff) are provided with comprehensive training on the use of e-learning resources.

The Review Committee found that the process of teaching and learning is flexible, considers different modes of e-learning delivery and uses a variety of pedagogical methods to achieve learning outcomes. These include simulations and interactive exercises. Student centred learning is at the heart of the programme and there is a robust system for dealing with complaints.

Practical Training: The programme anchors theoretical discussion in practical training through the use of innovative online resources such as the cyber range and escape room. These allow the students to apply their learning to real-world problems.

Student Assessment: The assessment framework is comprehensive and transparent. Students engage in continuous assessment with weekly assignments, as well as end of module exams and other assignments. This means the assessment is ongoing and supportive of the learning objectives. It also allows for regular review by programme directors. Criteria for assessment are clear and easily understood. Students can appeal outcomes using a well-established system at the OUC. Assessors are experts with considerable experience of assessment. Mitigating circumstances are taken into account and provided for.

Study Guides Structure, Content and Interactive Activities: The students will be provided with a comprehensive study guide setting out learning objectives, schedule of activities, nature of interactive activities, assessment information, instructions for engagement, and other relevant information. The study guides are detailed and appropriate to the level of study.

Strengths

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

A mature and well-developed e-learning infrastructure that reflects the OUC experience in this domain

A supportive, student-centred learning environment that is enhanced by the use of innovative learning tools.

Clear processes and procedures that allow students to navigate the programme and its requirements easily

Providing most of the activities asynchronously will be of great help to mature students who are balancing their studies with employment.

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 is important to find ways to strengthen the interaction and the communication between students. One way. To do that is to make the dialog between students into something that feels necessary and normal for them. For example, by introducing the method of peer-reviewing for thesis opposition, group-based assessment or for several individual projects in the modules.

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
2.4	Study guides structure, content and interactive activities	Compliant

3. Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

<u>Sub-areas</u>
3.1 Teaching staff recruitment and development
3.2 Teaching staff number and status
3.3 Synergies of teaching and research

3.1 Teaching staff recruitment and development

Standards

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

3.2 Teaching staff number and status

Standards

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

3.3 Synergies of teaching and research

Standards

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

You may also consider the following questions:

- *Is the teaching staff qualified to teach in the e-learning programme of study?*

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

Findings

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

Teaching Staff Recruitment and Development - The processes for recruitment and development of teaching staff appear to be fair and transparent – the recruitment process is well established one within the university that focuses on matching expertise to the role required. The recruitment panel approach for adjuncts offers the university a pool of talent and expertise it can draw on.

Teaching staff are established academics with appropriate qualifications. 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. All academics have a high level of achievement and there is a mix of international qualifications that demonstrates a good degree of intellectual diversity.

Professional development is taken seriously. For example, staff are provided with training on in-house teaching tools, there are continuous development opportunities through the education laboratory, and these are available to all staff. These include various webinars that address particular pedagogical issues, as well as mandatory introductory training. Personal research allowance can be used for professional development.

Quality of teaching features highly in institutional priorities. Student feedback is taken seriously and acted upon – there is an established process involving anonymous questionnaires and the information is fed to senior academics who evaluate feedback and discuss with relevant teaching staff. Quality of teaching also factors into promotion. It is included in the law governing academic promotion.

Teaching Staff Number and Status - The programme is well-supported in terms of staff – 8 permanent faculty across two organisations - and these provide the bulk of educational delivery. The number of staff supporting the programme is a strength as it means that students are exposed to real experts in their areas.

Synergies of Teaching and Research – Teaching staff are research active, as demonstrated by extensive publication records. There is evidence of considerable collaboration with external partners, including government, the EU and the private sector. Research activity is encouraged and the teaching staff are

feeding research insights directly into the programme. There are various projects – DroneEYE, CyberSecPro, Sentinel, etc. – that feed into the programme. Staff publications demonstrate their expertise and are appropriate to the discipline. These are also related to the programme modules.

Strengths

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

- Programme draws on strengths of both organisations and provides a multidisciplinary programme that includes computer science, avionics, ethics.
- Teaching on the programme is clearly linked to staff expertise and research. There is significant potential for research-led teaching as staff are engaged in collaborative projects with government and private sector.
- Programme is well-supported across both organisations – 8 permanent staff and 1 adjunct supporting the programme.
- Approach to recruiting necessary expertise through adjunct recruitment system is well-established and appears robust.
- Extensive experience of collaborating with external actors – governments, private sector, international organisations. This contributes to a dynamic research environment that feeds into the student experience.
- Strong commitment to staff training across both organisation, including mandatory training and webinars dealing with particular pedagogical issues.

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 institution clearly places great emphasis on student feedback. This is taken seriously and the faculty respond to feedback. The panel finds the programme to be compliant in this regard. One suggestion from the panel – based on recent experience in the UK – was that the institution might consider ‘closing the loop’ on student feedback by letting the students know about the positive changes that faculty have made in response to feedback. We acknowledge this is a suggestion that goes beyond the programme review, but it is something that could contribute to student satisfaction.
- The teaching team could consider including guest speaker on the programme. The programme team is very well connected with policymakers (nationally and internationally) and the private sector. There are unique perspectives that these groups could offer to enhance the student experience.

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.*

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.

Student admission, process and criteria

The criteria for student admission include an undergraduate degree in a relevant discipline (computer science, computer engineering, electrical engineering, etc.) from a recognized university; proficiency in English as demonstrated by a minimum grade IELTS 5.5 or equivalent; and adequate computer skills. Those computer skills are not formally tested, but include the basic use of common softwares (emails, browser, etc.). It is considered that if students can find information about the program and actually apply, they already possess those skills.

All the information is clearly available for students on the programme's website. Students who fulfil the criteria are enrolled, and applications are checked by the academic affairs services. The review committee found the process to be transparent and fair.

Student progression

Students must complete the degree in a minimum of 1.5 years and a maximum of 6 years. Student progression is monitored through regular in-class activities and through exams. There are also multiple opportunities for students to interact with faculty: forums, office hours, phone calls, etc. The faculty can also organize extra synchronous activities (extra lectures) if required. The main interface for interaction is the Learning Management System "Moodle", which serves as a repository for course information, and hosts the forums where students can discuss and ask questions. When students raise questions, the faculty will initially let other students interact, and will step in to correct mistakes or provide answers. The expectations for progress are clearly laid out for each course and communicated through Moodle.

Student recognition

On a case-by-case basis, relevant professional experience can be taken into account as substitute for formal education in the admission process. Prospective students are encouraged to contact the Student Welfare Services, which will liaise with the faculty in order to determine whether the professional experience warrants an exemption of a formal degree. There is no official/systematic conversion matrix between years of experience and types of exemption, as the programme directors want to be able to properly assess, on an individual basis, the actual work experience. However, as a rule of thumb, a minimum of two years of experience is required.

Students can apply for credits they have acquired elsewhere to be transferred to the master programme. This cannot compensate for more than 25% of the entire master programme, and the course having conferred the credits must be of the same level or higher than a master-level course, and the material should be at least 80% similar to one of the master's current programme. The decision is taken by the academic staff on a case-by-case basis.

Student certification

Upon graduation, the students receive a diploma signed by the two universities, a grade transcript and diploma supplement summarizing the content of the courses and providing other background information on the programme.

Strengths

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

The procedures are transparent, and easily available to the students on the university's website. The Student Welfare Services act as the point of contact for students and then handle (or dispatch) the requests. Having this "single counter" approach greatly facilitates communications and provides an easily accessible entry point for the students.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

While we understand that relevant professional experience is handled on a case-by-case basis, and there are good reasons for that, it might be worthwhile thinking about a lightly formalized conversion matrix between professional experience and academic qualification. For example a matrix explaining which type of job titles/work responsibilities/duration of employment *are more likely* to be recognized as equivalent to a formal education. This would not remove the case-by-case assessment and the final academic oversight, but it could provide potential applicants with more information about whether the programme is a good fit for them.

The above remark is far from being a critical issue and is only meant as food for thought in order to further increase transparency for prospective 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

- *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.

Teaching and Learning resources: All platforms utilized to assist in proper delivery of the programme are fit for purpose. The Open University of Cyprus has a lot of experience in this regard. Students will engage with weekly interactive activities such as problem-solving scenarios and simulations, using in-house tools such as the cyber range. The review team found these resources to be very impressive. The interactive simulations replicate real world conditions and leave students well-equipped for employment after the programme. The interactive activities support problem solving and other skills required in employment.

The programme is supported by the University of Cyprus e-learning unit, a dedicated team that has years of experience in supporting e-learning. The e-learning infrastructure is state of the art and the team is readily available to support programme directors with improvements or changes to the programme.

The systems will be introduced to the students by their teachers in the form of a basic training session, ensuring every student is comfortable using them. Teachers always remain at the students' disposal through various means of communication, for example through forums or via email. Additional synchronous sections may be planned according to the needs of individual students, either in the form of group counselling or individual sessions especially for people facing difficulties because of their disabilities. Student-centred learning and flexible modes of e-learning and teaching, are taken into account when allocating, planning and providing the learning resources. The review committee found the range of resources and their quality impressive. Student support is considerable, including bespoke support for students with particular needs.

Physical resources: The IT infrastructure is robust and reflects the fact that the Open University of Cyprus has enormous experience in delivering online education. Resources are extensive and their availability made clear to students. This was confirmed by students on current programmes.

Human support resources: Current staff numbers are appropriate for the expected enrolment rates of students. Should the enrolment rate increase, the Open University of Cyprus will be responsible for hiring

additional teaching staff to cover the needs of the programme. Students and prospective candidates can be easily informed about the resources available to them through the University's website, while enrolled students are also kept up to date via email, e.g. for financial support.

Student support: Support is provided to students of all backgrounds and abilities. The University offers the option of completing their degree on a part-time basis in a time span four times larger than the predetermined one. As this programme is intended to be an international one, teaching staff will adjust teaching hours according to the needs of those students in other time zones. When it comes to students with disabilities, the matter is handled with as much discretion as possible by the Student Welfare Service Office, and the matter is assessed on an individual basis. Students are well informed both through the website and via email regarding the services available to them. While student mobility is a provided feature through the Erasmus programme, it is not regularly utilized, which appears to be due to the daily commitments of students, as most of them are working professionals taking programmes part-time.

The review committee was impressed by the lengths that the programme team have gone to design an engaging programme that seeks to cater for students of all abilities and backgrounds.

Strengths

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

- Students in need are provided with aid across all areas, from financial to psychological, through the Student Welfare Service Office.

- Programme staff appear passionate and committed to providing a programme that equips students with the skills and knowledge needed in an international labour market.

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.

Although multiple up-to-date tools support the delivery of the courses and multiple efforts are made to encourage student interaction, e.g. through an introductory activity on the forums, students felt like their interaction with others was very limited and perhaps greater efforts could be made to help students form a community. A simple way to achieve that, would be by assigning more group projects.

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	Compliant
5.2	Physical resources	Compliant
5.3	Human support resources	Compliant
5.4	Student support	Compliant

6. Eligibility (*ALL ESG*)

Sub-areas

- 6.1 Legal framework and cooperation agreement
- 6.2 The joint programme
- 6.3 Added value of the joint programme

6.1 Legal framework and cooperation agreement

Standards

- *The joint programme is offered in accordance with legal frameworks of the relevant national higher education systems.*
- *The terms and conditions of the joint programme are laid down in a cooperation agreement. The agreement in particular covers the following issues:*
 - *Denomination of the degree(s) awarded in the programme*
 - *Coordination and responsibilities of the partners involved regarding management and financial organisation, including funding, sharing of costs and income, resources for mobility of staff and students*
 - *Admission and selection procedures for students*
 - *Mobility of students and teaching staff*
 - *Examination regulations, student assessment methods, recognition of credits and degree awarding procedures*
 - *Handling of different semester periods, if existent.*

6.2 The joint programme

Standards

- *The partner universities apply joint internal quality assurance processes.*
- *The joint programme is offered jointly, involving all cooperating universities in the design, delivery and further development of the programme.*
- *Aims and learning outcomes are clearly stated, including a joint syllabus, language policy, as well as an account of the intended added value of the programme.*
- *Study counselling and mobility plans are efficient and take into account the needs of different kinds of students.*

6.3 Added value of the joint programme

Standards

The joint programme leads to the following added values:

- *Increases internationalisation at the institutions.*
- *Stimulates multinational collaboration on teaching at a high level and makes cooperation binding.*
- *Increases transparency between educational systems.*

- *Develops study and research alternatives in accordance with emerging needs.*
- *Improves educational and research collaboration.*
- *Offers students an expanded and innovative arena for learning.*
- *Increases highly educated candidates' employability and motivation for mobility in a global labour market.*
- *Increases European and non-European students' interest in the educational programme.*
- *Increases competence at partner institutions through cooperation and implementation of a best practice system.*
- *Increases the institution's ability to change in step with emerging needs.*
- *Contributes to tearing down cultural barriers, both personal and institutional.*

You may also consider the following questions:

- *Does the joint study programme conform to the requirements of a study programme offered at the specific level?*
- *Is there a system that assures the quality of joint provision and guarantees that the aims of the programme are met?*
- *Do the mechanisms for ensuring the quality of the joint study programme take into consideration the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)? Are they adopted by all the universities involved?*
- *Is the division of responsibilities in ensuring quality clearly defined among the partner universities?*
- *Is relevant information about the programme, e.g. admission requirements and procedures, course catalogue, examination and assessment procedures, well documented and published by taking into account the specific needs of students?*
- *What is the added value of the programme of study?*
- *Is there a sustainable funding strategy among the partner universities? Explain.*

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.

Legal framework and cooperation agreement: Under the joint agreement, whilst students will be recognised by both HAFA and OUC, they will fall under the OUC from a regulatory and procedural perspective. This helps to simplify the arrangements and remove any potential conflict in procedures and policies that might exist between the two institutions. The review committee is satisfied that the joint programme is offered in accordance with legal frameworks of the national higher education system.

The MoU signed by both institutions makes it clear where the division of responsibilities lie and what the financial arrangements are for the partnership. The review committee is satisfied that there is clear understanding of responsibilities relating to admissions, progression, teaching, degree award, etc. An academic committee comprising of academics from both institutions will provide oversight of the

programme and enable collective decision making on any programme specific issues that arise (such as exceptions to the standard admissions process).

The Joint Programme: The Open University of Cyprus and the Hellenic Air Force Academy have established a joint academic committee to ensure quality assurance and oversight of the programme, and the MoU describes the nature of their interactions. The design of the entire program is the result of cooperation between both universities, while each course is designed by a permanent member of academic staff - these are drawn from the two universities. This demonstrates commitment from both universities to ensure the quality and coherence of the programme.

Teaching staff from the HAFA will receive appropriate training in order to properly use the e-learning systems used by the OUC and ensure the consistency of the student experience. They will have access to the same extensive programme of training and support as OUC academics.

Students will have access to resources from both the OUC and the HAFA, including library resources and counselling services.

Added Value of the Joint Programme: The programme represents a unique collaboration between the Air Force Academy and the Open University of Cyprus. The programme will undoubtedly increase internationalisation at both institutions. The programme will have international appeal as it addresses an area of contemporary significance. There is also great potential for multinational collaboration here. The programme directors are internationally recognised academics with extensive networks and experience of working on large, multinational research projects. Given that these contacts and experiences will be leveraged for the programme, there is no doubt that it will pave the way for international collaboration.

The programme will provide students with a range of knowledge, skills and understanding – all of which will prove attractive to employers. From the technical skills developed in areas like cybersecurity and telecommunications, to the understanding of contemporary technology-related threats, the programme covers highly relevant and important ground.

Military officers will benefit from the perspectives of civilian students from other countries and civilian students will gain exposure to military perspectives on security and defence issues. This blend of perspectives helps internationalise the classroom and create global networks of contacts for students on the programme. This, in turn, contributes to student mobility in a global labour market.

Research and teaching at both institutions should also benefit from the joint programme through cross-fertilisation of military and civilian researchers.

Strengths

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

- The programme design team have clearly given careful thought to the pragmatic operation of the programme. The use of OUC as the primary oversight of the student journey/experience has helped to provide an unambiguous and simplified set of regulations, policies and procedures.

- Teaching is distributed between the permanent staff of both universities, which ensures that students have access to the best experts possible.

- The programme follows the administrative processes and benefits from the support of the OUC, which minimizes the risks of bureaucratic tensions between the two institutions.
- The MoU delineates responsibilities, and the cooperation seems designed to maximize the academic/teaching output while minimizing bureaucratic overload.

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.

None.

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

Sub-area		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
6.1	Legal framework and cooperation agreement	Compliant
6.2	The joint programme	Compliant
6.3	Added value of the joint programme	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 (Consider also the added value of the joint programme).

The Committee was impressed by the programme under review. This unique collaboration between the Open University Cyprus and the Hellenic Air Force Academy has significant potential to develop as an internationally recognised programme dealing with contemporary security issues in areas of critical importance, including cyber security and telecommunications. The programme design represents a carefully thought out collaboration between academics at both institutions and it is evident that the blend of perspectives and expertise that the respective academics bring will benefit students. The mix of military and civilian perspectives is also a real asset.

With regard to programme resources and student engagement, the Review Committee was impressed by the innovative, in-house tools developed by the programme team. These include the cyber range and the cyber escape room, both tools that allow students to engage with real-world issues in a safe, simulated environment.

The Review Committee was also impressed with the commitment to student support. The institutional structures surrounding the programme mean that students have access to extensive resources, from learning materials to counselling support.

On the whole, the Review Committee agrees that this programme is a worthy addition to the portfolios of these institutions and represents a valuable joint venture.



E. Signatures of the EEC

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Prof Matthew Moran	
Prof Nathan Clarke	
Prof Olivier Schmitt	
Prof Iordanis Kavathatzopoulos	
Niki Makri	
Click to enter Name	

Date: 20 February 2024