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External Evaluation

Report

Educational Sciences, MA, Distance Learning

- **Higher Education Institution:**
European University of Cyprus (EUC)
- **Town: Nicosia**
- **School/Faculty (if applicable): School of Humanities, Social and Education Sciences**
- **Department/ Sector: Education Sciences**
- **Programme of study- Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)**

In Greek:

Επιστήμες της Αγωγής (18 Μήνες / 90 ECTS, ΜΕΤΑΠΤΥΧΙΑΚΟ):
Εξ'Αποστάσεως

In English:

Education Sciences (18 Months / 90 ECTS, Master of Arts),
Distance Learning

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

In Greek: Δημιουργικότητα και Παιχνίδι στην Πρώτη Αγωγή και Εκπαίδευση, Τεχνολογίες Μάθησης & Επικοινωνίας και Εκπαίδευση STEAM, Εκπαιδευτική Διοίκηση και Ηγεσία

In English: (a) Creativity and Play in Early Childhood Education (b) Technologies of Learning & Communication and STEAM Education, (c) Educational Management and Leadership



The present document has been prepared within the framework of the authority and competencies of the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education, according to the provisions of the “Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education and the Establishment and Operation of an Agency on Related Matters Laws of 2015 to 2019” [N. 136 (I)/2015 to N. 35(I)/2019].



A. Introduction

The relevant documentation was delivered in time for the evaluation. A full day virtual/distance site visit was conducted on the 13th of May 2021. The personnel and students were prepared and the atmosphere was very positive and constructive. In addition to the material provided in advance, the on-site presentations offered insights into the Faculty and the programme to be evaluated.



B. External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

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

C. Guidelines on content and structure of the report

1. Study programme and study programme's design and development

(ESG 1.1, 1.2, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9)

Sub-areas

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

1.1 Policy for quality assurance

Standards

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

1.2 Design, approval, on-going monitoring and review

Standards

- *The programme of study:*
 - *is designed with overall programme objectives that are in line with the institutional strategy and have explicit intended learning outcomes*
 - *is designed by involving students and other stakeholders*
 - *benefits from external expertise*
 - *reflects the four purposes of higher education of the Council of Europe (preparation for sustainable employment, personal development, preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies, the development and maintenance, through teaching, learning and research, of a broad, advanced knowledge base)*
 - *is designed so that it enables smooth student progression*
 - *is designed so that the exams' and assignments' content corresponds to the level of the programme and the number of ECTS*

- *defines the expected student workload in ECTS*
- *includes well-structured placement opportunities where appropriate*
- *is subject to a formal institutional approval process*
- *results in a qualification that is clearly specified and communicated, and refers to the correct level of the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area*
- *is regularly monitored in the light of the latest research in the given discipline, thus ensuring that the programme is up-to-date*
- *is periodically reviewed so that it takes into account the changing needs of society, the students' workload, progression and completion, the effectiveness of procedures for assessment of students, student expectations, needs and satisfaction in relation to the programme*
- *is reviewed and revised regularly involving students and other stakeholders*

1.3 Public information

Standards

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

1.4 Information management

Standards

- *Information for the effective management of the programme of study is collected, monitored and analysed:*
 - *key performance indicators*
 - *profile of the student population*
 - *student progression, success and drop-out rates*
 - *students' satisfaction with their programmes*
 - *learning resources and student support available*
 - *career paths of graduates*
- *Students and staff are involved in providing and analysing information and planning follow-up activities.*

Findings

- For promoting Quality Assurance, the EUC promotes the Programme Evaluation Review (PER) procedure. PER combines data by various resources including students' perceptions (students' evaluation questionnaires). Focusing on students' feedback data the vice Rector mentioned that students' overall impression is positive towards Programme operation and quality over time. Furthermore, he explained that many of students' concerns or considerations have helped the improvement of the Programme and are used to design professional development programs for the teaching staff and improve regulations (e.g. having a second chance in their final exams and the design of a professional development Programme on using of games as a learning tool).
- Workload is in general not considered as a problematic by students. However, they said that they believe that a master's thesis is a difficult task, demanding a high workload that is too difficult to combine with a job.
- A coordinating chair (Mavrou) has been appointed to oversee the complete study Programme design for Educational Sciences, its further development and management. Her role (during the site visit) was that of a coordinator (primus inter pares) and not director that sets out the integration of content and innovative approaches. She explained that there had been some staff changes recently (since 2019 when application was prepared) on the coordinating level.
- The (DL) Master of ES is placed as department within the School of Humanities. The study Programme contains three specializations called 'concentrations' that have separate coordinators: Creativity and play in early childhood education (Charalambous), Learning technologies and STEAM education (Meletiou-Mavrothesis), and Leadership and management in education (Chatzipanagiotou). All coordinators were present during the site visit and actively contributed to discussions.
- The Quality Assurance seems in place to internally monitor the quality on a regular basis, on aspects such as: Programme standards, performance of teaching and administration staff and student learning experiences. Some members (like Vryonides, Dean of School of Humanities) were present during a site visit session to further explain these procedures. Student participation in evaluations is reported to be about 65%. The EEC noticed that the internal evaluation committee of the EUC had scored the Programme on all aspects as good to excellent. Drop-out rates appear acceptable although exact numbers were not provided.
- The Vice-Rector (Symeou) explained the history and ambitions of the EUC in a comprehensive and swift presentation. Currently about 6000 students, 5 schools that house 12 departments.
- Funding of the EUC and Master under study is 90% from matriculation fees (about EUR9000 per program), and 10% from externally funded research projects. There is a 'teaching hours reduction' policy to enable a full-time staff member to go from 12 towards 6 teaching hours a week; and have more time available for research activity.

Strengths

- The Quality Assurance Framework is an example of good practice where different stakeholders are working together to improve a Programme serving the needs not only of each stakeholder but also ensuring a high level of academic quality.
- According to the vice-Rector, the university's 'teaching hours reduction policy' and the national research policy (2014) have helped the University increase research activity (by factor 4) and research publications (by factor 3) over the last years.
- The University's ambition is based on excellence in 4 pillars: Research, Academic education, Connections to Industry, and Employability. Upon request of the EEC, staff mentions 'reshaping the future', 'becoming a 21th century University', and 'distant but still very close' as possible taglines that would define best the unique selling points. We recognize an optimistic and future-oriented attitude.
- The EEC evaluates positive that a relative high number of staff members is employed on a full-time basis (11 within department, another 8 hired from other departments to assure inter-disciplinarity). This ensures a substantial nucleus for collaboration, professional development and shared vision.
- The EEC evaluates positive that special attention is given to staff development, especially in the domain of TEL-enhanced learning at a distance. The DLU is instrumental here.
- The EEC evaluates positive that reality checks on the content and approach are provided through advisory boards for each department. In the one for ES representatives from academia, trade unions, ministry and schools are participating. Their advice is actually taken up on
- Ambition for research-informed teaching is important for the academic quality of the master. Apart from external collaborations, there are Research Units (one for each of the specializations under study) within the EUC that already feed into the program, although for distance education this is sometimes more limited.
- During the site visit we noticed an open, constructive and friendly climate where staff members felt free to speak out.
- All participants (from management to students and administration staff) showed a high amount of pride in their university. They are good advocates.
- Ambition for a fourth specialization (Special Needs) and delivery of all specializations in English.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- During the presentation of course examples, teachers demonstrated they give assignments encouraging students to apply their knowledge in their own workplace and professional practice. However, this had not been mentioned clearly in the validation documents that all emphasize acquisition of theoretical knowledge, and to the opinion of the EEC could still be intensified to better deal with the demands of future work environments. The case studies presented (on request of the EEC) not always reflect the full complexity of the professional context the graduates are getting (better) prepared for.

- Textbooks are the main sources of teaching content. We recommend including more research materials and case studies, e.g., from the research projects the staff are involved in. This will strengthen the academic status of the program.
- For an academic master, the voluntary character of doing a Master's Thesis as the final proof of mastership in research and/or innovation skills is problematic. Especially since only about 5% opt for acquiring this proof of 30 ECTS, where others take two elective courses of 15 ECTS each. The EEC realizes this choice option by students is compliant within national governmental regulations, but at the same time questions whether 80% of graduates would fully qualify as academic master (compared to professional master) within the EQF standards. We fully appreciate the time constraints of (working) students and the capacity limits of a currently small teaching staff that have led to this voluntary choice for the thesis study. At the same time do not see these reasons as fit from an academic end terms perspective, in which setting up and executing independent research is an essential part (especially for the Research component of the Dublin descriptors at EQF7/8 levels). In most European Universities writing a master's thesis therefore is mandatory. The EEC therefore suggests (pending the current situation) to introduce a dual label to the certificate: academic master for those who have completed a thesis, and professional master for those who choose to do electives and improve their professional competences.
- We recommend actions and activities to enhance more positive attitudes towards research and taking on a master's thesis, such as meetings during their first year focusing on understanding the goals and the demands of a master's thesis. Also, to have a mini conference where the theses of last year are presented by the authors to all students and staff of the programme. This could inspire and show that it is doable and worth doing. Such actions may change students' prior negative or overly cautious attitudes on the demands and workload of the master's thesis and may lead to an increase of the number of students that finally choose to do a master's thesis.
- We recommend considering if the amount of ECTS for each unit should be a 'one size fits all' solution. From an administrative perspective we understand the simplicity, but from the academic perspective we feel there could be more variety in needs and importance. This also applies to the way units are being assessed upon completion and the order of provision (now it is often just-in-case where it better be just-in-time).
- The 'commercial model' of a private university contains certain academic risks. The vice-Rector stated he did not want to be put under pressure by demands and expectations. However, the EEC feels that making students decide whether (or not) to do a Master research with thesis (demand-driven) is such an academic compromise. The choice is very legitimate and understandable, but from an autonomic and proposition-driven academic perspective 'being more competitive or more attractive for students' are not valid reasons. We recommend to carefully distinguish this in the labelling in the diploma: 'professional' versus 'academic' paths.



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

Sub-area		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
1.1	Policy for quality assurance	Compliant
1.2	Design, approval, on-going monitoring and review	Partially compliant
1.3	Public information	Compliant
1.4	Information management	Compliant

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

Sub-areas

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

Findings

- All courses have a similar organization. Material (typically, theories from the literature and cases derived from the teacher’s experience) is presented by the lecturer in (virtual) classes on a weekly schedule. Students can interact with each other and with the teacher during classes. There are reading assignments and practical assignments that students typically carry out in their own (working) environment.
- Several teachers implement their own research into their classes. There are examples of students contributing to the research of the teacher.
- The learning objectives of the courses are well-formulated and correspond to a master’s level. The assignments are in general consistent with the objectives, allowing students to develop competence in the required areas.
- Students will learn to appreciate what it is to do research in the concentration area they have chosen, since most courses have assignments in which students perform one or more of the steps of a research study (e.g., observe; evaluate observations from the point of view of a theory; gather data; critically discuss data; and /of present findings). However, a majority of the students will not combine, integrate and apply these partial experiences in doing the research for a master’s thesis.
- The teaching methodology heavily leans on (virtual) class lectures with additional (online) teaching materials. We noted sufficient variety in teaching methodologies, which is partly reflected and specified in the study guides we received with the application.
- Also, we received sufficient evidence that current research is used to enrich teaching and learning.
- The study guides reflect some evidence of educational activities which encourage students’ active participation in the professional practice (again discussion of case studies, analysis of applications in your own context, some actual implementation of the various components of the educational reality, etc.).
- Currently about 290 students are enrolled in Master ES From 2016 there are about 20 dropouts – less than 10 % of the total enrolment. This is a very acceptable number. Roughly about 200 students are enrolled per year. Of these about 40 or 50 are graduated per year.

Strengths

- Well-structured Programme with some professors of reputation in their field attracts students.
- To offer Creativity and Play in Early Childhood Education on a master's level and through distance learning is quite unique, and seems to serve the educational profession well.
- Ambition for research-informed teaching.
- Flexibility and organization of the DL Programme attracts and retains (working) students.
- Good coverage of some important and timely topics in Educational Science.
- Good use of external experts in some specialist courses
- Enthusiastic teaching staff (at least those that were present)
- Good tutor-student relationships (reported both by teachers and students that were present)
- Another strong point is the recent and effective introduction of webcam-based proctoring during online exams in about 8 cases by time of writing (the University does no longer have regional centers where exams can be taken physically)
- Study guides about the master thesis including specific goals, outcomes and assessment criteria (Master Thesis 85%; Presentation and Thesis Defence 15%).

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Better integration of teaching methodologies with individual needs and learning strategies
- Incorporate more current research in course material on a more intensified level
- Include more opportunities for students to take an active role in the learning process
- Include more hands-on experience where applicable
- Strengthen teaching and practice interconnections (even more)
- Enhance critical and creative thinking, making judgements on evidence-informed ways
- Strengthen Programme (Theory)-Professional (Practice) relationships for re- and decontextualization of knowledge
- We recommend considering more diversity in final course assessments, and esp. more practice-based
- We recommend considering the order of content provision (from just-in-case to just-in-time), especially for research methods in context.
- The concentration Creativity and Play has a clear focus on enabling students to develop activities that stimulate creativity and play in educational settings for children aged 3-8. It could be more explicit on the various developmental outcomes of these activities (in areas such as literacy; numeracy; executive functions; social skills; understanding of the material world; problem solving; ...) and on how students can learn to monitor these different outcomes.
- The name of the concentration 'Technologies of Learning & Communication and STEAM Education' is somewhat confusing. An alternative could be 'Applying emerging technologies to achieve educational

outcomes'. This emphasizes that augmented reality, programming in Scratch, robotics, et cetera, can be useful not only to achieve STEAM objectives.

- Dividing the workload for the master's thesis over two academic semesters may help the students to organize their scientific work and ensure a manageable timeframe that will lead on a successful thesis. As always in adult education, it needs to be clear to the students why something is done and how they benefit from the activity. Explaining the WHY? of a thesis in a relevant and convincing manner could help.

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

Sub-area		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
2.1	Process of teaching and learning and student-centred teaching methodology	Partially compliant
2.2	Practical training	Partially compliant
2.3	Student assessment	Partially compliant
2.4	Study guides structure, content and interactive activities	Partially compliant

3. Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

Sub-areas

3.1 Teaching staff recruitment and development

3.2 Teaching staff number and status

3.3 Synergies of teaching and research

3.1 Teaching staff recruitment and development

Standards

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

3.2 Teaching staff number and status

Standards

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

3.3 Synergies of teaching and research

Standards

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

Findings

- Staff is generally active in European collaborations. It is not always clear in the application how this is reflected in their teaching.
- Good ratio of full-time fixed staff (11) and part-time collaborators (about 8).
- Candidates for teaching are assessed on their distance teaching expertise, and (some mandatory) workshops are offered by the DLU on e-didactics to keep them up-to-speed on new possibilities of learning technologies.
- Some of teaching staff cannot be found on ResearchGate, Google Scholar (Chatzipanagiotou, Georgiadou, Koloumbaritsi, Papazacheriou, Pavlakis, Theodosiou, Vlachopoulos) for international visibility. Staff explained they sometime had to make tough decisions (priorities) at the cost of international visibility, and e.g. concentrate on Greek writing for their own students. We fully understand that, as well as that selection criteria for part-time collaborators are not as strict (regarding research) as for fixed staff.
- The workload and stress that were caused by the Corona pandemic have noticeably taken its toll on teachers. We were told that last year had been especially hectic due to the pandemic and various accreditation processes, of which this is the fortunately the last.
- EUC has signed 30 Erasmus Mobility Agreements and prof. Loizou in his presentation showed data about teaching staff numbers mobility but did not indicate if these numbers reflect to the teachers from the MA of Educational Sciences.

Strengths

- The number of permanent academic staff (full time) is relatively high, and all the subject areas can be sufficiently covered with the help of contracting part-time collaborators (with workloads of about half a day a week, usually for one course).
- All fixed teaching staff are PhD holders with decent research tracks.
- Course coordinators approve the final exam questions.
- New faculty positions for the next period will probably be approved.
- Erasmus Mobility Agreements with a significant number of Institutions related to Education.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- In most courses, the emphasis is on disseminating existing theories and applying these to practice, which is good. In a master's program, students should also be confronted with the process of knowledge construction through research. Teaching and learning could be more enlightened by this process, by engaging students more in the research of the staff, or by making this more visible when it occurs.
- The research output for about half of the academic staff that teach in the Programme are not published in international journals. For others impact factors encountered ($h < 10$) leave room for improvement. Only a small portion of central staff (about three four) achieved adequate impact ($h > 15$) with room for improvement.
- There is room for staff development with regard to teaching methods, such as case studies, work-based simulations, data driven assignments, in order to provide more active and experiential learning and to have an impact on educational practice through the assignments the students do in their own workplace. The availability of the SOCIETH lab can be exploited more for distance learning.
- Nucleus of fixed staff has to be further extended for sufficient critical mass in generating own research (from within EUC), even for a relatively small school or ES master. Currently there is some proof of tenure tracks and career perspective that can be offered. Internal research nuclei are starting and considered necessary for the future.
- Enrich Erasmus Mobility Agreements with institution from neighbouring countries and encourage students to participate in.
- For a next (international) accreditation of the Programme we recommend that the CV's provided are better actualized and structured in a more uniform (APA compliant) and less chaotic way, and do not contain large parts in Greek (which makes the evaluation work for the EEC complicated).

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	Partially compliant

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

Sub-areas

- 4.1 Student admission, processes and criteria
- 4.2 Student progression
- 4.3 Student recognition
- 4.4 Student certification

4.1 Student admission, processes and criteria

Standards

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

4.2 Student progression

Standards

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

4.3 Student recognition

Standards

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

4.4 Student certification

Standards

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

Findings

- Admission criteria for the Programme under evaluation are clearly stated in the regulating documents.
- Students have full access to the online library and online learning platform Blackboard, where lectures, video conferences, assignments, self-evaluations and forum (chatbot) are available, for effective communication among other students and teaching staff. Direct links to research projects appears to be (largely) missing.
- Students are generally very enthusiastic about their learning experience at EUC, mainly because of the good organization and effective relationships with the teaching staff. Teaching staff encourages questions during lectures and is available to students for further questions through office hours and email.
- The students in the panel are extremely happy with the program, and convinced us on many quality aspects. We can only hope and will assume they were a representative selection from the total population of master students.
- Students convinced us that when opting for a Master thesis (about 5% of students) there is good supervision and possibility to select a wide range of mixed models research. Research possibilities were seriously hampered by the pandemic last year, but good alternatives were provided by staff.
- There are academic advisors monitoring the student's progress on a regular basis, while the University offers counselling, psychotherapy, sports and other student facilities.
- Reasons students choose for EUC are clear and convincing
- We have taken notice of the videos and tutorials (mainly on Research methods), as well as a virtual tour to the ES facilities. Such videos and tutorials could be extended to other domains.
- The students are attracted mainly from Cyprus and Greece. Several students have an international background.
- Two students mentioned the value of recognition of their degree by European and American universities as a strong reason for choosing this program.
- The Programme offers a certification accompanied by a diploma supplement for every student in line with European and International standards.

Strengths

- The Programme attracts a large number of students from Greece.
- EUC has gained international reputation. Some of the students are from e.g. USA and Germany. One student has already received an employment offer and her master's degree from EUC in Educational Sciences played a role in this.
- Interactive online teaching and interactive and audiovisual extensions to the standard learning environment Blackboard, that appears well maintained by ICT staff.
- Students mention as strengths: most opportunities, inter-disciplinarity, and focus on both technical and soft skills in the Master ES. Also, good relations with staff and direct responses, as well as the international recognition of the certificate, are mentioned as a plus.
- Small class size guarantees individual support for each student.
- Effective and relevant feedback to students; some distant students even stated 'on a 24/7 basis'. Students' participation in evaluation process is high (65%)
- Motivating combinations of classes, cooperative-learning activities in professional learning communities of students and individual learning tasks.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Relationship between teaching staff and students are productive but sometimes could still have more of a challenging character.
- Students could be supported more in becoming self-guided / independent researchers.
- Continue with confidence building and academic reputation, as there are other universities in Cyprus (and globally) that are more favoured by potential students
- The process for downloading the prospectus of a Programme is complicated. We suggest simplifying this process and offer an open access file of prospectus without the prerequisite to fill in a personal data form.

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**

Findings

- Excellent physical resources seem to be offered for residential students (like 81 classrooms, 3 auditoria, housing, ... on campus in Nicosia), including social welfare services (annexes 8 and 9) and sports and theatre facilities, although most DL students will not make much use of them.
- All administrative procedures worked out and maintained well, knowledgeable staff during site visit.
- Excellent online access to ICT and administrative help was also reported by DL students. Some Laboratory facilities, library and learning materials are provided and used at satisfactory level, and are at times used adequately in relation with the courses for this Master of ES.
- Some TEL-related course teachers (e.g. Loucas, Vekiri) mention using these lab facilities in their courses, e.g. for modelling, playful simulation, and 'engaging practice'. For the Technologies specialization, the EEC has become convinced of some basic use of relevant software available (like Scratch) and relevant ID models with quality criteria (like 4C/ID, TPACK) in education to stimulate further mastery beyond the Master. Teacher Loucas used the metaphor of 'growing mushrooms', and some students confirmed that was actually proven to be the case, after which they successfully extended and applied acquired skills on their own practice.
- A good range of textbooks and journal articles (most in English) are readily accessible to students and staff.
- Especially for DL programs, controls for fraud and plagiarism should be in place. This is an ongoing development of which the Programme is aware and takes measures. The EUC uses Turnitin software for plagiarism detection, and Proctoring for exam fraud detection.
- Students who chose to do a master's thesis confirmed the existence of support and guidance by their supervision. They also said that they have the freedom to deepen their knowledge in research methods and analysis of data based on their personal needs.
- Students are encouraged to participate in conferences as presenters of their research work and publish their work in peer-reviewed journals.

Strengths

- The EEC positively evaluates the presence of an DLU (Distance Learning Unit) with emphasis on staff development in TEL (human resources rightfully considered to be the fourth leg of the basis for stable educational development and innovation). We got a pretty good idea of the courses and webinars delivered by that Unit, in which all departments have representatives, and is lead from ES (Chatzipanagiotou).
- Blackboard is the standard LMS for both teaching and student monitoring. There are further extensions or plug-ins for groupwork (Collaborate) and interactive materials (like video clips and animation) to make it more complete. Teachers also learn how to use the Bb learning analytics to improve and redesign their own courses.
- There is sufficient knowledge about ID models and criteria for qualitative TEL based education, some of which knowledge is also delivered through ES courses on TEL (teach as you preach).
- We were told about research activities during the semester that offered the opportunity to involve students in academic writing and finally, publish their work to a broader scientific community.
- We had the pleasure to encounter a pro-active and thoughtful vice-rector, and several enthusiastic staff members who presented us with innovative ideas for the future (and actual examples of the presence) of how the Programme should better address competences like critical thinking, problem solving and carrying out research, that were largely missing in the application we could review before the site visit. The committee thinks this responsive attitude will work well for continuous learning of staff and continuous improvement of the program.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- To have a larger fully employed staff will help generate a collaborative workforce for enabling more effective and innovative DL programs in the future, especially when supported by a dedicated DLU and research units/labs.
- The EEC saw good examples of ‘engaging practice’ in teaching and learning. However, some of these practical assignments appear to just scratch the surface and are limited to very first levels of skills, like exercises 6.1 (blog about 10 criteria for SG), exercise 7.1 (write 250 word essay on AR design) for ETD 620; and like exercise 7.2 (draw house with Scratch) for EDT625. But they at least do seem to yield interest for acquiring more profound skills levels. We recommend, within the constraints of available ECTS per course of course, to include more profound practical exercises that better represent the *authentic complexity* of future professional work contexts.
- The weekly structures (14 weeks per course) are clearly outlined in the about 1500 pages (!) of course descriptions, with the (already mentioned) overview of competences mapped on Programme missing. Apart from including such an overview, we recommend to be more flexible and (where required) vary some more on the amount of ECTS per course and on the order of delivery (from just-in-case towards just-in-time, especially for research methods).

- A mention was made, that all staff are ‘certified DL experts’. However, taking a yearly seminar (mentioned in the site visit that only first course is mandatory) will not be sufficient to qualify as expert.
- We suggest including more research activities during the semester that offer the opportunity to involve students in academic writing and finally, publish their work to the broader scientific community.
- The pedagogical design, selection and development of interactive teaching should be initiated by specialized and permanent staff with affinity to more innovative ICT (Information and Communication Technology). The DLU can initiate this.
- The EEC feels that the potential of the Research Labs is yet not fully exploited in this master’s education (for research-informed teaching), esp. regarding the Research Unit for ICT / the SOCIETH lab in relation to courses on learning technologies (e.g. ETD620 and 625). In the application there is mention of the presence of research on game-based learning, simulations and modelling, a.o. at the campus’ Lab, but such research seems to be mainly reflected in other Master programs or F2F Masters.
- In the application we did not encounter any e-learning in the sense of more dedicated interactive media applications (designed by the Labs), that for instance support students to apply their knowledge in a simulated professional environment. During the site visit we could also hear some realities and plans to include real interactive e-learning programs where students experience content, apply knowledge in more authentic contexts. We recommend to develop further on these good initiatives.
- We had an extensive discussion of ideas on how to improve the research quality of both staff and student within the program, an important but challenging quality aspect for academic programs. We understand the practical conditions that might be limiting here, but still urge the staff to not allow this to demotivate this ongoing endeavor.
- In respect to controlling for fraud during essay writing and exams we recommend to keep looking for IT improvements for DL, taking in account recent technologies (pattern/handwriting/iris recognition) and proctoring during exams. The ICT staff confirmed these are starting to become into place, but that AVG restrictions are limiting (e.g. no biometrics)
- We recommend the DLU (a real unique value of the University) should be further extended and contain more substantial and more dedicated expertise for instructional methods and interactive e-learning, in order to design and develop a more active and experiential program, needed to achieve some of the higher order competences in HE (see other comments). It appears recently new staff with more ICT and innovation affinity was contracted, but this an ongoing process. Knowledge on Digital Didactics (offered through center of excellence on digital didactics) might attract paying teachers from other universities (all struggling with ‘emergency remote teaching’) as an extra source of income.
- Internal units for research (operational partly), for DL, and standardized liaisons with the working field (already operational through teachers and advisory boards) warrant input and support from science, innovation, and practice. This way the university can truly aim to be great in academic excellence, employability, research and industry.



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

Sub-area		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
5.1	Teaching and Learning resources	Partially compliant
5.2	Physical resources	Compliant
5.3	Human support resources	Compliant
5.4	Student support	Compliant

D. Conclusions and final remarks

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

The present situation is very good with potential for a strong future. Finding a way to attract good students to the programme, is of the essence. Offering the programme in English provides opportunities for student recruitment on a global scale. This in turn could provide opportunities for expansion, further development of the personnel (larger, more varied and especially more international) and could enhance the visibility and reputation of the the programme, the Faculty, and the University. Many of the approaches and procedures were efficient and up to date, including recruitment and development of faculty and staff. The balance between risks and possibilities in a private University is not an easy one. Strong cooperation within Cyprus and internationally could further deepen and broaden the content and quality of the programme. The EEC would suggest that the potential for merging some of the many universities and programmes in Cyprus be seriously considered. The position of Cyprus as a hub of higher education in Europe is promising.

The EEC urges the Faculty to take into account the suggestions of the previous sections.

Instruction and research of tomorrow will need investments in infrastructure and personnel. With flexibility in how resources are allocated, high ambitions and goals can be achieved. The University needs to consider how the expertise in the Faculties can best be provided with the autonomy and resources necessary for taking the responsibility of reaching the strategic goals and full potential of the University. The Department is also well placed to provide inspiration for the University and more globally to find new and efficient methods and technology for DL and instruction. Much has and is changing in instruction and research and many innovative solutions are found daily in the Universities around the world.



E. Signatures of the EEC

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Patrik Scheinin	
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Maria Anastasou	

Date: 14.5.2021