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

- **Higher Education Institution:**
University of Nicosia
- **Collaborative Institution(s):**
University of Patras
- **Town:** Nicosia Cyprus/ Patras Greece
- **School/Faculty (if applicable):** Education
- **Department/ Sector:** Education
- **Programme of study- Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)**

In Greek:

Ειδική Αγωγή και Εκπαίδευση (2 έτη, 120 ECTS, Μάστερ, Εξ Αποστάσεως, Διαπανεπιστημιακό)

In English:

Special Education (2 years, Distance Learning, 120 ECTS)

- **Language(s) of instruction:** Greek
- **Programme's status:** Currently Operating
- **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 Evaluation Committee consisted of four academics and a student representative who participated in the online evaluation of University of Nicosia and University of Patras Joint - E-learning programme study “Special Education (2 years, Distance Learning, 120 ECTS)”.

On the online site visit, Rectors at the two universities gave a briefing before the committee met with the members of the internal evaluation committee. Committee then received a presentation on the proposed program by representatives from programme including programme coordinators, teaching administrative staff. The Committee also had an opportunity to meet and discuss matters with the teaching staff and student representatives.

The Committee would like to thank colleagues at University of Nicosia and University of Patras for good cooperation and willingness to provide the extra requested documentation for the purpose of conducting this evaluation and preparing this report.



B. External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>University</i>
Ona Bø Wie	Full professor	University of Oslo
Michael Shevlin	Full professor	Trinity College, Dublin
Alexander Minnaert	Full Professor	University of Groningen
Stylianos Hatzipanagos	Full Professor	University of London
Maria Anastasou	Student	University of Cyprus

C. Guidelines on content and structure of the report

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

Findings

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

Strengths

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

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

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

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

Sub-areas

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

1.1 Policy for quality assurance

Standards

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

1.2 Design, approval, on-going monitoring and review

Standards

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

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

1.3 Public information

Standards

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

1.4 Information management

Standards

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

You may also consider the following questions:

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

Findings

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

The study programme of this CYQAA External Evaluation Report belongs to the Master in Special Education, a distance learning joint degree of 2 years, 120 ECTS, provided and supported by the University of Nicosia and the

University of Patras. The Quality Assurance system underpinning the Masters in Special Education programme is publicly available and the quality assurance procedure of this joint degree is governed by the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. There are programme objectives, clearly expressed intended learning outcomes, quality standards, indicators, appropriate structures, codes of ethics, rules and regulations and an anti-plagiarism system, all designed to safeguard quality assurance and to ensure that procedures are fair and transparent.

The Dean of the School of Education, heads of the departments, and coordinators of the programme interviewed demonstrated a clear awareness of the importance of Quality Assurance, on-going monitoring (also based on students' evaluative feedback) and management and were committed to ensuring that the highest standards were upheld. The programme is managed by a three-member Committee. In addition, an Internal Programme Evaluation Process procedure is installed at the University of Nicosia comprising an internal and external team of reviewers. The latter team incorporates only one student member from the programme. Student involvement in the Quality Assurance regulations and procedures might need an upgrade as well as the representativeness of the University of Patras in the whole process of Quality Assurance for the joint degree.

The programme, as designed, appeared to favour a more special education approach to content and (the majority of) learning outcomes which is somewhat at odds with international developments within inclusive and equitable quality education programmes of study. The programme coordinator was very aware of this trend and stated that an earlier application to launch a more inclusive-oriented education study programme was, unfortunately, rejected by an internal committee. Rewording the title of this programme to both inclusive and special education seems an equitable and contemporary step forwards to meet the standards and future time perspectives of teachers in the years to come. The programme coordinator assured that inclusion is the philosophical pedagogy grounding the actual programme "Special Education". This is in line with the experience of one of the Alumni in becoming a better teacher for all (students) after attending this programme.

A comprehensive, two year curriculum of 120 ECTS is designed, comprising three obligatory courses, three elective courses to choose from a broader amount of courses available, three general (methodological/measurement-related/theoretical) education courses to choose from, a practicum and an optional Masters' thesis. Students can choose whether to complete a Masters' thesis (of 30 ECTS) or undertake three elective courses of 10 ECTS each. Only a few students choose to complete a Masters' thesis, as most of them are already teachers and do not wish to pursue a research-oriented career. As there is a more worldwide trend to professionalise teachers as applied researchers, promoting a Master's thesis might pave the way for future (career) developments.

Selection criteria are clearly stipulated and known, but the career paths of graduates seem less known by the students within the programme. The students and alumni unanimously expressed their satisfaction with teachers' engagement and support. Although pass and drop-out rates were not precisely reported on (neither in the application report, nor during the interviews), both teacher staff and students offered convincing evidence that reasonable accommodations and ongoing support was provided for students who have disabilities and/or special educational needs and/or face challenges in the combination of study, work and family life. In this regard, it was mentioned by the students that they are faced with pressure to find another school because the practicum cannot be fulfilled in the school where they are already working. This might need some further consideration and reflection (also in the ongoing context of regulations and restrictions due to the pandemic).

Strengths

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

- *The Quality Assurance system and the aligned procedures of the joint programme “Special Education” between the University of Nicosia and the University of Patras are all designed to safeguard quality assurance and to ensure that procedures are fair and transparent.*
- *The two-year, distance learning joint degree programme is comprehensive and offers students the opportunity to engage in-depth with key (research and content-related) domains in special and inclusive education.*
- *The process of teaching and learning is strongly student-centred with in-built flexibility while retaining a coherent structure. Students are fully engaged with the course through weekly activities designed to enhance the learnings from the course lectures and materials. There was strong evidence, particularly from the students/graduates, that course lecturers were very responsive to any difficulties experienced. Formative assessment was a core feature of the course with lecturers giving regular feedback to students on their performance and constructive suggestions about how to improve their work. The accessibility of the course was ensured through enabling technology designed according to the principles underpinning Universal Design, according to the team. The two year course was designed to provide many pathways into acquiring new knowledge through the provision of a series of electives focusing on specific aspects of special/inclusive education. The course design team was very aware that the majority of participants are education practitioners and so developed a series of practical activities designed to enhance practitioner skills in classroom practice. *Students were very positive about the level of engagement with the teaching staff and how students’ needs were addressed to optimise study progress and success.**

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.

- *Involvement of students and members of the University of Patras might be upgraded to ensure a more equitable representation of all partners in the Quality Assurance process.*
- *The fundamental goal and philosophy of this programme, i.e. to deliver professionals in inclusive and special education in order to safeguard equitable quality education for all, might be better mirrored in a programme that includes both inclusive and special education in the title of the programme (as applied for some years ago, but rejected).*
- *To attract and stimulate more research-oriented teachers into the field of inclusive and special education, the Masters’ thesis might need more promotion from teaching staff and further monitoring within the Quality Assurance procedure. The same is applicable to accommodate the urgent and contemporary needs of students in finding a place to fulfil their practicum (next to the place they are actually working as a teacher).*

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

Sub-area	Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant
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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	Partially 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 organization and the content of practical training, if applicable, support achievement of planned learning outcomes and meet the needs of the stakeholders.*

2.3 Student assessment

Standards

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

2.4 Study guides structure, content and interactive activities

Standards

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

You may also consider the following questions:

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

Findings

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

The process of teaching and learning is strongly student-centred with in-built flexibility while retaining a coherent structure. Students are fully engaged with the course through weekly activities designed to enhance the learnings from the course lectures and materials. There was strong evidence, particularly from the students/graduates, that course lecturers were very responsive to any difficulties experienced. Formative assessment was a core feature of the course with lecturers giving regular feedback to students on their performance and constructive suggestions about how to improve their work. The accessibility of the course was ensured through enabling technology designed according to the principles underpinning Universal Design, according to the team. The two-year course was designed to provide many pathways into acquiring new knowledge through the provision of a series of electives focusing on specific aspects of special/inclusive education. The course design team was very aware that the majority of

participants are education practitioners and so developed a series of practical activities designed to enhance practitioner skills in classroom practice.

Strengths

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

- The quality of relationships between course lecturers and students constituted a major strength of this programme. There were numerous examples of how course lecturers responded in a timely manner (within 24 hours) to student requests and concerns. This was specifically highlighted by the students/graduates in their feedback on the course. The quality of these relationships was considered a major factor in student retention. When students experienced difficulties in research modules, support was readily available from the course lecturers.
- There was a conscious effort to continuously update courses by utilising new technology and enhancing interactive aspects of the course. Students/graduates considered the course to be challenging to complete but manageable.
- Student guidance and assessment is fully aligned with distance learning and is well organised and transparent for students as confirmed in the student/graduate feedback. The course team follow a specific distance learning methodology supported by the Distance Learning Unit that provides a series of tutorials and seminars designed to improve the delivery of teaching in a distance learning format.
- In discussion with the EEC, students valued the opportunity to engage with practice based activities designed to improve their classroom practice in supporting pupils with additional needs. Students commented that the course had enabled them to become more effective teachers for all pupils and to develop an awareness of how to create inclusive learning environments.
- The Practicum provides a supported yet challenging practice in teaching pupils who have additional needs. Some students commented that it was difficult to source a school for their Practicum.

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 very commendable that the Distance Learning Unit will offer additional support if requested on a confidential basis and students undoubtedly benefit from this type of support. However, despite the existence of relevant policies put in place by both institutions, there did not appear to be a set of reasonable accommodations that were transparent and readily available to students on the course who had additional needs.
- It is clear that classroom practice elements are highly valued by the students, however, it appears that as a result there is less emphasis on research. There was strong evidence that students are reluctant to undertake a research dissertation and this will likely continue given that the majority of participants are education practitioners. In the absence of a dissertation research skills could be enhanced through incorporating a research element into core and elective modules.
- We would recommend that research skills be enhanced through incorporating a research element into core and elective 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)

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.*

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.

The university support to the staff appears to be comprehensive and effective. The faculty has both technical and subject related compulsory and optional training opportunities that appear well organised and of high quality. The courses are offered for the new employee as well as on a continuous basis for the staff. Specifically, the faculty technical training courses on a range of tools the staff can use to advance their courses is innovative and impressive. The university's Research Skills Development Programme consisting of workshops with experts in the field is of high quality and an opportunity for further development. The full time teaching staff qualifications are adequate and the lecturers hold a PhD securing an appropriate level of knowledge. The programme is dependent on a high number of part time lecturers (204) in addition to the 42 full time staff members on the program. In the interview, the staff expressed that there was sufficient time for research and that the teaching workload was reasonable. The staff has reported on high quality publications but the publication lists shows that there is room for increased publication activities in high ranked international journals with relevance to Special Needs Education. The teaching staff are working together effectively to develop and evaluate the content and the quality of the program. To some extent, the qualification of the teaching staff reflects the content of the study programme as containing a more broad perspective on inclusion rather than of special needs education with in depth knowledge of the different disabilities. For further staff recruiting it will strengthen the programme if new members of the staff have in depth knowledge in these areas.

Strengths

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

- Especially strong technical training support for new and existing staff members
- Good support in promoting teaching excellence, faculty professional development and pedagogical support

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.

- Increase publication in highly ranking international journals
- Increased use of own research in teaching and student activity
- Recruiting staff with more in depth knowledge of and qualifications in specific areas within SEN

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.*

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.

Regulations regarding student admission and student progression are in place. The policies, admission process and criteria for selection are transparent and students can find them on the website of the programme. In addition, student progress is well-monitored by the academic staff through Moodle Analytics data.

In general, the students who participated in the programme seemed very satisfied regarding its overall quality and some of them remarked on the improvement of their generic teaching skills. During the interviews with the students the ECE committee received some interesting comments focusing on the effectiveness of the practicum process. Some students expressed their difficulty to find an appropriate school (other than their own school) to complete their practicum. They said that such a restriction is unfair and for some of them led them on a never-ending practicum process. Some students referred to the difficulties they faced in using electronic tools and specific software for their studies.

Strengths

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

- The programme is focused on students' needs.
- The joint character of the programme offers the students the opportunity to participate in a diverse team of students from different academic backgrounds, working experiences and individual characteristics.
- The programme has built a strong reputation not only locally but also outside Cyprus attracting many students from Greece.
- The Greek counsellors for the practicum from University of Patras were highly qualified and were willing to support students at every phase of the practicum process.

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 programme should offer more detailed information in public about the practicum placement options and restrictions (e.g. that it is not allowed for students to do their practicum in their own schools) and adopt a more flexible approach especially for students who are employed.
- The programme should offer more details in public regarding technological prerequisites. For example, provide some details to students regarding the equipment they need to participate effectively in this programme and the skills required in the use of media.

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.

Overall, the programme offers satisfactory resources to support students (e.g., access to learning materials, IT infrastructure and administrative support). The libraries at both universities offer a range of resources to support student learning (this is done through access to books and sections of books via interlibrary loans and to e-books and journals). In terms of human capital support, the synergy between the two universities means that there is an adequate number of experienced staff (both on the administrative and academic side to ensure that appropriate support is provided to the students).

Pedagogical considerations seem to be taken into account in the design and delivery of the programme. There is an infrastructure in both institutions that supports the quality assurance development and delivery of Distance Learning. This in the University of Patras is based around a focus on quality assurance and at UNIC related initiatives are coordinated by an infrastructure that comprises the distance learning unit, the e-PSU (pedagogical support unit) and the Faculty Training and Development Unit.

Technologies that support interaction between students and staff have been employed, mainly the virtual learning environment (VLE, Moodle) and auxiliary technologies to enhance communication such as WebEx, that work alongside other learning technologies that are embedded in the VLE (e.g. wikis). The VLE is the central focus of online pedagogy. There was evidence in the materials that the EEC reviewed of activities and exercises that supported student learning and encouraged reflection and self-evaluation. Course design that the EEC reviewed comprised VLE learning materials that consisted of narrated PPTs, including the use of quizzes for formative purposes and links to bibliography and other online resources that the students would need in their studies.

There is an optional online induction to distance and online learning offered to students in the beginning of their studies.

Assessment approaches in the distance learning mode employ a model where end of term exams are the key assessment event in the student journey, and formative tasks such as self-evaluation activities. According to the programme team, this is the expectation from regulatory and professional bodies. During the pandemic exam operations were moved online. There was an indication that the university was moving back to traditional face-to-face exams (the pandemic permitting).

Dissertations are optional and they can be replaced by a number of electives that the students could opt for instead.

Career guidance and careers orientation initiatives in both institutions are offered to students in the programme to support employment opportunities. A significant number of students in the programme are professionals, completing the programme for career advancement purposes.

Strengths

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

- This is a collaborative enterprise led by two institutions that are committed to providing the necessary support to teaching staff and students with the necessary resources needed to perform their duties.

- The personnel (both academics and administrators) are well trained and there are professional development support activities in place.
- The use of formative assessment and activities is commendable in the distance learning delivery.
- The virtual learning environment offers some opportunities for interaction.
- Online learning design conforms to accessibility requirements.
- The combined structure of the two institutional libraries meets students expectations in an academic environment and serves the current needs of students and faculty.

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.

- Learning design (1): Establishing a set of learning design benchmarks that all online modules could conform to at minimum, so that students have a uniform experience in their study of the modules of the programme.
- Learning design (2): Further attention should be given to enhancing the interactive elements in the programme’s online platform to provide personalised feedback to student input.
- Learning design (3): Enhancement of the interaction aspect of the programme should include innovative use of technology, e.g. computer simulations and serious games. Technologies such as social media (wikis) and the use of augmented or virtual reality embedded in the learning environment were discussed by the programme team.
- Assessment: There seems to be a reliance on end of year exams that take place mainly in a face-to-face format at exam centres. An option would be to think about diversifying assessment by offering alternative forms of assessment, e.g. continuous assessment by coursework or project-based work.
- We recommend that the use of open book exams (supported by a proctoring system), is adopted fully after the pandemic. This is subject to professional and regulatory bodies’ agreement.
- We recommend that the induction in the online environment becomes compulsory for all students as this will help to address learning support needs during the student journey.
- We recommend that the experience of the students as far as student access to library materials from both partners becomes seamless by the provision of an appropriate interface (dashboard).
- We recommend that staff professional development around distance and online learning (including webinars) becomes part of an institutional professional accreditation programme, for instance in addition to the current certificate of attendance, also adopting a microcredentials approach to motivate and encourage staff to participate in professional development.
- There should be further emphasis on choosing the dissertation as an option at the end of the programme rather than the electives. This will be in alignment to the research focus that both institutions have.
- Courses/seminars on how to manage materials in English would be very useful for students in accessing relevant course materials.

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

Sub-area	<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
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5.1	Teaching and Learning resources	Partially 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.

The joint programme conforms to the requirements of a study programme offered at postgraduate level. UNIC offers the infrastructure for the programme and Patras the disciplinary expertise and expertise in the Practicum aspect of the programme.

A system is in place that assures quality of joint provision by bringing together a strong Quality Assurance input from the University of Patras and a robust infrastructure from UNIC that overviews quality comprising the distance learning unit, the e-PSU (pedagogical support unit) and the Faculty Training and Development Unit. A three-member Committee consisting of the programme coordinator and two faculty members at the rank of Professor one from each of the partner institutions provides an overview of quality assurance and enhancement issues.

The quality assurance procedure of the joint degree conforms to the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.

Strengths

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

Both universities and collaborating departments have an active research culture from which students of the programme can benefit.

This is a programme that can benefit further from the collaboration and synergies between two dynamic and established HE institutions as far as student support is concerned. This is done up to a point but it could further be enhanced by achieving consistency between all the components of 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.

- Additional support, infrastructure and flexibility could be added to make sure that students benefit from the research culture of both institutions. For instance international mobility might not be applicable to distance learners because of professional, location etc. constraints.
- It appears that the course teaching is provided exclusively by the University of Nicosia teaching team while the University of Patras oversees the practicum element. It was not clear how much collaboration, if any, existed between the teaching teams from both universities. For example, it was not clear whether any learnings gained from the Practicum were shared with the teaching team in the University of Nicosia in order to address any gaps in provision or possible course improvements that could be made.
- We would recommend that existing collaboration between both course teams is enhanced to ensure that the learnings from each element of the course can be incorporated into course evaluation and future planning.

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	Partially 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).

We offer below some recommendations that can enhance this programme:

Curriculum design

- To attract and stimulate more research-oriented teachers into the field of inclusive and special education, the Masters' thesis might need greater staff promotion and further monitoring within the Quality Assurance procedure.
- Attention is required to accommodate the urgent and contemporary needs of students in finding a place to fulfil their practicum (next to the place they are actually working as a teacher).
- Existing collaboration between both course teams should be enhanced to ensure that the learnings from each element of the course could be incorporated into course evaluation and future planning.
- Student research skills should be enhanced through incorporating a research element into core and elective modules.

Enhancing Quality Assurance

Enhance student involvement and involve an equitable representation of staff members of the University of Patras in the Quality Assurance process.

Student support

We would recommend that a set of reasonable accommodations are developed and made publicly available to all students on the course:

- Achieving consistency between the different components of the programme should apply to learning design and the use of learning technologies: employing benchmarks, enhancing interactivity, providing personalised feedback and strengthening assessment (see section 5).
- The induction in the online environment should become compulsory for all students as this will help to address learning support needs during the student journey.
- Supporting students' knowledge of English to secure access to essential literature.

Increased focus on research

Increase publication in highly ranking international journals to enhance use of own research in teaching and student activity

Professional development

We recommend that staff professional development becomes part of an institutional professional accreditation programme also adopting a microcredentials approach to motivate and encourage staff to participate in professional development.



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CYPRUS AGENCY OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION





E. Signatures of the EEC

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Ona Bø Wie	
Michael Shevlin	
Alexander Minnaert	
Stylios Hatzipanagos	
Maria Anastasou	

Date: 09.12.2021