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Date: 25-10-2023

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

- **Higher Education Institution:** Mediterranean Institute of Management
- **Town:** Nicosia
- **School/Faculty (if applicable):** School/Faculty
- **Department/ Sector:** Department/Sector
- **Programme of study- Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)**  
  
**In Greek:**  
Μεταπτυχιακό στην Διοίκηση Επιχειρήσεων Εξ'  
Αποστάσεως  
  
**In English:**  
Master in Business Administration, MBA/E-Learning)
- **Language(s) of instruction:** English
- **Programme's status:** New
- **Concentrations (if any):**  
  
**In Greek:** Concentrations  
**In English:** Concentrations



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

## A. Introduction

*This part includes basic information regarding the onsite visit.*

Upon receiving an invitation from the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education (CYQAA), the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) assessed the “Master in Business Administration” programme in two variations: the existing conventional *programme (referred to as MBA)* and the new *Distance-Learning (referred to as DL-MBA)*”. The latter is an innovative e-learning master's programme offered by the Mediterranean Institute of Management (MIM) in Nicosia, Cyprus.

The EEC consisted of four academics: the Chair of the Committee, Professor Dionisis Philippas (ESSCA School of Management), and the members Professor Louis Brennan (Trinity Business School), Dimitrios Spyridonidis (University of Warwick), the DL expert Professor Olaf Zawacki-Richter (University of Oldenburg), and the student member Mr Kyriacos Andreou (Open University of Cyprus).

The evaluation for the programme occurred at the MIM premises on October 24, 2023. In advance of the site visit and during the visit itself, the EEC received extensive materials and other pertinent documentation, including all the PowerPoint slides presented on the day of the site visit. Digital communication tools were employed by the EEC to aid in the preparation of the site visit and the evaluation.

The EEC met with the senior management team, namely the MIM Manager Mr. Kyprianos Nicolaides, and the AG. Director and Internal Evaluation Committee Chairperson Ms. Maria Nicolaou, the e-programme coordinators Dr Paris Vogazianos and Dr Pavlos Panagi, responsible for delivering the DL-MBA programme, a number of full-time adjunct faculty, the administrative and other support staff from MIM, and several students (current and graduates) who joined the programme.

To begin the sessions, the senior management team at MIM presented the institution, along with the conventional existing MBA and the new DL MBA program, both under review. Subsequently, the EEC met with various stakeholders, including the members of the E-Learning unit, adjunct faculty, students, and administrative personnel.

These discussions covered the programs under review, their structure, academic aspects, staff workload and organization, assessments, resources, as well as the e-learning management system. After the presentations in each session, the EEC had the opportunity to engage in a question-and-answer session, where they collected additional information. Specifically, the EEC inquired about various aspects, including

the programme (e.g., learning objectives (LO), programme structure, delivery methods, assessment approaches, quality of learning (QoL), infrastructure, and IT support, among others), the faculty, and broader institutional matters.

Furthermore, the EEC sought additional evidence and clarification regarding various areas. These included information on placements and how they would be managed for distance learners, examples of assessments, details about open access materials, platforms, and other learning technologies, the learning management system, and the infrastructure for supporting e-learning. During the site visit, the EEC engaged with both current and graduate students, who shared their experiences at MIM, particularly regarding the conventional program. Later, the EEC took a tour of MIM's premises and the library, where a demonstration of e-book searching was conducted.

Lastly, the EEC posed questions about significant changes that have taken place during the last few years of the existing program, driven by the rapid developments in the region. They also inquired about the management's strategic plan for the programme's future and the overlapping between the conventional and e-learning programme, since they are very similar. The final session involved a meeting with members of the senior management team for any remaining questions and clarifications.

The EEC members found the discussions to be fruitful and informative. The EEC would like to thank all parties involved for their cooperation and support during the site evaluation.

The committee would also like to express its gratitude to Mr. Lefkios Neophytou, the CYQAA coordinator, for his efficient way of managing the process.

As we detail below, we find that the new DL-MBA programme is overall compliant with the stated criteria and standards. However, the EEC identifies some specific areas of partial compliance that we recommend improving upon prior to the start of the programme offering.

## B. External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>University</i>
<b>Dionisis Philippas</b>	Professor and Chairman	ESSCA School of Management
<b>Louis Brennan</b>	Professor	Trinity Business School
<b>Dimitrios Spyridonidis</b>	Professor	University of Warwick
<b>Olaf Zawacki-Richter</b>	Professor	University of Oldenburg
<b>Kyriacos Andreou</b>	Student representative	Open University of Cyprus
Name	Position	University

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

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

### **Findings**

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

### **Strengths**

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

### **Areas of improvement and recommendations**

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

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

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

### **Sub-areas**

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

### **1.1 Policy for quality assurance**

#### **Standards**

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

### **1.2 Design, approval, on-going monitoring and review**

#### **Standards**

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

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

### 1.3 Public information

#### Standards

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

### 1.4 Information management

#### Standards

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



*You may also consider the following questions:*

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

### Findings

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

MIM plans to launch the DL-MBA in 2024 after receiving approval. The main findings concerning the new programme are as follows:

The DL-MBA programme under review is up to a 1.5-year programme with English as the language of instruction. The programme requires successful completion of 90 ECTS points (comprising 60 ECTS from core courses, 30 ECTS from a compulsory dissertation worth 22.5 ECTS, and two elective courses chosen from four electives, each worth 7.5 ECTS). This structure mirrors that of the existing conventional programme.

The EEC reviewed all information related to admission criteria, course learning outcomes (ILOs), course delivery methods, and assessment tools and procedures, all of which are consistent with the conventional programme. The EEC also evaluated the main DL features of the online learning environment as presented by MIM. Additionally, the EEC had the opportunity to meet with tutors who are responsible for coordinating and teaching modules in the programme, and these tutors are the same as those in the conventional program. The EEC found the admission criteria, assessment system, and criteria for student course performance to be appropriate and in compliance with the requirements set by Cypriot authorities and HE legislation.

Overall, the DL programme under review closely resembles the conventional one, with learning objectives aligned with MIM's strategy. The purpose, requirements, and learning objectives are congruent with the mission of both the programme and the needs of the Cypriot job market. The curriculum has a disciplinary focus, reflected in its structure and content, and the master dissertation holds significant importance within the programme.

The EEC identified that there are internal policies and procedures in place to ensure programme quality. MIM provided evidence of quality assurance procedures as part of ongoing review and development, demonstrating alignment with academic standards.

The programme's faculty includes tutors who maintain regular interaction with the students, and the staff from MIM involved in the new programme consists of full-time adjunct faculty.

### Strengths

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

The EEC believes that the proposed programme stands good, based on the structure of the conventional one; however, it could be further enhanced to provide an improved learning experience. The programme boasts several significant strengths, as outlined below:

- The programme leverages established processes and the outsourcing DL IT support and internal DL Unit, ensuring continuity in the learning process. The learning and operational processes, as well as the IT infrastructure, meet expectations, showcasing the MIM's commitment to provide a distance learning education.
- Management, tutors, and administrative staff demonstrate dedication to the programme's planning and execution.
- An attractive factor of the DL programme is that it is free of fees, which is aligning with the MIM strategy.
- The programme offers a diverse range of learning modules that effectively cover key topics in business administration. These modules provide students with the requisite background knowledge and skills to meet future work requirements in their respective fields or advance their careers in the public sector.
- The student performance assessment process aligns with DL programme expectations.
- Students have to do a Master's thesis which is important aspect.
- An elaborate and regularly executed quality assurance system is in place.
- The programme's content strongly aligns with the tasks and requirements of the public sector.

### 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 suggests that the management team, in conjunction with the teaching staff, consider certain improvements in the programme's design, structure, and delivery. The following suggestions could inform the improvement process, resulting in a more transparent learning offering and, hopefully, a more sustainable programme, especially given the increasing competition in the provision of educational services. These suggestions include the following:

1. A more explicit and consistent mapping of the programme's learning outcomes (LOs), delivery methods, and expectations for prospective students would significantly enhance the comprehension and execution effectiveness of the programme.
2. Attention should be given to ensuring that students are exposed to current developments and the latest key trends in the field of business and management.
3. The assessment system and criteria regarding student course performance should be communicated more effectively to the students.
4. Consider certain revisions in the curriculum content for the future. Such revisions may include, but are not limited to: develop leadership skills such as agility and resilience, the art of delegation and how to lead with impact.
5. Online Library Services are of critical importance for distance learning programmes. All required and recommended readings mentioned in the study guides must be made available on the learning platform. Where possible, Open Educational Resources and Open Textbooks should be used.
6. The student selection process in the conventional programme has an open approach, allowing applications from different fields in the public sector, particularly from Cypriots. This enhances the programme's interdisciplinary focus. However, in the case of the DL program, this approach may overlap with the conventional one by attracting Cypriots from different regions, potentially jeopardizing the sustainability of the conventional programme.

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

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

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

### **Sub-areas**

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

**2.2 Practical training**

**2.3 Student assessment**

**2.4 Study guides structure, content and interactive activities**

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

#### **Standards**

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

### **2.2 Practical training**

#### **Standards**

- *Practical and theoretical studies are interconnected.*
- *The organisation and the content of practical training, if applicable, support achievement*

*of planned learning outcomes and meet the needs of the stakeholders.*

## 2.3 Student assessment

### Standards

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

## 2.4 Study guides structure, content and interactive activities

### Standards

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



*You may also consider the following questions:*

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

### Findings

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

The MBA programme has not yet started in a distance learning mode. The following findings are therefore based on the accreditation documents and the presentations and discussions during the campus visit.

The MBA programme heavily uses external, adjunct lecturers (professors from other higher education institutions in Cyprus and practitioners from private business consulting firms). More than 80 % of the teaching staff is not permanently employed by MIM.

Interaction with and collaboration among students are key elements of the pedagogical e-learning model. The Learning Management System (LMS) Moodle supports asynchronous and asynchronous interaction using Big Blue Button (BBB), both open-source software applications. Focus is placed on asynchronous interaction and collaboration, and up to six synchronous conferences are offered throughout the semester (14 weeks). The size of the classes is limited to 30 students allowing the instructors to work in close contact with the students providing the guidance and encouragement needed especially in distance learning settings. Various digital tools and social media are used to facilitate online interaction, collaboration, and content presentation.

The course modules have a weekly study guide that includes relevant information: a summary and synopsis, goals, and objectives, intended learning outcomes, a bibliography, supplemental resources, self-assessment exercises and activities, and self-evaluation exercises. The students are challenged to apply their knowledge in group work, case studies, presentations, discussions, and project-based learning activities.

Since the distance learning programme is not yet in operation, we had a conversation with students and graduates of the conventional MBA programme. They were very positive about the support they received from the lecturers, who are always easy to contact. However, there is no general guideline or policy for online communication, e.g. with regard to minimum response times for students' questions.

Each course is completed with a final exam that the students take in person on campus. Non-resident students can take exams at embassies or consulates in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The result counts 50 % towards the final grade, and another 50 % is awarded on weekly learning activities (assignments, online participation, study groups) during the online courses. Rubrics are available for all graded assignments. Plagiarism is checked through the software Urkund.

### Strengths

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

The proposed programme has some strong elements:

1. A suitable distance learning infrastructure and an adequate instructional methodology are put in place.
2. The weekly study guides used in the courses can be considered good practice in the context of distance learning.



3. Learning activities, exercises, and projects are designed to promote collaboration among students in which they apply their knowledge to solve complex problems. A variety of digital communication tools are used to support collaborative online learning.
4. The availability of synchronous and asynchronous activities enhances student engagement with the programme and supports working DL students.
5. The programme employs a range of approaches to enhance interaction between students (via group work and peer review), students and teaching staff (via interactive synchronous online sessions), students, and the material.
6. Students who were interviewed reported that they appreciated the friendly and proactive support provided by the instructors.
7. There is considerable administrative support and academic commitment to the program.
8. The programme documentation points to a well-structured curriculum with adequate detail and planning in place.
9. The students are aware of the outcome of the programme in advance.

#### 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 recommends the following areas for improvement:

1. MIM should clearly communicate to the lecturers – internal or external – what is to be expected from them in terms of online teaching standards. The institution should set some standards or policies in terms of best practice e-learning standards, e.g. regarding minimum required response times.
2. A policy on the ethical use of AI applications, especially generative AI applications for text creation, should be developed and adopted - not only with regard to the assessment of assignments and the prevention of plagiarism but also with regard to the use of such tools to support learning and teaching.
3. Opportunities for internationalization “at home” could be used by inviting international speakers to synchronous online conferences.
4. Furthermore, it could be considered to use more open educational resources (OER) and open textbooks.

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	Partially 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 EEC met with the programme coordinators and adjunct faculty members involved in the new programme.

These are experienced tutors who also teach in the conventional MBA programme and have been actively involved in developing the e-learning programme's materials and syllabi.

The programme is further supported by MIM's DL Unit, an e-learning IT outsourcing company, and administrative services.

The teaching staff interviewed displayed a high level of motivation and demonstrated a deep understanding of the programme's planning and operations.

### Strengths

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

The EEC has identified the following strengths related to the adjunct faculty members during the Q&A session:

1. All faculty members are experienced tutors and academics, actively engaged in other institutions, including universities and the private sector.
2. The faculty is aware of the workload, activities, and deliveries required for the new DL-MBA programme.
3. The faculty cultivates a student-oriented environment.
4. The EEC found the tutors to be professional, engaged, and dedicated to the new programme.
5. The specialization fields of the faculty members are reflected in the content 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.*

The EEC offers the following suggestions:

- The EEC recommends that MIM consider providing additional support to the faculty members, as they now have added responsibilities, not only due to the new programme's enrolment but also because of the increased requirements (such as more master dissertations) and the potential needs of students at any given time. This support might include the establishment of proper financial incentives.
- Strengthening the connection between research and education by incorporating faculty research findings to enhance teaching effectiveness (e.g., utilizing case studies, published results).
- Encouraging increased faculty involvement with the private and public sectors to enhance the programme's appeal and improve teaching effectiveness. Engaging in public policy discussions and contributing to regulatory developments could also empower faculty to make applied contributions.

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

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

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

##### **Sub-areas**

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

##### **4.1 Student admission, processes and criteria**

###### **Standards**

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

##### **4.2 Student progression**

###### **Standards**

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

##### **4.3 Student recognition**

###### **Standards**

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

##### **4.4 Student certification**

###### **Standards**

- *Pre-defined and published regulations regarding student certification are in place.*
- *Students receive certification explaining the qualification gained, including*

*achieved learning outcomes and the context, level, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed.*

*You may also consider the following questions:*

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

### Findings

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

The EEC met with nine current and graduate students from the conventional MBA programme. The EEC asked them about their experiences, reasons for choosing this particular programme and MIM, and what they like or dislike. In general, the EEC observed that students hold predominantly positive views about their studies, the programme they have participated in, and the support they have received.

The student admission requirements and programme outcomes appear to be clear to all students and align with the criteria set by Cypriot authorities and the national HE framework. These requirements are effectively communicated by MIM to prospective students.

According to the students, both the course tutors and administrative personnel are helpful and supportive of their needs, creating a very student-oriented environment. The students also seem to receive support from MIM in terms of teaching materials, IT support, and library access in the existing program.

One of the primary motivations for students studying in the MBA programme was its affordability (i.e., fees), flexibility, and the reputation of the MIM brand.

### Strengths

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

The EEC review is based on the existing programme and MIM's general strategy.

- There are adequate processes in place for student admission, monitoring, and certification of student progress and achievements.
- There are processes aimed at promoting the internationalization of the student body.
- Students have highlighted the flexibility of a potential DL program, which provides an advantage to the new programme under review.
- The students maintain good communication with the faculty, who consistently offer support regarding assessments and exams.
- The requirement for students to complete a master's thesis at the end of both the conventional MBA programme and the new DL MBA programme is a valuable addition.

#### 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.*

One area that MIM should focus on is ensuring there will not be any lack of communication with teachers in the new DL program, particularly concerning students' assessments and team assignments.

Some students mentioned that one of the main motivations for potentially joining a DL programme is the time savings and cost-effectiveness, especially if they live in different regions. Senior management should carefully review this as it pertains to the programme's sustainability.

One significant change compared to the conventional programme is that the number of synchronous online meetings is fewer than a conventional one, which means students must put in more personal effort and workload. This should be clearly communicated to prospective students.

Instructors should provide clearer guidance regarding reference books and course materials, as well as how students can obtain this material.

There is a need for more consistent feedback that is tailored to the DL delivery. To implement the suggestions mentioned above, a standardization of the processes in the DL-MBA programme is essential.



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.*

MIM was the first Business School in Cyprus established in 1976 and became a public institution of tertiary education under the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance in 2013. MIM is enrolling 20-25 new students per year and programme, with 110-120 students in total. Hence, MIM is a small-scale operating higher education institution, which has an impact on the resources and infrastructure available.

The EEC visited MIM's facilities and met with the E-Learning Unit and administrative staff. Based on the tour and interviews, the EEC finds that the MIM provides adequate resources for both students and instructors, including access to library materials, IT infrastructure, and administrative support. The lecturers appear to have the necessary resources to fulfil their teaching responsibilities.

The E-Learning Unit is responsible for the professional development, guidance, and support of instructors in all matters related to distance learning. The E-Learning Unit is a central service unit with two e-learning experts and administrative support. The staff is professionally qualified to carry out these activities. The IT infrastructure for online learning and teaching is Moodle (E-Learning Platform) plus Big Blue Button (BBB) for synchronous interaction, which is integrated in Moodle. The small team of the e-learning unit would be overwhelmed with maintaining, updating and securing the e-learning hardware and software. It was therefore a good decision to outsource these tasks to an external service provider. In this way, a robust and reliable e-learning system with an almost 24/7 service for students and lecturers can be ensured. The instructors and students reported in the interviews that technical problems can always be fixed in a short time.

The lecturers interviewed are all experienced in teaching online, and most of them have been working for MIM for many years. MIM makes an effort to train and develop its lecturers, however, not in a systematic way. A training in online learning and teaching is not mandatory for new lecturers.

### Strengths

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

1. Given that MIM is a small HE institution with limited resources, the physical resources, as well as the online learning and teaching infrastructure, and the technical and pedagogical support services are appropriate. It was a good decision to outsource the technical maintenance and support of the e-learning infrastructure to an external service provider to ensure a professional service for students and instructors also in the evenings and over the weekend.
2. There are provisions for staff training in the DL methods of instruction and support from the E-Learning Unit.
3. Instructors state that they enjoy teaching in the programme and are quite enthusiastic about the quality of the services and support provided by MIM.
4. There is access to electronic journals and books via the library. There are provisions for inter-library loans and access with libraries in Cyprus.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

Although the current small team of the E-Learning is providing good services, it is recommended to slightly increase the staff, especially if it is planned to further expand e-learning delivery. Given the increasing significance of distance learning programmes, it is essential to address the latest trends in educational technology and online learning in a professional manner. This includes utilizing and developing open educational resources, utilizing learning analytics, and incorporating artificial intelligence applications such as chatbots for academic guidance and student counseling. MIM should continue to collaborate with an external services provider to remain competitive in terms of the educational technology infrastructure.

MIM works with an unusually high proportion of external instructors (approx. 80 %). Ensuring the quality of teaching is a particular challenge here. It is strongly recommended to clearly communicate the e-learning quality standards (or Key Performance Indicators, such as minimum response times) to the instructors in a guideline or policy for teaching in MIM's distance learning programmes.

Based on these standards, MIM should develop a more formal, mandatory professional development training programme for current and new lecturers not only in terms of the technical use of the e-learning platform and tools but also in terms of pedagogical aspects to facilitate and support asynchronous and synchronous learning, interaction and collaboration.

The EEC believes that the administrative team for the MBA programme is performing admirably. However, we do have a recommendation to make. We strongly believe that the programme and any new DL programme on the way, would benefit from the recruitment of new permanent personnel. The current administrative team is burdened with a significant workload to maintain a long-term strategic plan for the programme and the MIM. Therefore, our recommendation to the senior management is to invest in acquiring more permanent human capital for the department.

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

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

## D. Conclusions and final remarks

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

The DL-MBA programme is a new e-learning MBA programme up to a 1.5-year content design and structure, offered by MIM. It is based on the conventional MBA programme that MIM has been running for years.

The main elements of the DL MBA programme are the same as the conventional one, with differences in delivery method, language, and DL unit support. The EEC appreciates the significant progress made by MIM in launching the programme, including utilizing tutors' expertise, ensuring quality assessments, and establishing a programme structure consistent with similar e-learning programmes. This evaluation aims to suggest improvements to the programme, as recommended, under the supervision of the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education.

The EEC welcomes the programme positively as it holds the potential to allow MIM to promote its conventional programme and reputation, fostering collaboration with both local and international industry and business. Like most programme proposals, there is room for improvement. Indeed, we have identified areas for reflection, elaboration, and further development, as outlined in each section above. All of the above concerns can be reflected in the programme content, as well as in the course content in the current proposed curriculum. We also suggest that MIM promotes the programme in the local and international job markets, increasing its visibility, and targeting professionals.

The EEC would like to take this opportunity to thank the CYQAA coordinator, Mr. Lefkios Neophytou, for efficiently and effectively managing the process. His facilitation has been exemplary and has contributed to the smooth running of the evaluation. Finally, if the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education requires any clarifications regarding the points raised in the report, the members of the EEC remain at the Agency's disposal.



## E. Signatures of the EEC

Name	Signature
Dionisis Philippas	
Louis Brennan	
Dimitrios Spyridonidis	
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**Date:** 25-10-2023