

Doc. 300.3.1

Date:

External Evaluation Report (Departmental)

- **Higher Education Institution:**
University of Nicosia
- **Town:** Nicosia
- **School/Faculty:** School of Business
- **Department:** Digital Innovation
- **Programme(s) of study under evaluation**
Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)

Programme 1

In Greek:

Programme Name

In English:

MSc in Blockchain and Digital Currency

Programme 2

In Greek:

Programme Name

In English:

Programme Name

Programme 3

In Greek:

Programme Name

In English:

Programme Name

- **Department's Status:** New

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

A. Introduction

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the assessment was conducted online. It took place on Monday, the 20th of July 2020.

10:00 – 10:10

- A brief introduction of the members of the External Evaluation Committee

10:10 – 10:40

- A meeting with the Rector - Head of the Institution and the Vice Rector of Academic Affairs – short presentation of the Institution
- A meeting with the members of the Internal Evaluation Committee

10:40 – 11:50

- A meeting with the Head of the relevant department and the programme’s Coordinator.

Short presentations of:

- The School’s / Department’s structure
- The programme’s standards, admission criteria for prospective students, the learning outcomes and ECTS, the content and the persons involved in the program’s design and development

11:50 - 12:00

- *Coffee Break*

12:00 – 13:00

- A meeting with members of the teaching staff of each course for all the years of study (QA session).
 - Discussion on the CVs (i.e., academic qualifications, publications, research interests, research activity, compliance with Staff ESG), on other duties in the institution and teaching obligations in other programmes.
 - Discussion on the content of each course and its implementation (i.e., methodologies, selected bibliography, students’ workload, compliance with Teaching ESG).
 - Discussion on the learning outcomes, the content and the assessment of each course and their compliance with the level of the programme according to the EQF.
 - Discussion on assessment criteria, samples of final exams or other teaching material and resources.

13:00 – 14:00

- *Lunch Break*

14:00 – 14:30

- A meeting with students only or/and their representatives.

14:30 – 14:45

- A meeting with members of the administrative staff.

14:45 – 15:30

- A virtual visit to the premises of the institution (i.e., library, computer labs, teaching rooms, research facilities).

B. External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>University</i>
Horst Treiblmaier	Full Professor and Head of the Department of International Management	Modul University Vienna
Roman Beck	Full Professor at the Business IT Department	IT University of Copenhagen
Markos Zachariadis	Full Professor in Financial Technology and Information Systems	University of Manchester
Andreas Sokratous	Student at the University of Cyprus	University of Cyprus

C. Guidelines on content and structure of the report

- *The external evaluation report follows the structure of assessment areas and sub-areas.*
- *Under each assessment area there are quality indicators (criteria) to be scored by the EEC on a scale from one (1) to five (5), based on the degree of compliance for the above mentioned quality indicators (criteria). The scale used is explained below:*

1 or 2:	<i>Non-compliant</i>
3:	<i>Partially compliant</i>
4 or 5:	<i>Compliant</i>

- *The EEC must justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.*
- *It is pointed out that, in the case of indicators (criteria) that cannot be applied due to the status of the Department, N/A (= Not Applicable) should be noted and a detailed explanation should be provided on the Department's corresponding policy regarding the specific quality indicator.*
- *In addition, for each assessment area, it is important to provide information regarding the compliance with the requirements. In particular, the following must be included:*

Findings

A short description of the situation in the Department based on evidence from the Department's application and the site - 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 followed by or linked to the recommendations of how to improve the situation.

- *The report may also address other issues which the EEC finds relevant.*

1. Department's academic profile and orientation (ESG 1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9)

Sub-areas

- 1.1 Mission and strategic planning
- 1.2 Connecting with society
- 1.3 Development processes

Mark from 1 to 5 the degree of compliance for each quality indicator/criterion

- 1 or 2: *Non-compliant*
- 3: *Partially compliant*
- 4 or 5: *Compliant*

Quality indicators/criteria		
1. Department's academic profile and orientation		
1.1 Mission and strategic planning		1 - 5
1.1.1	The Department has formally adopted a mission statement, which is available to the public and easily accessible.	3
1.1.2	The Department has developed its strategic planning aiming at fulfilling its mission.	5
1.1.3	The Department's strategic planning includes short, medium-term and long-term goals and objectives, which are periodically revised and adapted.	4
1.1.4	The programmes of study offered by the Department reflect its academic profile and are aligned with the European and international practice.	5
1.1.5	The academic community is involved in shaping and monitoring the implementation of the Department's development strategies.	5
1.1.6	Stakeholders such as academics, students, graduates and other professional and scientific associations participate in the Department's development strategy.	4
1.1.7	The mechanism for collecting and analysing data and indicators needed to effectively design the Department's academic development is adequate and effective.	5

Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

- The mission statement for the department is not publicly available.
- The revision and adaptation of the department's continual improvement is not fully clear.
- External professionals were not available during the visit.

Additionally, provide information on the following:

1. Coherence and compatibility among programmes of study offered by the Department.
2. Coherence and compatibility among Departments within the School/Faculty (to which the Department under evaluation belongs).

Just the two programmes

Provide suggestions for changes in case of incompatibility.

- The two programmes under evaluation are coherent and compatible with each other since they only differ in the respective mode of delivery. Going forward, the Department would need to ensure that the quality of the two programmes is comparable and that the different modes of delivery will not affect the respective quality of the programmes.
- The BSc programme in Information Systems is provided by a different department. It would be interesting to evaluate how synergies between the departments can be created.

1. Department's academic profile and orientation

1.2 Connecting with society		1 - 5
1.2.1	The Department has effective mechanisms to assess the needs and demands of society and takes them into account in its various activities.	5
1.2.2	The Department provides sufficient information to the public about its activities and offered programmes of study.	5
1.2.3	The Department ensures that its operation and activities have a positive impact on society.	5
1.2.4	The Department has an effective communication mechanism with its graduates.	5

Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

- The department has strong connections with the industry and society, which helps to ensure the relevancy of the programmes.
- There is also a strong connection with R3 which might create a dependency on one specific blockchain technology company.

1. Department's academic profile and orientation

1.3 Development processes

1 - 5

1.3.1	Effective procedures and measures are in place to attract and select teaching staff to ensure that they possess the formal and substantive skills to teach, carry out research and effectively carry out their work.	4
1.3.2	Planning teaching staff recruitment and their professional development is in line with the Department's academic development plan.	4
1.3.3	The Department applies an effective strategy of attracting high-level students from Cyprus and abroad.	4
1.3.4	The funding processes for the operation of the Department and the continuous improvement of the quality of its programmes of study are adequate and transparent.	3

Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

- Mechanisms to increase the motivation of the faculty should be outlined in more detail. This is especially important to assure the pedagogical quality of the affiliate teaching staff.
- There should also be motivational incentives for existing faculty members to participate in continuous improvement programs, which currently seem a bit underdeveloped.

Additionally, write:

- Expected number of Cypriot and international students
- Countries of origin of international students and number from each country
- 15 Cypriot students and 65 international students are expected for the next academic year. The cohorts in previous year were quite diverse.

Findings

A short description of the situation in the Department based on evidence from the Department's application and the site - visit.

The new Department of Digital Innovation at the University of Nicosia has the vision to become a global centre of excellence on the topic of interdisciplinary disruptive digital technologies and their impact on society. The three main pillars of this vision are (1) teaching and development, (2) research and (3) collaborations. A major strength of the Department is the fact that it is already well-known in blockchain research and education. Furthermore, the department members have strong networks with the industry and thus a high visibility in the areas of the proposed Master programs.

The site visit was conducted online on Monday, 20 July 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It included several presentations from the university as well as talks with faculty members, administrative staff and students.

The EEC has strong evidence that the overall strategy process is effective and that the planned department fills an educational gap in the areas of the two respective programmes. However, we also found some room for improvement, which we will outline in more detail in the sections below.

Strengths

The University of Nicosia was one of the first universities worldwide to establish a teaching programme related to cryptocurrencies and blockchain/distributed ledger technology. Being the largest private university in Cyprus with a current enrolment of over 12,000 students, it has experienced a steady growth over recent years. The student population of the university and the existing Master programme in Blockchain and Digital Currency is highly international, which indicates that this programme is attractive for a worldwide student population. Furthermore, the Department has strong connections with the industry, which not only helps to ensure the timeliness of the topics through immediate feedback, but also improves the employment opportunities of the students. Existing collaborations are reinforced through international conferences and events that the Department organizes. Summarizing, the EEC believes that the department is well-organized and well-positioned to compete with similar institutions worldwide.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Blockchain/DLT is a fast-moving area that is characterised by an ongoing technological change. In order to accommodate for that change, the EEC recommends that formal processes should be established to ensure the continuous improvement of the respective programmes. Currently there seems to be a high dependency on the competencies of a rather small number of faculty members. This also poses a substantial risk since the existing market for university faculty in this teaching and research topic is limited.

Another conclusion that can be drawn from the current market situation is the need to ensure the continuous training of the faculty. This relates to teaching content, but also to motivational factors and teaching skills in general. The measures taken to ensure the future quality of teaching should be made more explicit.

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

Sub-area	<i>Non-compliant / Partially Compliant / Compliant</i>
1.1 Mission and strategic planning	Compliant
1.2 Connecting with society	Compliant
1.3 Development processes	Compliant

2. Quality Assurance

(ESG 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8)

Sub-areas

- 2.1 System and quality assurance strategy**
2.2 Quality assurance for the programmes of study

Mark from 1 to 5 the degree of compliance for each quality indicator/criterion

- 1 or 2: Non-compliant*
3: Partially compliant
4 or 5: Compliant

Quality indicators/criteria		
2. Quality Assurance		
2.1 System and quality assurance strategy		1 - 5
2.1.1	The Department has a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of the Institution's strategic management.	3
2.1.2	Internal stakeholders develop and implement a policy for quality assurance through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders.	5
2.1.3	The Department's policy for quality assurance supports guarding against intolerance of any kind or discrimination against students or staff.	4
2.1.4	The quality assurance system adequately covers all the functions and sectors of the Department's activities:	
2.1.4.1	Teaching and learning	5
2.1.4.2	Research	4
2.1.4.3	The connection with society	4
2.1.4.4	Management and support services	5
2.1.5	The quality assurance system promotes a culture of quality.	5
Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The policy for quality assurance is not publicly available. 		

- The staff members should be included in the discrimination policies.
- There should be a structured process for dealing with issues of sexual harassment and (cyber-)bullying.
- More information is needed on how the quality assurance system helps to improve research and the connection with society. What are specific management and support services in this areas?
- More information should be provided about the research output and the respective part that was done by the Department of Digital Innovation.

2. Quality Assurance

2.2 Quality assurance for the programmes of study		1 - 5
2.2.1	The responsibility for decision-making and monitoring the implementation of the programmes of study offered by the Department lies with the teaching staff.	5
2.2.2	The system and criteria for assessing students' performance in the subjects of the programmes of studies offered by the Department are clear, sufficient and known to the students.	5
2.2.3	The quality control system refers to specific indicators and is effective.	4
2.2.4	The results from student assessments are used to improve the programmes of study.	5
2.2.5	The policy dealing with plagiarism committed by students as well as mechanisms for identifying and preventing it are effective.	5
2.2.6	The established procedures for examining students' objections/ disagreements on issues of student evaluation or academic ethics are effective.	5
2.2.7	The Department publishes information related to the programmes of study, credit units, learning outcomes, methodology, student admission criteria, completion of studies, facilities, number of teaching staff and the expertise of teaching staff.	5
2.2.8	The Department has a clear and consistent policy on the admission criteria for students in the various programmes of studies offered.	5
2.2.9	The Department flexibly uses a variety of pedagogical methods.	4
2.2.10	The Department systematically collects data in relation to the academic performance of students, implements procedures for evaluating such data and has a relevant policy in place.	5
2.2.11	The Department analyses and publishes graduate employment information.	5
2.2.12	The Department ensures adequate and appropriate learning resources in line with European and international standards and/or international practices, particularly:	

	2.2.12.1	Building facilities	5
	2.2.12.2	Library	5
	2.2.12.3	Rooms for theoretical, practical and laboratory lessons	5
	2.2.12.4	Technological infrastructure	5
	2.2.12.5	Academic support	5
2.2.13	There is a student welfare service that supports students in regard to academic, personal problems and difficulties.		5
2.2.14	The Department's mechanisms, processes and infrastructure consider the needs of a diverse student population such as mature, part-time, employed and international students as well as students with disabilities.		5
2.2.15	Mentoring of each student is provided and the number of students per each permanent teaching member is adequate.		5
2.2.16	The provision of quality doctoral studies is ensured through doctoral studies regulations, which are publicly available.		N/A
2.2.17	The number of doctoral students, under the supervision of a member of the teaching staff, enables continuous and effective feedback to the students and it complies with the European and international standards.		N/A
2.2.18	The Department has mechanisms and funds to support writing and attending conferences of doctoral candidates.		N/A
2.2.19	There is a clear policy on authorship and intellectual property.		N/A

Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

- Several important indicators are not detailed, such as the level of students satisfaction or the drop-out rates per semester or per course.
- In general, more feedback from students would have been helpful.
- Hands-on exercises, practical examples, a greater variety in teaching styles, and more case-based teaching might lead to higher student satisfaction. This was in line with the feedback we got from students.
- The EEC was not able not answer the questions related to doctoral studies due to lack of information about PhD programmes and since no PhD student was available during the virtual visit.

Findings

A short description of the situation in the Department based on evidence from the Department's application and the site - visit.

The Department of Digital Innovation has a dedicated committee for quality assurance consisting of the acting (associate) Head of the Department, one faculty member and one student representative. The goal of the assurance system is to promote a culture of quality that covers teaching and learning, research, connection with the society as well as management and support services.

The EEC found that the Quality Assurance Committee (UIQAC) is well-established within the existing organizational structure of the university and that it allows for the participation of teaching staff, administrative staff and students. However, several processes were insufficiently outlined and deserve further attention. Summarising, the department provides sufficient evidence of compliance.

Strengths

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

The current structure of the Quality Assurance Committee (UIQAC) ensures a sufficient participation of different groups from within the university. Several processes are outlined in great detail, which makes it clear for all parties involved how to trigger the respective processes. Two examples are shown in the applications, which relate to the incorporation of feedback from students as well as instructors. Furthermore, the interviews with former students confirmed that the Department takes feedback seriously and has the right processes in place to incorporate it. Furthermore, the Department has strict policies in place to ensure the compliance with international standards and the Rector has the overall responsibility for quality assurance, which helps to guarantee a swift implementation.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

The EEC was not able to assess several areas of quality assurance due to lack of information. This especially pertains to several policies which were not made public. Furthermore, all groups of the university, including research and teaching staff, administrative staff and students, should be included in the discrimination policies. A structured process should also be defined and made public on how to deal with cases of sexual harassment and cyber(bullying). Information about the academic achievements of the Department should also be made available and should be more detailed than is currently the case.

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

Sub-area	<i>Non-compliant / Partially Compliant / Compliant</i>
2.1 System and quality assurance strategy	Compliant
2.2 Quality assurance for the programmes of study	Compliant

3. Administration (ESG 1.1, 1.3, 1.6)

Mark from 1 to 5 the degree of compliance for each quality indicator/criterion

1 or 2: *Non-compliant*
3: *Partially compliant*
4 or 5: *Compliant*

Quality indicators/criteria		
3. Administration		1 - 5
3.1	The administrative structure is in line with the legislation and the Department's mission.	5
3.2	The members of the teaching and administrative staff and the students participate, at a satisfactory degree and on the basis of specified procedures, in the management of the Department.	5
3.3	The administrative staff adequately supports the operation of the Department.	5
3.4	Adequate allocation of competences and responsibilities is ensured so that in academic matters, decisions are made by academics and the Department's council competently exercises legal control over such decisions.	5
3.5	The Department applies effective procedures to ensure transparency in the decision-making process.	5
3.6	Statutory sessions of the Department are held and minutes are kept.	5
3.7	The Department's council operates systematically and autonomously and exercise the full powers provided for by the law and / or the constitution of the Department without the intervention or involvement of a body or person outside the law provisions.	5
3.8	The manner in which the Department's council operates and the procedures for disseminating and implementing their decisions are clearly formulated and implemented precisely and effectively.	5
3.9	The Department applies procedures for the prevention and disciplinary control of academic misconduct of students, teaching and administrative staff, including plagiarism.	4
3.10	The Department has appropriate procedures for dealing with students' complaints.	5

Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

- More information on the consequences of GDPR violations is needed.
- It is unclear how the Department deals with plagiarism cases of staff members.

Findings

A short description of the situation in the Department based on evidence from the Department's application and the site - visit.

The EEC had a very positive impression of the Department's administrative structure. This assessment is based on the structural and procedural descriptions in the application forms, interviews during the EEC's online visit as well as the information provided in a video that showed the facilities. Furthermore, the interviews with graduates from the Master programme helped to confirm the effectiveness and efficiency of current operations.

Strengths

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

The positive assessment of the EEC is based both on an evaluation of the physical facilities as well as the competencies and motivation of the staff members. Further evidence is provided by the fact that the distance learning Master programme has been offered for several years and the overall evaluations (as given to the EEC) confirm a high level of student satisfaction. The operation of the Department's council appears to be smooth and supports the current processes.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

The EEC was not able to fully assess the quality of several administrative processes. This especially pertains to processes that involve plagiarism of staff members (academic conduct), which also includes the use of teaching material, and especially the compliance with GDPR guidelines mainly in the context of using research data. The latter poses a huge challenge for institutions that need to deal with large amounts of personal data and universities are a prime example for that. More detailed information on how personal data is being treated and protected would therefore be advisable.

Please select what is appropriate for the following assessment area:

Assessment area	<i>Non-compliant / Partially Compliant / Compliant</i>
3. Administration	Compliant

4. Learning and Teaching (ESG 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.9)

Sub-areas

- 4.1 Planning the programmes of study
- 4.2 Organisation of teaching

Mark from 1 to 5 the degree of compliance for each quality indicator/criterion

- 1 or 2: *Non-compliant*
- 3: *Partially compliant*
- 4 or 5: *Compliant*

Quality indicators/criteria		
4. Learning and Teaching		
4.1 Planning the programmes of study		1 - 5
4.1.1	The Department provides an effective system for designing, approving, monitoring and periodically reviewing the programmes of study.	5
4.1.2	Students and other stakeholders, including employers, are actively involved on the programmes' review and development.	5
4.1.3	The content of the programmes of study, the assignments and the final exams correspond to the appropriate level as indicated by the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).	5
4.1.4	The programmes of study are in compliance with the existing legislation and meet the professional qualifications requirements in the professional courses, where applicable.	N/A
4.1.5	The Department ensures that its programmes of study integrate effectively theory and practice.	4

Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

- The consequences in case learning and teaching shortcomings are identified are not outlined in detail.
- The EEC does not know the existing legislation and can therefore not comment on the compliance.
- When it comes to the integration of theory and practice, the EEC recommends that the students are equipped with a sufficient understanding of theoretical knowledge that fosters abstract understanding and problem solving.

4. Learning and Teaching		
4.2 Organisation of teaching		1 - 5
4.2.1	The Department establishes student admission criteria for each programme, which are adhered to consistently.	5
4.2.2	Recognition of prior studies and credit transfer is regulated by procedures and regulations that are in line with European standards and/or international practices.	5
4.2.3	The number of students in the teaching rooms is suitable for theoretical, practical and laboratory lessons.	5
4.2.4	The teaching staff of the Department has regular and effective communication with their students, promoting mutual respect within the learner-teacher relationship.	5
4.2.5	Student-centred learning and teaching plays an important role in stimulating students' motivation, self-reflection and engagement in the learning process.	4
4.2.6	The teaching staff of the Department provides timely and effective feedback to their students.	5
4.2.7	The criteria and the method of assessment as well as the criteria for marking are published in advance.	5
4.2.8	The assessment allows students to demonstrate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved.	4
<p>Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The current focus is on frontal teaching. The EEC suggests different teaching and learning styles in order to foster students' self-reflection. More information is needed in order to judge whether the course assessments reflect students' achievement of the learning outcomes. 		

Findings

A short description of the situation in the Department based on evidence from the Department's application and the site - visit.

The Department of Digital Innovation builds on a solid organisational structure and previous experience with designing and performing courses related to blockchain/DLT. Given that the distance learning programme in Blockchain and Digital Currency has already existed for a couple of years and has proven to be able to attract a sufficient number of students, the quality indicators of learning and teaching can be assessed in light of the current effectiveness. The EEC found that the processes for the administration of learning and teaching are straightforward and well-structured. Since we do not know the current legislation that is in place as well as all details of current European

standards, we did the assessment of the alignment of the processes to the best of our knowledge and based on our own experiences at various international universities.

Strengths

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

The Department of Digital Innovation suggests an elaborate system for creating and carrying out the programmes. The previous experience with the distance learning programme illustrates that the current system is effective and appealing to a worldwide target population of students. Based on talks with several alumni, the EEC found that students are actively involved in designing the programme and given the opportunity to provide ample feedback, which in turn is used to further improve the programme.

The admission criteria can be found on the website and are outlined in great detail. Furthermore, clear guidelines exist on how credit can be transferred. Another strength of the Department is the close relationship with its students, evidenced by frequent communication and feedback. This was confirmed by our discussions with staff members as well as students.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

The above assessment of the EEC was done in good faith. Due to our lack of knowledge of existing regulation we cannot fully assess the extent to which the content of the programme, the assignments and the final exams correspond to the European Qualification Framework. More details in the application would have been helpful.

The EEC also finds that a stronger integration of theory and practice will benefit students. The current programmes mainly focus on applied skills and providing students with skills that allow them to abstract from a given problem will help them to be more flexible in their future workplace. This also corresponds to the current teaching style, which is mainly frontal teaching, and the fact that the Master thesis is voluntary. A compulsory thesis will help students not only to gain academic skills but also to show their ability to design and carry out a comprehensive research project.

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

Sub-area	<i>Non-compliant / Partially Compliant / Compliant</i>
4.1 Planning the programmes of study	Compliant
4.2 Organisation of teaching	Compliant

5. Teaching Staff (ESG 1.5)

Mark from 1 to 5 the degree of compliance for each quality indicator/criterion

- 1 or 2: *Non-compliant*
3: *Partially compliant*
4 or 5: *Compliant*

Quality indicators/criteria		1 - 5
5. Teaching Staff		1 - 5
5.1	The number of teaching staff - full-time and exclusive work - and the subject area of the staff sufficiently support the programmes of study.	5
5.2	The teaching staff of the Department has the relevant formal and substantive qualifications for teaching the individual subjects as described in the relevant legislation.	5
5.3	The visiting Professors' subject areas adequately support the Department's programmes of study.	5
5.4	The special teaching staff and special scientists have the required qualifications, sufficient professional experience and expertise to teach a limited number of programmes of study.	5
5.5	The ratio of special teaching staff to the total number of teaching staff is satisfactory.	5
5.6	The ratio of the number of subjects of the programme of study taught by teaching staff working fulltime and exclusively to the number of subjects taught by part-time teaching staff ensures the quality of the programme of study.	5
5.7	The ratio of the number of students to the total number of teaching staff is sufficient to support and ensure the quality of the programme of study.	5
5.8	Feedback processes for teaching staff in regard to the evaluation of their teaching work, by the students, are satisfactory.	5

Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

Also, write the following:

- Number of teaching staff working full-time and having exclusive work
 - Number of special teaching staff working full-time and having exclusive work
 - Number of visiting Professors
 - Number of special scientists on lease services
- In the application form for departmental evaluation 6 members of the academic staff are listed with teaching hours ranging from 6 to 15. Most of the teaching is done by a lecturer and a faculty member with a status of "unranked".

- Two further teaching staff members are listed who support the activities of the Department of Digital Innovation. Two instructors are listed as special teaching staff.
- Five industry experts support the MSC in Blockchain and Digital Currency (the actual amount of teaching is not specified in detail).

Findings

A short description of the situation in the Department based on evidence from the Department's application and the site - visit.

The EEC found that the Department of Digital Innovation has a sufficient number of teaching staff with a broad variety of teaching expertise. Teaching is done by both internal and external instructors, which ensures an inflow of new ideas and best practices from the industry. The teaching staff possesses the needed formal qualifications and, based on talks with previous students and the evaluations shown in the application forms, also the general teaching abilities to transfer content. The frequent involvement of visiting professors ensures a fruitful exchange of ideas with other academic institutions. The Department has managed to gain a solid reputation due to being one of the first institutions worldwide to offer a programme in blockchain/DLT/cryptocurrencies. Given the growing interest and the emergence of competing programmes we recommend keeping a strong focus on integrating an international faculty in the future.

Strengths

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

The Department of Digital Innovation has demonstrated its flexibility in designing and administering a Master programme in an area which is characterised by the need to constantly update course contents and consequently also the qualifications of the staff members. Given that the current programme has shown its capability to attract a worldwide audience of students, the EEC is positive that this teaching focus will also be successful in the future. The qualifications of the teaching staff play an important role in this process and our assessment in this matter was very positive. The Department has shown its flexibility not only when it comes to updating content but also when dealing with strong fluctuations in student numbers. Numerous external faculty members and prominent scholars may help to further increase the visibility of the programme.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

The biggest threat that the EEC perceives lies in the need to continuously update and improve the skills of the workforce. Furthermore, the reliance on several core faculty members in combination with a relatively small labour market might pose a risk in case there is a change in the workforce.

Please ✓ what is appropriate for the following assessment area:

Assessment area	<i>Non-compliant / Partially Compliant / Compliant</i>
5. Teaching Staff	Compliant

6. Research

(ESG 1.1, 1.3, 1.5, 1.6)

Mark from 1 to 5 the degree of compliance for each quality indicator/criterion

1 or 2: *Non-compliant*

3: *Partially compliant*

4 or 5: *Compliant*

Quality indicators/criteria		
6. Research		1 - 5
6.1	The Department has a research policy formulated in line with its mission.	5
6.2	The Department consistently applies internal regulations and procedures of research activity, which promote the set out research policy and ensure compliance with the regulations of research projects financing programmes.	5
6.3	The Department provides adequate facilities and equipment to cover the staff and students' research activities.	5
6.4	The Department has the appropriate mechanisms for the development of students' research skills.	4
6.5	The results of the teaching staff research activity are published to a satisfactory extent in international journals which work with critics, international conferences, conference proceedings, publications, etc. The Department also uses an open access policy for publications, which is consistent with the corresponding national and European policy.	4
6.6	The Department ensures that research results are integrated into teaching and, to the extent applicable, promotes and implements a policy of transferring know-how to society and the production sector.	3
6.7	The Department provides mechanisms which ensure compliance with international rules of research ethics, both in relation to research activity and the rights of researchers.	5
6.8	The external, non-governmental, funding of research activities of teaching staff is similar to other Departments in Cyprus and abroad.	N/A
6.9	The policy, indirect or direct of internal funding of the research activities of the teaching staff is satisfactory, based on European and international practices.	5
Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.		

- The EEC is not able to assess in detail the compliance of the Department of Digital Innovation with European and International practices.
- The EEC is not able to compare the funding activities of the Department with other departments in Cyprus.

Findings

A short description of the situation in the Department based on evidence from the Department's application and the site - visit.

The main focus of the Department of Digital Innovation is on teaching. However, it also conducts numerous research activities that include not only publications in academic journals and conference proceedings, but also active service in the academic community and the participation in funded projects. The EEC found that the research activities of the Department are in line with its overall mission and the facilities for carrying out research are adequate.

Strengths

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

The Department is actively involved in numerous third-party funded activities which not only help to raise money for research activities but also increase international visibility. Upon request from the EEC, the Department reported a total of more than 2 Mio. € that stem from nine international research projects, most of them funded by the European Union. However, information about the annual external research budget was not provided, just the aggregated amount for several years. The acquired research grants illustrate that the University and the Department have the expertise to contribute to international research projects and are active in this vibrant community.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

A compulsory Master thesis might give the Department the opportunity to actively involve students in their research activities. In the section above we outlined the benefits for students, but this might also be beneficial for the Department since students can be actively involved in research projects. The EEC further recommends that the results from research projects are integrated into teaching and that the Department develops teaching material out of their own research activities. This includes, for example, the development of case studies that show students how blockchain/DLT technology can be used in concrete real-world settings.

In order to maintain visibility in the academic world the EEC also recommends a stronger focus on research papers being published in highly ranked academic journals. The numbers provided in the application form and the presentation were fairly aggregated and did not allow for a detailed assessment of individual contributions.

Please ✓ what is appropriate for the following assessment area:

Assessment area	Non-compliant / Partially Compliant / Compliant
6. Research	Compliant

7. Resources (ESG 1.6)

Mark from 1 to 5 the degree of compliance for each quality indicator/criterion

- 1 or 2: *Non-compliant*
3: *Partially compliant*
4 or 5: *Compliant*

Quality indicators/criteria		
7. Resources		1 - 5
7.1	The Department has sufficient financial resources to support its functions, managed by the Institutional and Departmental bodies.	4
7.2	The Department follows sound and efficient management of the available financial resources in order to develop academically and research wise.	5
7.3	The Department's profits and donations are used for its development and for the benefit of the university community.	5
7.4	The Department's budget is appropriate for its mission and adequate for the implementation of strategic planning.	5
7.5	The Department carries out an assessment of the risks and sustainability of the programmes of study and adequately provides feedback on their operation.	4
7.6	The Department's external audit and the transparent management of its finances are ensured.	3
7.7	The fitness-for-purpose of support facilities and services is periodically reviewed.	4
<p>Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The EEC cannot comment on the details of the external audit and the transparency of the finances. More detailed analyses regarding future scenarios are needed. The assumptions underlying these scenarios should be made clear. 		

Findings

A short description of the situation in the Department based on evidence from the Department's application and the site - visit.

The budget is developed at the Department level by the Head of Department, the Programme Coordinators and the faculty and approved by the Dean of School. The process is transparent and

involves all relevant stakeholders. The financial information as given to the EEC was on a highly aggregated level. All forecasts indicate that the Department will be able to contribute to the overall success of the University, but a more detailed analysis was not possible due to lack of information.

Strengths

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

According to the calculations as provided by the Department, the current programmes will be able to yield a surplus, most likely a substantial contribution margin, even in situations of relatively low student enrollments. The rapid growth in demand between 2016/17 and 2017/18 and the subsequent fall between 2017/18 and 2018/19 illustrates the need to be able to cope with a large fluctuation in student numbers. Previous experience has shown that the Department is able to do that and that it will also be able to contribute to the overall profit of the School and the University.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

The information that was given to the EEC was at a highly aggregated level and further details were missing regarding the assumptions underlying the calculations. Furthermore, a more detailed breakdown of the cost structure would have been useful. This also includes a differentiation between variable and fixed costs as well as between online and offline students who presumably have a different cost structure. Furthermore, a multi-year forecast scenario is needed and information about how often students are taken in. An annualization of the tuition fee is needed, as the approx. 13.000,- Euros are for a 3 semester program, which most likely corresponds to 1.5 years. In line with that, more detailed information on the Department's development plan would have been useful. This also includes up-to-date information on the number of current applications (if available). This would be useful to forecast growth and plan for further permanent staff to manage better teaching quality and capacity to accommodate more students when going forward.

Please ✓ what is appropriate for the following assessment area:

Assessment area	<i>Non-compliant / Partially Compliant / Compliant</i>
7. Resources	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 Department under review may be achieved.

The assessment of the Department of Digital Innovation was performed from July 20 until July 22, 2020. The assessment was done based on information given during a virtual visit on July 20 as well as the information provided by the Department in their application forms for departmental evaluation as well as the evaluation of the programmes of study. Additional information was provided by the Department upon request.

This evaluation was made in good faith that the information provided is correct. If appropriate, the EEC noted that it was not able to confirm the compliance with existing legislation.

The overall assessment of the EEC is positive. We were impressed by the quality of the existing programme and how it fills a current need on the market. The University was one of the first academic institutions worldwide to realise the power of cryptocurrencies/blockchain/DLT technology and to offer educational programmes in this area. The fact that the MSc in Blockchain and Digital Currency was successfully launched in 2016 and has been in existence ever since, indicates that there is a pending need for education and research in this area. However, the recent decline in student numbers, most likely caused by the end of the blockchain hype in 2017, also shows that in order to be successful, the Department needs to be flexible and make sure that it constantly updates its educational content. The calculations, as provided by the Department, are conservative and signal that the programme will be able to withstand fluctuations in demand.

The Department has a highly qualified internal and external faculty and excellent industry connections. Its participation in numerous international programmes ensures a high visibility within the academic community and also among practitioners. In order to maintain its leading position in the area of cryptocurrencies/blockchain/DLT we also recommend a strong focus on high-quality research.

Summarising, the EEC concludes that proposed department as well as the two Master programmes are innovative, internationally competitive and will benefit the University as a whole.

E. Signatures of the EEC

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Horst Treiblmaier	
Roman Beck	
Markos Zachariadis	
Andreas Sokratous	

Date: 23 July 2020

