Doc. 300.2.2

Date: Date

Institution Response
(Institutional Evaluation)

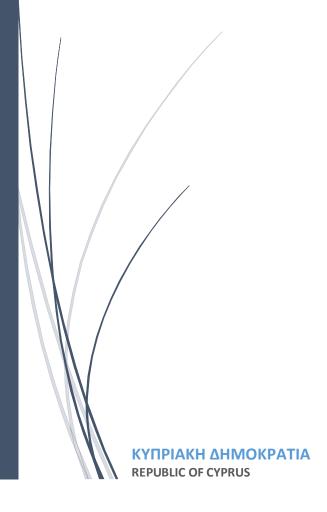- **Higher Education Institution:**
  Name

- **Town:** Town

- **Institution Status:** Institution Status

A. Guidelines on content and structure of the report

- *The Higher Education Institution (HEI) based on the External Evaluation Committee's (EEC's) evaluation report (Doc.300.2.1) must justify whether actions have been taken in improving the quality of the Institution in each assessment area.*

- *In particular, in the section building facilities, student welfare services, infrastructure, the HEI must respond on the comments and scoring of the EEC.*

- *Under each assessment area, the HEI must respond on, <u>without changing the format of the report</u>:*

  - *the findings, strengths, areas of improvement and recommendations of the EEC*
  - *the deficiencies noted under the quality indicators (criteria)*
  - *the conclusions and final remarks noted by the EEC*

- *The HEI's response must follow below the EEC's comments, which must be copied from the external evaluation report (Doc. 300.2.1).*

- *In case of annexes, those should be attached and sent on a separate document.*

GENERAL COMMENT BY COSMOS OPEN UNIVERSITY

We would like to thank all the members of the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) for conducting a thorough and analytic evaluation of all the sections comprising the Application of COU for Institutional Accreditation. Furthermore, we are grateful to the EEC for their valuable advice and recommendations; the conversations that took place were productive and in depth, on some occasions covering important strategical issues for the sustainability of our Institution. We would also like to thank the EEC for rating all the sections of our Application as "**Compliant**".

BUILDING FACILITIES - STUDENT WELFARE SERVICES - INFRASTRUCTURE

1. Building facilities

1.1 Plans and licenses

Comments from EEC: Regarding 1.1.3.5. indicator, the certificate should be updated.
Answer by COU: Yes, we shall update the Certificate for adequate Electrical and Mechanical Installations, issued by the Electromechanical Department.

1.2 Other facilities

Comments from EEC: The building is currently permitted as office spaces. It covers almost all of CYQAA'S building facilities requirements.......... However, it is the opinion of the committee that the University can properly and sufficiently operate with its current facilities based on the fact that it is an online University and therefore no further requirements regarding building facilities are considered necessary.

Answer by COU: We would like to thank the Committee for all the "satisfactory" grading as well as for their final comment that our University can properly and sufficiently operate with its current facilities based on the fact that it is an online University and therefore no further requirements regarding building facilities are considered necessary. We would like to note that our University always respects the guidelines and comments, of both EEC and CYQAA.

2. Student Welfare Services

Comments from EEC: There are no comments.
Answer by COU: We thank and acknowledge all the positive comments (all grades are "satisfactory").

3. Infrastructure

Comments from EEC: The University building will not be used for teaching in person on site. According to the Institution's academic program the lectures will be 100% online. Therefore, the building is classified as office spaces only and will be used for administrative purposes only.

Answer by COU: We thank and acknowledge all the positive comments (all grades are "satisfactory").

1. Institution's Academic Profile and Orientation

> **Sub-Areas**
>
> **1.1 Mission and strategic planning**
> **1.2 Connecting with society**
> **1.3 Development processes**

1.1 Mission and strategic planning

Comments from EEC: There are general comments by EEC in the summary of 1.1-1.3 "Areas of improvement".

Answer by COU: We thank the EEC for the "Compliant" grade. We will provide a summary answer at the end of this section.

1.2 Connecting with society

Comments from EEC: There are general comments by the EEC in the summary of 1.1-1.3 "Areas of improvement".

Answer by COU: We thank the EEC for the "Partially Compliant" grade. We will provide a summary answer at the end of this section.

1.3 Development Processes

Comments from EEC: There are general comments by the EEC in the summary of 1.1-1.3 "Areas of improvement".

Answer by COU: We thank the EEC for the "Compliant" grade. We will provide a summary answer at the end of this section.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

EEC: - Broader embedding in (international) academic networks and links to professionals with complementary expertise as well as access to "best practices" in on-line academic teaching is recommended.

COU: We agree with the comment of the EEC. Indeed, as stated in our presentations, Cosmos plans to become member of the most important International Education Organizations (EUA, EURASHE, EADTU, EDEN, ICDE), which promote international policies (Bologna Process, EQAA) and development strategies for Quality Assurance in higher education, particularly for Open and Distance Learning. Embedded in such Organizations help provide further links to professionals as well as access to best practices on online education.

ΔΙΠΑΕ CYQAA
ΦΟΡΕΑΣ ΔΙΑΣΦΑΛΙΣΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΠΙΣΤΟΠΟΙΗΣΗΣ ΤΗΣ ΠΟΙΟΤΗΤΑΣ ΤΗΣ ΑΝΩΤΕΡΗΣ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗΣ
CYPRUS AGENCY OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

eqar enqa.

2. Quality Assurance

> **Sub-Areas**
>
> **2.1 System and quality assurance strategy**
> **2.2 Ensuring quality for the programmes of study**

2.1 System and quality assurance strategy
Comments from EEC: There are general comments by the EEC in the summary of 2.1-2.2 "Areas of improvement".
Answer by COU: We thank the EEC for the "Compliant" grade. We will provide a summary answer at the end of this section.

Concerning the paragraph 2.1.7, where the grade is "2", our answer is the following: "The Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) aims to ensure that holders of a qualification from a signatory country can have adequate access to an assessment of the qualification in another country in a fair, flexible, and transparent way. Cyprus ratified the Lisbon Convention and the corresponding accreditation body for foreign degrees is KYSATS. Cosmos Open University abides with the accreditation of all degrees evaluated by KYSATS."

Concerning the paragraph 2.1.8, where the grade is "2", our answer is the following: "To all the graduates, both coming from foreign countries as well as to the recipients of Cosmos University degrees, we will be providing the necessary documentations explaining the qualifications gained".

2.2 Ensuring quality for the programmes of study
Comments from EEC: There are general comments by EEC in the summary of 2.1-2.2 "Areas of improvement".
Answer by COU: We thank the EEC for the "Compliant" grade. We will provide a summary answer at the end of this section.

Areas of improvement and recommendations
EEC: - The persistent absence of a clearly articulated educational model, coupled with congruent teaching methodologies, remains a salient concern for the assessment of the University. It is imperative for the University to reframe this not merely as a prerequisite for accreditation but as an opportunity for genuine academic enhancement. In addition, the University should engage with experts specializing in online learning to develop or adapt another educational model. By doing so, the University can pave the way for the development of a Mediterranean-centric educational model that incorporates the specific needs of the region and the needs of their international students, ranging from Cyprus and Greece over Arabic to Indian countries. Creating and using such an all-encompassing educational model for a certain region would not only help the University's branding efforts in a market that is becoming more crowded, but it would also give the institution a unique identity and mission within its geographical scope. The benefits of such a strategic approach extend beyond immediate accreditation goals and have the potential to significantly elevate the University's standing in the academic community. Finally, such a model is not done in a one-time achievement, it is an iterative process that further

COU: Our University will respect and work closely with CYQAA, accepting their guidelines, and continuously striving to improve the pedagogical model. It is a mixed model containing several types of interactive

processes among students, tutors, fellow students and the education material. This model is combined with different teaching methodologies applied according to the capabilities of our electronic platform to attain all the categories of learning outcomes.

Yet, we are grateful that the EEC has recognized the University's potential to pave the way for the development of a Mediterranean-centric educational model to accommodate the needs and attract students from further afield. Based on that, we would like to thank again the EEC for providing us with the suggestion for such a strategic upgrade. We immediately decided to constitute an international committee of recognised experts in on-line teaching to help address the needs of the variety of cultures and different educational backgrounds.

3. Administration

Comments from EEC: There are general comments by the EEC in the summary of 3.1-3.8 "Areas of improvement".

Answer by COU: We thank the EEC for the "Compliant" grade. We will provide a summary answer at the end of this section.

Concerning the paragraph 3.2, where the grade is "2", our answer is the following: "In our organograms we include representatives of the administrative staff and students' representatives. However, as we have not enrolled any students yet, and we are in the process of recruiting a sufficient number of administrative staff, this provision has not been implemented yet".

Areas of improvement and recommendations

EEC: - Governance body should be gender balanced.

COU: We appreciate the EEC's comment. Based on the relevant law, with the commencement of the operation of the University, the Governing Board can be reformed so that it becomes gender balanced.

4. Learning and Teaching

Sub-Areas

4.1 Planning the programmes of study
4.2 Organisation of teaching

Click here to add text.

4.1 Planning the programmes of study
Comments from EEC: There are general comments by the EEC in the summary of 4.1.1-4.1.5 "Areas of improvement".
Answer by COU: We thank the EEC for the "Compliant" grade. We will provide a summary answer at the end of this section.

4.2 Organisation of teaching
Comments from EEC: There are general comments by the EEC in the summary of 4.2.1-4.2.5 "Areas of improvement".
Answer by COU: We thank the EEC for the "Compliant" grade. We will provide a summary answer at the end of this section.

Areas of improvement and recommendations
EEC: **- Admission of students**
The University could benefit from introducing language proficiency criteria in its admissions, given its target audience.
COU: For graduate programs, a B2-C1 certification in English language is required.
For undergraduate programs a B1-B2 certification in English language is required.
These requirements can be found in the https://www.cosmos.com.cy/admission-criteria/

EEC: - Educational Model
The University has yet to provide convincing documentation outlining their educational model, and more specifically, its impact on the design and dynamics of student learning and teaching.
COU: We will collect and integrate in the existing Student and Faculty Handbooks all the elements providing the features concerning the education model and their impact on the design and dynamics of student learning and teaching.

5. Teaching Staff

Comments from EEC: There are general comments by the EEC in the summary "Areas of improvement".
Answer by COU: We thank the EEC for the "Compliant" grade. We will provide a summary answer at the end of this section.

Areas of improvement and recommendations
EEC: - Areas of improvement and recommendations
The EEC recommends to be consistent regarding terminology and positions. It should be stated that visiting professors have the same position than adjunct professors, as the EEC was told in the site visit..
COU: All adjunct professors have the same status and do not belong to the long-term academic staff. COU can also invite visiting professors. Long-term academic staff and visiting professors are named academic faculty and are considered as full-time employees. Adjunct professors can be either full time or part time.

6. Research

Comments from EEC: There are general comments by the EEC in the summary "Areas of improvement".
Answer by COU: We thank the EEC for the "Compliant" grade. We will provide a summary answer at the end of this section.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

EEC: - International scientific research is highly competitive and it is not realistic to expect anything at this level when starting from scratch at the University in the short term. However, the board embraces and promotes research activities by their teaching staff and provides financial support to trigger initiatives. According to the committee, and echoed by the board of the University, the key principle here is (international) collaboration. It is advised that some of the funding available for research is used to build international collaboration and prepare for involvement in EU grants rather than specific research projects. Also, through their affiliated staff and Advisory Board it is recommended to explore and install collaborations with networks/consortia, academic institutions and individuals to ensure sufficient involvement and exposure of staff and students to high level research.

COU: We would like to thank the EEC for their useful advice concerning research matters. Indeed, as the EEC advised, and beyond running research activities brought to COU by the hired faculty (both academic faculty and adjunct professors), much of the funding available for research in COU can be used to build international collaborations and prepare for involvement in EU grants. Considering the international character of the University and its strong collaboration ties to established partners abroad, enhanced by the strong affiliations of the members of the International Advisory Board, this can be implemented successfully, largely exposing the staff and students to high-level research.

7. Resources

Comments from EEC: There are general comments by the EEC in the summary "Areas of improvement".
Answer by COU: We thank the EEC for the "Compliant" grade. We will provide a summary answer at the end of this section.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

EEC: - It is evident that while significant emphasis has been placed on the backing of investors, a comprehensive understanding of the financial viability of the post-accreditation phase is still needed.

The university's revenue generation mechanisms, including both fixed and variable costs associated with its operations, have not been adequately detailed. It is essential to have a clearer picture of revenue and costs on an annualized basis, alongside established benchmarks for the viability of courses and programs as well as the assurance of staff. A specified timeline for assessing the financial feasibility of individual modules is also imperative. The committee has concerns regarding the full cost of operating an online learning university to steer the University towards a financially sustainable trajectory.

Also, the fact that there is not any information about possible additional financial contributions from investors make it hard to figure out how long the University will be able to carry out its mission and vision. It is crucial to emphasize the need for a robust marketing strategy tailored to the unique demands and opportunities of the Mediterranean educational market in the Arabic, Greek, Cyprus, and Indian regions.

COU: Indeed, a full business plan will be performed after the knowledge of the timelines. A business plan is the upgrade of a feasibility study, more in depth and in detail, but it needs exact timelines in order to be successfully performed. At this stage (before accreditation):

1. We have submitted a full feasibility study (including market preliminaries) in April 2022 to the Ministry of Education (it is written in Greek language).
2. We have submitted the Institution's Budget based on the mission and strategic planning, as annex in the 07.14.711 Institute Application to CYQAA.
3. We have submitted the Budget's management to support the Institution's operations and its development, as annex in the 07.14.711 Institute Application to CYQAA.
4. The details for points 2. and 3 above can be also found in the presentation of the Institution, in the backup material.
5. In addition, a fully detailed 10-year feasibility study was conducted from February till July 2023 by **Deloitte (Cyprus),** where several financial models were analysed and all the costs are successfully identified. Unfortunately, this feasibility study is bound by confidentiality agreement with **Deloitte**, but it can be shown to CYQAA, if needed (not shared). Yet, we can share with EEC and CYQAA some relevant pages that prove our statements.
6. A marketing plan is ongoing with the company 'Bold' (Athens).

B. Conclusions and Final Remarks

We are honored that the External Evaluation Committee acknowledged that our University has successfully met all the accreditation criteria as set forth by the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education.

C. Higher Education Institution Academic Representatives

Name	Position	Signature
Professor Panos Razis*	President of the Governing Board	
Professor Andreas Pavlakis	Vice President of the Governing Board	
Kiki Clark	Vice President of the Governing Board	
Dimitris Mastoridis	Director of Administration and Finances	
Nikolas Stylianides	Head of the eLearning Unit and Technology Department	
Fullname	Position	

*On behalf of all the signatories for the Institution

Date: 05/11/2023