

Doc. 300.1.2

Date: 31/05/2021

### Higher Education Institution's Response

- **Higher Education Institution:**  
Open University of Cyprus
- **Town:** Nicosia/Lefkosia, Cyprus
- **Programme of study**  
Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)

**In Greek:**

Σπουδές στον Ελληνικό Πολιτισμό, Προπτυχιακό πρόγραμμα, 4 έτη, 240 ECTS

**In English:**

Studies in Hellenic Culture Programme, Bachelor Programme, 4 years, 240 ECTS

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

**In Greek:** (α) Φιλολογία, (β) Ιστορία – Αρχαιολογία – Τέχνη και (γ) Γενική

**In English:** (a) Literature, (b) History - Archaeology - Art and (c) General



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. 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.300.1.1 or 300.1.1/2 or 300.1.1/3 or 300.1.1/4) must justify whether actions have been taken in improving the quality of the programme of study in each assessment area.*
- *In particular, under each assessment area, the HEI must respond on, without changing the format of the report:*
  - *the findings, strengths, areas of improvement and recommendations of the EEC*
  - *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.300.1.1 or 300.1.1/2 or 300.1.1/3 or 300.1.1/4).*
- *In case of annexes, those should be attached and sent on a separate document.*

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

### Findings

The leadership of the OUC, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, and all the teaching and administrative personnel of the ELPOL Programme have been very supportive of our work and provided detailed information on and access to all relevant issues and materials. More specifically, the following items stood out:

- \* The ELPOL Programme has designed a comprehensive curriculum with a very clear structure and has procedures in place to adequately review each year. The learning outcomes, too, are regularly reviewed.
- \* The quality of teaching is ensured through student evaluations collected at the end of each semester for every module by the Quality Assurance Committee. Procedures guarantee the regular internal appraisal of the curriculum.
- \* The appointment procedures of the associate faculty members are very clear. Great care is taken to select the best-qualified applicants, all Ph.D. holders with English-language fluency, with extensive publication records in their area of specialization and experience in teaching in a Distance Learning Programme.
- \* Members of academic staff, both permanent and part-time appointees, take a vested interest in the ELPOL programme, which started in academic year 2006/2007 and which was recently revised to better fit the OUC's framework.
- \* The ELPOL Programme has its own dedicated website at <https://www.ac.cy/studies-degrees-bachelor-ell>, and staff members take great care to update it regularly. The website contains a description of the programme (history, aims). It specifies criteria for student admission, ECTS requirements, and it contains a list of available course offerings.
- \* The Programme takes every step to assist disabled students, especially the vision-impaired.
- \* The Programme's guidelines for quality assurance are clear and have been taken to heart by its teaching staff. The material provided in the context of this evaluation covered all the areas required. Additionally, the CYQAA provides clear guidance for quality assurance procedures and the results are published on the CYQAA website.

### Strengths

- \* The ELPOL Programme is a highly commendable example of a well-designed and well-functioning e-Learning Programme. It is particularly user-friendly for working students. ELPOL is a key asset in OUC's pursuit to become an internationally attractive university. The instructors take extra care of incoming Erasmus+ students by providing teaching in English in addition to their instruction in Greek.
- \* The e-Class and e-Learning Platforms are constantly renewed and follow technical improvements to remain up-to-date and easy to use for both the teaching personnel and the students.



- \* The ELPOL Programme is periodically reviewed. The third revision of the ELPOL Programme is the subject of our current evaluation.
- \* Information about performance indicators is systematically gathered and analysed.
- \* Regular and very effective communication channels have been created between the teaching personnel and the students that go well beyond the e-Class, such as hybrid teleconferences, additional guidance provided by the instructors. Also, seminars and lectures with invited speakers are recorded and are made available to students.
- \* The ELPOL programme stays in touch with former students and follows their career paths.

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

\*The pathway of History, Archaeology and Art of the ELPOL Programme, but also the other directions, could be enriched by adding practical experience in Archaeology or in other fields, through agreements with the Department of Antiquities of Cyprus, the Greek Ministry of Culture, or other institutions or organizations. Ideally, OUC students will be able to register for excavations, or participate in the study of findings, or even work in museums during the summer. Thus, the students would learn more about the practicalities of research and develop transferable skills. In practice, they would do so by selecting an elective of 15 ECTS that is set up as an independent study, which would be supervised by one of the instructors (one or two instructors overseeing all independent studies). All students enrolled in this final-year independent and elective study module would be responsible for making contacts with excavations, museums, cultural foundations, schools, theatres, documentary film crews, creative writing groups, etc. themselves, depending on the interest of each individual. Their duties would comprise of: negotiating the contacts (with some assistance or a letter of introduction from the faculty), designing a workplan, compiling a portfolio of work accomplished, and presenting the work in an end-of-term online session that would showcase all presentations. At other institutions, this module is often called the «capstone experience» or is seen as the equivalent of the B.A. thesis experience. Such modules appeal to students' budding professional interests and the outcomes can assist them in their job-seeking experiences. We will return to this important suggestion in the conclusions to this document.

\*The ELPOL Programme direction in Philology could be enriched by adding study topics such as «The History and Development of the Greek Script», including introductions to Papyrology and Greek Palaeography. Or these topics could productively be covered by way of the above-described independent elective study module, with students following online courses in specialized topics elsewhere in their final year but reporting back to the independent module's supervisor. Such study topics will further qualify the B.A. students in Philology and will better prepare them for postgraduate studies or for employment in libraries and archives.

\*The expected unification of the Libraries of the OUC and the University of Cyprus may perhaps include the Makarios III's Foundation Library and the historical Library of the Cyprus Museum. Currently, the contract upon which OUC has agreed with the Greek ΟΣΔΕΑ ensures digital access to a vast number of Greek books. Other online resources such as JSTOR are also available. All combined, this range of facilities will be richer than that provided by most Universities in Greece. It is a significant asset that needs to be maintained.

## OUC RESPONSE

To start with, we do appreciate the fact that the External Evaluation Committee acknowledges that the ELPOL Programme is well structured and well-functioning since it was first offered in the 2007-2008 academic year. The Programme's academic team (faculty and adjunct faculty) do seek to review and upgrade the courses on a regular basis to provide students with updated knowledge and skills.

The Committee's first recommendation concerns the pathway "History, Archaeology and Art" and our evaluators consider that the Programme should introduce an elective capstone project that can serve as a culminating academic and intellectual experience for students, who are during their final year. We do believe that this is a constructive recommendation. Taking into consideration that this type of assignment will be implemented at an Open University for the first time and it should be tailored to distance learning students both in Cyprus and Greece, we believe that the BA capstone project can be introduced as a pilot scheme in the academic year 2022-23 and that it can concern only students who would like to attain practical experience in archaeological excavation in Cyprus and/or Greece. After having acquired the necessary know-how and enlarged our cooperation with several other institutions that could host ELPOL students, such as museums, cultural institutions, schools, theatres, archives, libraries, mass media corporations, more options of practical experience can be offered to our students. As is the case for other optional practical training courses offered by to the OUC Students, faculty and/or adjunct faculty will serve as mentors/supervisors for students opting for the optional capstone project.

The Committee has alternative recommendation: Adding a BA Thesis. Concerning this, please note the following:

The Committee's recommendation that the Programme should be enriched with a BA thesis is constructive. It will indeed enhance the learning experience of the students, especially those wishing to pursue postgraduate studies. Taking into consideration the time needed for the new Thematic Unit to be properly designed and approved by the University bodies, we propose that the BA Thesis be introduced **in the academic year 2022–23** under the following general terms:

### Place of BA Thesis in the Programme's structure

- "BA Thesis" is an elective Thematic Unit of 15 ECTS, that is electable either in Semester 7 or in Semester 8 provided that specific prerequisites are met.
- The Thematic Unit is open to students of all three directions (pathways) of the Programme, who choose a field of study as specified below and are assigned a supervisor suggested by the Academic Coordinator of the Programme and approved by the School of Humanities and Social Sciences.



## Goals

- The TU aims to foster deeper familiarity with/ specialization in areas of knowledge covered by Thematic Units the student attended in previous semesters.

## Topics and eligibility

- The topics of the BA thesis spread across different fields as per the content of the two main pathways of the Programme (Philology and History-Archaeology-Art).
- Students choose one of the following fields if they have completed the prerequisites specified (further options may be offered in the future):
  - Ancient Greek Theatre (Prerequisite: ELL411)
  - Modern Greek literature including the literature of Cyprus (Prerequisites: ELL313)
  - Byzantine literature (Prerequisite: ELL412)
  - Ancient Greek or Byzantine philosophy (Prerequisite: ELL323)
  - Ancient and Medieval History of Cyprus (Prerequisite: ELL325)
  - Modern History of Cyprus (Prerequisite: ELL414)
  - History of Rome (Prerequisite: ELL315)
  - History and Archaeology of Late Antiquity (Prerequisite: ELL324)
  - Ancient Greek Art (Prerequisite: ELL314)
  - Modern Greek Art (Prerequisite: ELL415)
- As it requires a strong background in the field of choice and increased skill and commitment to independent study and research, the Thematic Unit “BA Thesis” targets the top achievers of the Programme. Therefore, a minimum grade of 8/10 in the prerequisites is also set as a criterion of eligibility.

## Procedure

- The student enrolls in the BA Thesis at Year 4, Semester 7 or Semester 8.
- He/she is assigned a supervisor, who prescribes the thesis topic and guides the student through his/her research.
- The student completes his/her thesis, a written assignment of 6000 words, within twelve (12) weeks.
- At week 6, the student is expected to submit to the supervisor a preliminary body of work of no less than 3000 words. A ‘Pass’ grade is required to continue.
- At weeks 14–16, the student defends his/her thesis in front of an examination board consisting of the supervisor plus another member of academic staff, appointed by the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. The thesis defence follows the regulations applied to Master’s dissertations (OUC International Regulations of Study, chapter 7.5).

Regarding the recommendation of the Committee that a new elective module titled “The History and Development of the Greek Script” be added to the curriculum, we would like to express our

reservations for the following reasons. First of all, we should note that aspects of the content of the recommended module(s) are already contained in several already existing ones, such as ELL 111 (Introduction to the Study of Civilization), ELL 316 (Introduction to Epigraphy and Numismatics), ELL 423 (Linguistics), and the newly added ELL 410 (Ancient Greek III: Thematography). Moreover, our Programme offers a large amount of elective modules (24, four new ones are to be added in its new accredited version) to the extent that, due to the wide range of options, some of the existing modules do not often reach the threshold of eight students fixed by the Cyprus Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency for a module to be offered in a semester. We believe that we should consider the Committee's proposal, only after we have ascertained that existing modules have indeed completed their life cycle, say, after a four-year's full implementation of the new version of the Programme.

Concerning the Committee's comment on the academic libraries, please note the following: The Makarios III Foundation's Library is located and centrally managed by the Cultural Services of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth. The Open University of Cyprus' Library is cooperating with all academic libraries in Cyprus in the context of the Cyprus Libraries Consortium, and thus with the Makarios III Foundation Library. Regarding the comment made by the Committee that the contract between OUC and the Greek ΟΣΔΕΛ ensures digital access to Greek books, indeed this is the case, and our Library offers students with a substantial range of online resources and tailor-made scanned material.



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

### Findings

OUC is specialized in Distance Learning and it has gained a long-time experience in delivering various DL programmes and courses. An excellent technical infrastructure is in place to support cooperation and communication between teachers and students and also among students. Other necessary resources, such as library and teaching materials, are easily available through technological pathways. The ELPOL Programme currently under evaluation is compatible with high-quality e-learning delivery.

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

The purpose and objectives of the ELPOL Programme of study are formulated in terms of expected learning outcomes. These are consistent with the mission and the strategy of the OUC and are utilized as a guide for the design (or modification) of the programme of study. The programme's content, the teaching materials and the equipment (especially electronic tools and platforms) lead to the achievement of the programme's purpose and objectives and ensure the expected learning outcomes. These outcomes are known to the students and to the members of the academic and administrative personnel, which facilitates internal orientation, communication, and the overall study practice. The learning processes, through the use of appropriate educational materials, teleconferences, etc., guarantee the open character of the learning experience. They give the students the opportunity to choose the exact time and setting for study and the use of the material available.

The course curricula clearly and adequately define the expected learning outcomes, the content, the teaching and learning approaches. The ELPOL programme of study is structured in a consistent manner and in logical sequence, so that concepts that operate as preconditions precede the learning of other, more complex and more demanding concepts. Also, courses of general knowledge precede those that provide more specific and specialized knowledge in a constructive way. The content of courses and modules, and the corresponding educational materials (which include books, articles, podcasts, videos, etc.) are suitable for achieving the desired learning outcomes with regards to the knowledge, skills, abilities of comprehension and critical thinking that the students should acquire. The number, range and content of the ELPOL programme's courses amply allow for the achievement of learning outcomes concerning Greek Culture, set in a broad perspective both thematically and chronologically. The content of the ELPOL programme's courses admirably reflects the latest achievements and developments in science, arts, research and technology, but also the most influential trends both in theory and methodology.

## 2.2 Practical training

The practical and the theoretical parts of the ELPOL Programme are interconnected. Perhaps some of this rich interconnection could be further enhanced, especially in the area of Archaeology, so that students could more actively take part in fieldwork, excavations, etc. See our comments on p. 8 above (2 paragraphs shadowed in grey).

## 2.3 Student assessment

The ELPOL Programme's course curricula clearly define the various methods of assessing students' performance. These methods take into account 1) the student essays (35%), 2) the interactive activities (15%), and 3) the final exams (50%). The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) is consistently applied. Also, there is true correspondence between the number of credits earned (two categories of courses, providing 10 and 15 ECTS credits, respectively) and the workload per course and per semester.

## 2.4 Study guides structure, content and interactive activities

The ELPOL Programme's study guides deliver important and pertinent information about the courses in a constructive manner. They allow themselves to be accessed and used by the students on their own pace and according to their own availability. The structure of the guides is very good, and their content is very helpful for students, especially since they also facilitate the students' access to books and articles.

### **Strengths**

OUC has expertise in delivering Distance Learning programmes and courses, and many aspects described in the section above speak to the many strengths with which the ELPOL Programme has delivered on this mission.

OUC and the ELPOL Programme, in particular, have a clearly formulated pedagogical philosophy, policy and guidelines on training students and evaluating assignments. These are applied consistently and efficiently. As far as the use of technology is concerned, the students enjoy access to excellent training and supporting procedures, which only enriches the ELPOL Programme's rich academic offerings.

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

There is a satisfactory number of interactive activities between students, e.g. group tasks, debates, quizzes, group discussions, etc. However, many of them are synchronous. Students in DL programmes usually prefer to proceed on their own pace and according to their own time schedule. Therefore, and based on the knowledge that mutual teaching facilitates and accelerates learning, more asynchronous peer-reviewed assignments should be introduced. Such assignments stimulate

students to communicate and to coordinate in a natural and non-artificial way. The evaluation committee members understand that the design of the interactive activities associated with each module is still in an experimental phase. The above suggestions is therefore not a criticism, but is meant to help inform choices as this process develops.

## **OUC RESPONSE**

We thank the Committee for the sound evaluation, and we do believe that the interactive activities offered to the students will provide them the opportunity to develop skills and apply theory to practice. Regarding the comment that most interactive activities are synchronous, please note that group discussions are carried out asynchronously, as students use the courses' forums to address topics/questions applied by tutors, and engage in discussions with their peers. Moreover, quizzes and other group tasks are also carried out asynchronously, as students for example carry out multiple choice tests and quizzes using eClass at their own time and pace. The wide range of optional and compulsory synchronous and asynchronous interactive activities ensure that no student who can attend asynchronous activities is placed at a disadvantage.



### 3. Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

#### Findings

The ELPOL Programme employs three highly competent scholars (two in the rank of Associate and one in the rank of Full Professor). They have an impressive track record of publishing, teaching, mentoring, and attracting funds through various competitive programmes. They also take on critical service roles to assure the smooth working of the programme. Recruitment of faculty is subject to State Laws, which provide for a system of checks and balances that ensures impartial and objective assessment of prospective candidates. Promotion of the teaching staff is contingent upon their publication, research, grant award, and student evaluation record. The ELPOL Programme also employs a number of adjunct faculty members, who are appointed on the basis of equally objective assessment criteria (relevance of their research, professional experience & publications, activity record over the past 5 years, teaching experience in HEIs over the past 5 years, distance learning teaching experience in HEIs over the past 5 years & ability to use state-of-the-art technology, availability, candidate's evaluations if already teaching at the OUC). For the academic year 2020-2021, the total number of the adjunct faculty members amounts to 32. Many adjunct faculty members made short presentations to the evaluation committee members, from which it emerged that both permanent faculty and adjunct faculty members employ advanced and innovative teaching methods. Renowned visiting scholars contribute to the teaching programme, by giving occasional lectures, workshops, or seminars.

OUC has special administrative units and courses to training and support teachers in their extensive use of technology for Distance Learning.

#### Strengths

- \* Number and quality of the publications of the ELPOL Programme's faculty members.
- \* Participation in externally funded, competitive research programmes, most of which serve innovative and appealing approaches to the major topics in Hellenic Studies.
- \* Participation of the faculty members in major international and national conferences.
- \* Most of the adjunct faculty members are junior scholars positioned at the beginning of promising careers in teaching, research, and service. Many of them have held other academic appointments, either as postdoctoral researchers or as adjunct faculty members in other universities and research institutions. They are highly qualified to deliver e-learning courses, and they are supported by OUC as far as this content delivery is concerned.
- \* Concrete plans are in place for course and curriculum development.

## **Areas of improvement and recommendations**

The following points and areas for improvement are addressed to OUC rather than to the ELPOL Programme coordinators:

- \* The workload resting on all faculty is very heavy. For adjunct faculty, this load is compounded by the fact that they are contingency faculty, whose place at OUC is not secure. All of them manage a teaching and research but, given the very time-consuming nature of this teaching and the close mentoring that comes with it, the committee members see the need to raise the issue of whether the adjunct junior faculty, especially, still has time left to strengthen their record of research and publications—precisely those areas that are most likely to lead to the next step in the junior scholars' career path. The committee members also enquired about proper compensation, both for those involved in teaching and those involved in coordinating roles (data pending).
- \* The teacher-to-student ratio could be improved with the hiring of three more members to the rank of assistant professor. Teacher-to-student ratios and permanent-to-adjunct faculty ratios are areas that are closely scrutinized by external evaluators and other external bodies. OUC has a reputation to defend and has everything to gain by strengthening an already very committed programme of study in ELPOL.
- \* The OUC training courses offered to the teaching staff should focus mainly on how technology and learning interact. The pedagogical aspects of technology are most important. Such training will enable the instructors to take advantage of technology's pedagogical potential and to avoid its risks.

## **OUC RESPONSE**

### **Regarding workload of teaching staff:**

Staff (faculty and adjunct faculty) workload is quite extensive, including web lectures, group tutorials, marking assignments, formative assessments of interactive activities, etc. For permanent faculty there are internal rules based on which staff should dedicate 35% of their time in teaching, 35% in research and 30% in other activities. Adjunct faculty normally assume teaching duties for one (1) student cohort and their availability, as evidenced by a signed declaration of commitments to employers other than OUC, is one of the criteria for their appointment. As far as research and professional development is concerned, please note that permanent faculty members can use internal funds for research activities and participation in conferences, workshops, training, etc. Training programmes on eLearning tools, instructional design, etc. are offered to all adjunct and permanent teaching staff by the University's competent Units, i.e. ICT and Lab for Educational Material and Methodology (LEMM). All adjunct and permanent staff can also apply in the annual calls of the University's Mobility Office to secure funding for teaching or training purposes in the context of the Erasmus+ Mobility Programme. Permanent faculty members also have sabbatical leaves, which provide faculty members with the opportunity for further professional growth and development.



### **Regarding permanent and non-permanent academic staff:**

We do share the Committee's opinion that all Programmes of Study offered by the Open University of Cyprus should have an adequate number of permanent academic staff, and not rely so heavily on adjunct tutors on short-term contracts. This is however the case for the OUC that is a public University and all permanent academic staff positions (Lecturers, Assistant Professors, Associate Professors and Professors) need to be approved by the competent Ministries of Education and Finance. As with other Open universities, permanent faculty are limited in number, and the University is thus heavily depending on Adjunct Tutors for teaching in the majority of student cohorts. Taking this into consideration, the Undergraduate Programme ELPOL, the relevant Faculty and the University overall, are meticulous in ascertaining that, by way of a fair point system that balances experience and motivation, Adjunct Faculty of the highest caliber are hired every year, and depending on their evaluation, their contracts are renewed. The University's Rectorate and Council are constantly pressing the relevant Ministries for more academic positions, and when recommendations from external evaluators are also aligned with this opinion, the pressure can increase. We thus thank you for the comment.

### **Regarding the teacher-to-student ratio and permanent-to-adjunct faculty ratio:**

The teacher-to-student ratio is adequate, since based on the CyQAA's recommendations, the maximum number of students per cohort is 30. Concerning the permanent-to-adjunct faculty ratio, please refer to our comments in the previous paragraph. External ranking bodies should take into consideration that OUC is a distance teaching university and as in other ODL Universities permanent staff members are normally way less than the adjunct faculty.

### **Regarding teaching staff training:**

To date, the following two training courses are offered to teaching staff:

#### **1. Use of the University's eLearning Platform**

This course is offered asynchronously throughout the academic year and it is provided and supported by the University's ICT Unit. Its content includes: asynchronous platform, synchronous platform, video platform, plagiarism detection tools, and collaboration tools for teachers-staff interaction.

#### **2. Distance teaching, learning and assessment**

This course is provided by the University's Lab for Educational Material and Methodology (LEMM) and has a 13-weeks duration. Its objective is to inform OUC's teaching staff for the latest methods and practices regarding online teaching, learning and assessment. Moreover, it allows teaching staff to become familiarized with the synchronous and asynchronous collaboration and communication



tools provided in the eLearning Platform and procedures to develop interactive activities and suitable multi-format educational. Its content includes: theoretical models of adult learning and methods to design and measure learning outcomes, distance learning interactive assignments, how to create successfully video lectures, methods and techniques to engage students in the learning process, strategies to design suitable assessment methods and provide constructive feedback to students.

We ensure the Committee and the CyQAA that additional training courses will be developed and offered to the University's teaching staff in due time considering the limitations we currently have because of small number of administrative staff in the various departments (ICT and LEMM).

#### 4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

(ESG 1.4)

##### Findings

\* Because this institution of higher education is an open university, its philosophy is to accept all students who have obtained their high school diploma or the equivalent thereof, who are computer-literate, and have an adequate command of English (in addition to the language of instruction, which is Greek). There are no entry exams as, for instance, in the Greek higher educational system. This vision is clearly and unequivocally implemented, and these admission rules are pre-defined and published online. Access policies, admission processes and criteria are implemented consistently and in a transparent manner. The admission requirements are clearly stated on the ELPOL Programme's website as well:

##### **ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS**

- Certificate of Secondary Education ('Apolytirion') or equivalent.
- Competence in the use of computers and basic IT resources (Internet, email, etc.)
- Sufficient command of the English language is not mandatory, but it is considered necessary.

The same transparency holds true for the cost of the programme, and for the directions for prospective students on how to apply electronically: **APPLICATIONS:** Applications can be submitted only electronically, via the OUC website at <https://applications.ouc.ac.cy/admissions?sap-language=EN>.

\* As far as student progression is concerned, again in line with the philosophy of an open university, students can progress through the programme at their own pace. The shortest possible course of study is four years, the longest is twelve years, but personal circumstance (e.g. employment or medical conditions) and/or caring responsibilities are taken into consideration as mitigating

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circumstances in cases where an extension is requested. Staff and faculty members are on hand to help explain the course of study, which is also posted online (under 'programme structure'). Another important aspect of student progression is assessment. Again, pre-defined and published regulations are in place, and are clearly communicated to the students. The breakdown of assessment rubrics across modules is consistent, and thus easy for students to comprehend. The same holds for the marking criteria, especially for the student essays. The written essays, for instance, require access to an extensive bibliography. The essays are a critical assessment area of all modules, and every effort is made to ensure that students have adequate access to library and other study resources.

\* Student recognition: The main source of student recognition is the feedback from the module teachers, and the gift of their extremely close attention and care. We did not encounter any other forms of student recognition. The students with whom we spoke were very satisfied with what they had gained from the various modules and also from their close contact with the instructors. The end result of satisfactory student progression is, of course, the degree and the continuing support of the

instructors when it comes to endorsing student applications for jobs, for instance, with recommendation/acknowledgement letters. Our work as committee members for the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education is another way to bring recognition of student achievement to the ELPOL Programme. Ideally, however, OUC itself could make some prize money available that would be earmarked for academic achievement and would be entirely merit-based.

Student certification: Standardized procedures for students to achieve the learning outcomes and gain proper certification are in place.

### **Strengths**

The ELPOL Programme delivers on the OUC's mission to admit all students who meet the above-stated minimum requirements, and it does so with transparency and user-friendly online processes. This means that ELPOL can play to its strengths of attracting students from all walks of life and of all ages and backgrounds. The evaluation committee members enjoyed having the opportunity to meet with four students who could be qualified as 'mature' students, for being older than the average undergraduate students at other universities. They were students with jobs and families and each one of them stressed the programme's compatibility with their demanding schedules. They also emphasized how they were clearer, later in life, about what they wanted to gain by pursuing the ELPOL Programme of study, and they stressed factors of self-fulfilment as well as opportunities to advance their careers (e.g., while working in the civil service or educational sector). Because of its openness, ELPOL's vision and online format can respond flexibly to the needs of students in a variety of professional sectors, such as the culture industry (organizations, museums, cultural services, etc.), tourism, education, etc.—as its website justifiably claims:

<https://www.ouc.ac.cy/index.php/en/studies/programs/studies-degrees-bachelor/studies-degrees-bachelor-ell>

As far as student progression is concerned, the modules are assessment-heavy. This means: plenty of processes and tools are in place in each module, and also across modules, to monitor student progress. By way of a diversified range of assessment tools (typically two essays, carefully graded; interactive exercises; and one final exam), the instructors deliver feedback all throughout the module, allowing students to adjust their trajectories once their modules are underway. Students are provided with ample opportunities to act on the various forms of feedback and assessment data. Student recognition: strengths: strong support from the instructors, also in the students' future endeavours.

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

\* OUC's webpages are occasionally a bit slow to load and may be in need of a general upgrade. The delays in loading may be a function of maintenance efforts or may have other causes, but we trust that the website and learning platforms are closely monitored to avoid any problems of access.



\* As far as student progression is concerned, assessment is a huge part of the teaching of the modules. The assessment load (especially when pertaining to the student essays) is very labour-intensive, especially in those modules that fill up with many students.

\* Student recognition: areas for improvement: see our recommendation about prize competitions above.

## **OUC RESPONSE**

### **Regarding student recognition:**

The Open University of Cyprus is a public university and state-funded by approximately 50% of its budget. Prize awards are granted to graduates of a number of programmes who have secured the highest marks in their class. These are awarded during the University's Graduation Ceremonies each year and are sponsored by public and private institutions. The University is considering strategies to attract additional funding so as to provide scholarships and additional awards for students' achievements based on their merit.

### **Regarding assessment-related workload**

The University is currently reviewing the possibility of employing teaching assistants. Moreover, the members of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences recently submitted a package of further awards and salary improvements for the Adjunct personnel to the Human Resources Office and this issue too is under review by the university's governing bodies.

## 5. Learning resources and student support (ESG 1.6)

### Findings

Many of the paragraphs above have already covered our findings here. The evaluation committee members want to reiterate that OUC has great expertise in e-learning and covers all the technical resources needed for that purpose. They recommend that OUC continues to play to these strengths. Two units at OUC, in addition to a help-desk service, bear the responsibility for extending training skills and providing support to teachers and students regarding e-learning issues.

### Strengths

Activities and materials necessary for e-learning are incorporated and accessible in all courses of the ELPOL Programme.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

OUC has concrete plans for developing the training courses in e-learning offered to its teachers. But, since technology used for educational purposes as well as ICT in general are changing very fast, a plan for recurring revisions of these resources and training courses is necessary. Also, OUC webpages and active links will need to be at their best at all times.

## **OUC RESPONSE**

As previously mentioned, the University is currently offering two training courses to teaching staff, a) on the use of the University's eLearning Platform, and b) on Distance teaching, learning and assessment methods and practices. We ensure the Committee and the CyQAA that additional training courses will be developed and offered to the University's teaching staff in due time considering the budget and human resources limitations we currently have.

## 6. Additional for doctoral programmes

(ALL ESG)

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## 7. Eligibility (Joint programme)

(ALL ESG)

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## B. Conclusions and final remarks

### I. Features of Good Practice

- \* In conclusion, the EEC was very impressed with both the quality and the strengths of the ELPOL Programme at the OUC, as presented during the evaluation process.
- \* The ELPOL Programme teaches its contents not as separate entities but as a cohesive, multi-dimensional, and interdisciplinary subject.
- \* This Bachelor's Programme meets all the requirements outlined by the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency in their Guidelines for Accreditation document.
- \* The teaching and learning processes offered by the ELPOL Programme are student-oriented, research-based, and for Distance Learning, in line with international guidelines and expectations. Additionally, they are flexible qua delivery, method, organization, and feedback.
- \* The ELPOL Programme is structured with clarity and transparency and provides for a smooth and logical progression in the students' academic trajectory. In the first two years, compulsory core modules orientate students across a broad range of subjects, and they assist students to become familiar with university studies and scholarly expectations. In the third and fourth year, students choose from a large number of more specialized but elective modules.
- \* The ELPOL Programme participates in and promotes the Erasmus+ and Erasmus mundus programmes. Thus, it broadens the students' horizons and adds to the internationalization of the student experience.
- \* The ELPOL Programme's Internal Quality Assurance Committee system is robust and follows best practices.

### II. Recommendations

- \* It is essential that the OUC lend its full and unwavering support to the Humanities and in particular to the very committed ELPOL Programme. We strongly recommend that the OUC offer three more permanent appointments to the programme in study topics that are in high demand.
- \* We recommend that the OUC makes money available centrally for merit-based student recognition (prizes). The same could be done for faculty recognition.
- \* We further suggest that the ELPOL Programme encourage students who are not working to participate in the Erasmus+ exchanges and apply to spend a semester at another European university.
- \* We recommend that the ELPOL Programme be allowed to create a 4th-year 'independent study' or 'capstone' module that will recognize the very rich backgrounds and connections of many of ELPOL's students (see above p. 8, the grey-shaded paragraphs). Ideally, then, the final-year student could design a plan for independent learning on an excavation, in a museum, high school, foundation, theatre group, film crew, etc., and report back on this independent work to an academic supervisor at ELPOL. The module could require the compiling of a portfolio documenting the student's work and could be graded pass/fail, in its experimental phase. The students would be earning the recognition of outsiders to the university as well as of their instructors and peers (when

giving presentations of their work at the end of the semester). The students interviewed liked this idea a lot.

\* We highly encourage the OUC and the ELPOL Programme to thus introduce excavation experience and field methodology in the History-Archaeology-Art pathway, taking advantage of the opportunities for fieldwork and museum studies practice with which Cyprus and Greece present the students. The same holds true of other specialized topics that could be covered by the venue of the independent study elective: the addition of subjects such as: «The development of the Greek Script», «The Byzantine Background to the Italian Renaissance», etc.

An alternative route is to add these subjects as formal modules, which may result in 24 modules offered by the ELPOL Programme with 10 ECTS each, for a total of 240 ECTS. Alternatively, too, students might avail themselves of the (elective) opportunity to prepare an essay (Διπλωματική) of not more than 5.000 words on a topic of their own interests, relevant to the ELPOL's Programme's curriculum and under the guidance of a (compensated!) instructor. The successful end result could then be mentioned as a supplement to their B.A. degree.

## OUC RESPONSE

Firstly and importantly, we would kindly like to express our gratitude to the External Evaluation Committee (EEC), both for the constructive comments during our online meeting and evaluation, and for the detailed feedback, recommendations and acknowledgement of our Programme's success and strong elements.

Based on the feedback provided, the academic team of the Programme and the University's Quality Assurance Office worked to address in this Response the points raised by the Committee aiming at further improving the Undergraduate Programme in "Studies in Hellenic Culture", which is offered in Greek (240 ECTS). Under each heading (1. Study Programme, 2. Student-centered learning /teaching/assessment, 3. Teaching staff, 4. Student admission/progression/recognition/certification, and 5. Teaching and Learning Resources) we believe we address all issues raised by the EEC.

Regarding the concluding recommendations made by the Committee:

- The need for additional faculty in the Humanities will be reviewed in the context of the University's overall Strategic Plan, as the OUC is a public University and all permanent academic staff positions (Lecturers, Assistant Professors, Associate Professors and Professors) need to be approved by the competent Ministries of Education and Finance. The University will continue to put pressure on the competent Ministries of Education and Finance for additional permanent academic and administrative staff positions in critical areas, such as instructional design.
- The University will seek additional funding and means to provide additional scholarships and awards for merit-based student recognition. For adjunct faculty, the University has an internal process for Quality – Teaching Awards (non-monetary though).

- The University's Mobility Office is providing assistance to students interested in Erasmus+ Mobility Exchanges, not only for the ELPOL Programme, but for all OUC students. Our Programme has been engaged in both incoming and outgoing student and staff exchanges both within the EU and with third countries.
- The Committee's final recommendations to a) create a 4<sup>th</sup> year independent study or 'capstone' module, and b) to introduce more practical elements, such as field work and museum studies practice have been addressed in the First Section of this Response Report.

In closing, the Open University of Cyprus and the Academic Team of the B.A. Programme in "Studies in Hellenic Culture", would like to thank the external evaluation committee (EEC) for the very positive reception of our Bachelor degree. The remarks, suggestions and recommendations of the EEC were very constructive and thoughtful, significantly supporting our efforts to restructure the Programme in the best possible way. We are looking forward to a positive decision by the CYQAA regarding the accreditation of a programme that is being offered since the 2007-2008 academic year, with regular revisions, as per the recommendations of the EEC.



**C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives**

| <i>Name</i>                                | <i>Position</i>                                      | <i>Signature</i> |
|--|--|------------------|
| Associate Professor Georgios Deligiannakis | Academic Coordinator                                 |                  |
| Associate Professor Antonis Petrides       | Dean of the Faculty of Humanities                    |                  |
| Professor Yannis Manolopoulos              | Chair of the Internal Quality Assurance Committee    |                  |
| Erato Ioanna Sarri                         | Coordinating Officer of the Quality Assurance Office |                  |
| Click to enter Name                        | Click to enter Position                              |                  |
| Click to enter Name                        | Click to enter Position                              |                  |

**Date:** 31/05/2021





