

Doc. 300.1.2

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Higher Education Institution's Response

E-Learning Programme of Study

Date: Date

- Higher Education Institution:
Frederick University
- Campus: Distance Learning
- School: Education and Social Sciences
- Department / Sector: Education
- Programme(s) of study under evaluation
Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)

Programme

In Greek: Εκπαίδευση για την Αειφόρο Ανάπτυξη και Κοινωνική Αλλαγή (3 εξάμηνα, 90 ECTS, Μάστερ (MSc), Εξ αποστάσεως)

In English: Education for Sustainable Development and Social Change (3 semesters, 90 ECTS, Master (MSc), Distance Learning)

Language(s) of instruction: Greek / English

Programme's Status: Currently Operating

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.300.3.1) must justify whether actions have been taken in improving the quality of the department 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 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. 300.3.1).*
- *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)

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

Areas of improvement and recommendations

1.1 *The quality assurance scheme is very comprehensive but might also invite bureaucracy and lead to obligatory routines. The program will need to find a good balance between reflexivity and constructive dialogue between stakeholders in the program and accountability*

Quality assurance processes and templates ensure the accountability and documentation of quality, engaging faculty and students. Additionally, regular meetings with students (1-2 during the semester) and the graduates (with the end of their studies) are part of this process in order to support a constructive dialogue and reflexivity about the program's delivery.

1.2 *While the shift to systemic change, social change, inclusivity and empowerment makes the program unique, there is a risk that the ecological-environmental aspect might be lost a bit. The committee recommends keeping a good balance.*

The ecological – environmental aspect is included in the core introductory course on SD issues and the SDGs. This course includes an analysis of key concepts of environmental sciences: ecosystem (structure, organisation and operation, carrying capacity, complexity, limits), biochemical cycles, natural resources management, ecological footprint and scrutinises SD issues related to environmental issues (e.g. pollution, greenhouse effect and climate change, environmental quality, land ecosystems etc). Sustainable development issues and the SDGs are addressed throughout the rest of the courses in a systemic way, which inevitably will

establish connections not only with the social and economic aspects of SD issues, but also with the environmental aspects – addressing all three pillars of SD.

For example, the compulsory course 503 (Empowering Citizens through Competence based Education for Sustainable Development) addresses ESD competences and appropriate pedagogical techniques through the context of SDGs (including of course examples of ecological / environmental issues). The elective course 507 (Education for Sustainable Development through Literature and Drama / Theatre) addresses environmental issues in the context of contemporary plays. The same course includes the evaluation of literary texts as learning resources in the context of education for sustainable development with the help of Ecocritism's, Ecopoetics' and Ecocritical Pedagogy's concepts and criteria. Similarly, course 511 (Values and Education for Sustainable Development) specifically emphasizes environmental ethics and dilemmas that environmental ethics are called to deal with and settle. Elaboration and analysis of environmental ethics theories such as animal liberation, biocentrism, deep ecology and eco-feminism is also included, and the welfare of future generations of people and the welfare of future generations of animals, ecosystems and the biosphere, within the framework of SD are discussed.

1.3 *The study load seems acceptable but the committee found the ambitions in terms of learning outcomes and reading load a bit high. Some courses seemed to have too many learning outcomes, more than could realistically be achieved in 10 credits, in others the suggested assessments were too diluted which suggests over assessment, or were not authentic reflections of the learning outcomes. The committee recommends revisiting, reducing and prioritizing the learning outcomes in those courses and to make sure that the once selected and agreed upon can be assessed adequately (see also, section 3).*

All courses have been revised by the faculty and the learning outcomes have been reduced as per the Committee's recommendations (see Annex 1). Assessment assignments have been examined for relevance with the learning outcomes and reconsidered in terms of workload and extend. In courses where the assessment tasks were numerous these were revised into a more manageable (for the students) number. A peer review of the courses has been conducted as well, so as to ensure that the concerns of the committee have been addressed in the changes made.

1.4 *The research-orientation of the program is a strength as long as 'research' can also be design-oriented and activity-based, so as to avoid a conventional gap between research and practice.*

The Thesis guide, and the equivalent course descriptions have been updated as per the Committee's recommendation (see Annex 1) to include design-oriented and activity-based theses. Applied research is also an option already included in the scope of the Masters Thesis.

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

Sub-area		Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant
2.1	Process of teaching and learning and student-centred teaching methodology	Compliant
2.2	Practical training	Compliant
2.3	Student assessment	Compliant
2.4	Study guides structure, content and interactive activities	Compliant

Areas of improvement and recommendations

2.1 *Apart from learning together in the online classes, further opportunities for international experiences for the distance learners could be explored, e.g. by inviting international visiting experts (virtual internationalization).*

The Department invites Visiting Professors from abroad as collaborating academic staff in order to enrich the profile of the programme with their specialized knowledge and expertise. Specifically, Dr Evgenia Flogaitis, from the Kapodistrian University of Athens, is engaged in the delivery of DLSESC501 Sustainable Development Issues, Principles and Goals.

Similarly Dr. Liarakou from the Aegean University (and now in Kapodistrian University, Athens) will be engaged in the DLSESC503 *Empowering Citizens through competence-based Education for Sustainable Development*.

Nelly Kostoullas-Makrakis from the University of Crete will be engaged in the delivery of DLSESC510 Addressing inequalities for SD.

Further on, if necessary we can rely for Guest speakers or lecturers, on our numerous distinguished collaborators, in international research programmes, whose fields of specialization can enhance our courses on topics such as transformative learning, competence based ESD, whole institution approaches for ESD, visual arts education and ESD, etc.

2.2 The committee believes that in order to attract international students to an English-language based online MSc Masters on ESD, also in light of more of such programs arising worldwide, will be to identify a specific niche that builds upon the expertise and history of the program but also on the topics chosen in relation to regional, Mediterranean qualities and conditions. The niche could be the inter- and transdisciplinary approach that includes the humanities, arts-based approaches, values and ethics and the natural sciences, but also its focus on capacity-building, competence development, social change and empowerment. Profiling, having a clear identity and marketing will be essential for attracting sufficient students.

We appreciate the committee's suggestion that the program's inter- and transdisciplinary approach that includes the humanities, arts-based approaches, values and ethics and the natural sciences, and its focus on capacity-building, competence development, social change and empowerment could constitute the niche upon which we could build our program's profiling and identity as a marketing strategy for attracting sufficient students. This is already taken into account for the preparation of the program's marketing strategy which would be launched after the Program's accreditation.

Supportive to our marketing and promotion efforts is the overall governmental policy for establishing Cyprus as an Educational and Research Center is developing specific actions for promoting Cyprus universities and programs in the international market. Our university uses these opportunities for the promotion of the program in the international market. Profiling also will evolve around the committee's suggestion for presenting Frederick University as a unique international academic institution that will bring talented international students together who can benefit from the expertise of staff, the conducive learning environment Frederick University provides, and the vivid transdisciplinary research in sustainability and education. Furthermore, Frederick University is an associate member of EU-Conexus European University for Smart Urban Coastal and Sustainability network; ([Link](#)), as well as the Cyprus SDSN network ([Link](#)) which provides further opportunity to internationalize the program further.

3. Teaching staff

(ESG 1.5)

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

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- 3.1 *The department staff to participate regularly in the CPD offer provided by the distance learning center*

The University has identified that there is a need for a systematic communication and training on staff in a wide variety of matters. To this end, the University Council has established the Professional Development Center (Professional and Personal Development at Frederick - PDF) at the University that is explicitly responsible for developing a policy ([Link](#)) and schedule for training and professional development for staff in an organized manner.

This center constitutes of a few smaller committees with specific mission and goals. For example, one committee is responsible for CPD on strengthening staff's pedagogical skills, another committee has the mission to empower staff in addressing SDGs within their teaching practice and gradually making the SD dimension more visible in the university's operations. The DL support center is now under this broader coordinating body for professional development. These committees have been activated since spring semester 2021 and will start delivering centrally CPD to Frederick University's faculty and administrative staff as of Fall 2021.

Based on the outcomes of the needs' analysis conducted in the past semester, some of these trainings – especially the ones related to the University's mission and strategic planning, will be mandatory for the staff.

3.2 Staff to participate in development to enhance skills in accessing and using Moodle learning analytics to good effect

The University gives great emphasis on the online interaction, the use of advanced technologies, the use of data analytics and the integration of innovative and alternative assessment practices mainly for continuous assessment. It also aims to take advantage of the full affordances of the online platform. It acknowledges the need and has been continuously working towards enhancing and updating its processes and educational material. There is a firm intention from the University to move in this direction. Consequently, to further promote the aforementioned, the Centre for Professional and Personal Development has already developed a professional development action plan in regards to the workshops/trainings/courses to be offered during the following academic year. Some of the workshops / trainings to be provided focus on the use of Moodle and its tools (activities and resources), Moodle interface and the advanced use of Moodle (i.e data analytics, use of H5P), as well as the use of other equipment, hybrid classrooms and Virtual Computer Labs. Along with the trainings, the Open and Distance Learning Center of the University will continue to pedagogically and technically support the DL instructors in regards to course design and delivery and educational material development. The DL Instructors' Induction Course focuses also on learning analytics, Moodle resources and activities as well as advanced tools in Moodle.

3.3 Staff to develop skills to promote improved user interface design with Moodle

Please refer to answer 3.2

3.4 The institution to create badging or awards to recognise participation in further participation in distance learning/ teaching development activity

The EEC's recommendation has been adopted. In fact, starting this academic year, the University has established the 'Teaching Excellence Awards', an initiative with the goal of acknowledging best practices and encouraging DL instructors to strive for excellence in teaching. Concretely, as per the decision of the University Council in its 100th meeting, Frederick University has established a number of awards in memory of its Founder, Michael

Frederickou. The awards aim to highlight actions that promote the key values of the Founder and of the University, as expressed in the University's core mission pillars. The Michael Frederickou Teaching Excellence Awards (as mentioned above) are among the most prestigious awards and are awarded via nomination by colleagues or self-nomination. The Evaluation Committee comprises the School Deans, the Vice Rector of Academic Affairs and the President of Frederick University Council. During this year's graduation ceremony, awards for good practices and teaching excellence in distance learning programmes have been given ([Link](#)).

Regardless this awards scheme, people attending a training will be awarded with a document verifying their participation – as a qualification for CPD, administered by the university.

3.5 *The team to peer review the course descriptions using a constructive alignment framework. Ask the questions - are all learning outcomes achievable and how do they translate to assessment criteria and assessment formats*

The programme team has reviewed their course descriptions and reconsidered learning outcomes, assessment methods and volume of key readings and overall literature. The questions: "are learning outcomes achievable, how do they translate to assessment criteria and formats..." were given to the faculty as guide to their revision of their course. After the first revision, courses were peer reviewed (critical friends) amongst the program staff and finalized. The new CIP files are attached with this document (see **Annex 1**).

3.6 *Staff to consider running a TESTA audit to get an overview of assessment burden on students*

As a TESTA aims to present a picture of how students experience assessment across the programme so that the team can discuss patterns of over assessment, bunching of assessment, varieties of assessment, amount and quality of feedback, timeliness of feedback etc. a TESTA audit will be conducted upon the programme's accreditation and operation.

3.7 *The team to critique the notion of student centred learning Vs sustainability – a good start to this would be to read Silova, Komatsu, and Rappleeye (2021)*

We understand the Committees' concern on the student-centred approach and the critique it receives of its ability to reproduce and reinforce ontological individualism, which, in turn, is one potential cause of our inability to move toward sustainability. Ontological individualism is the assumption that “the individual is prior to society” and therefore represents “a primary reality”. This assumptive reality is in place prior to any cognitive or epistemic reflection. According to the recommended literature (see point 3.5: Silova, Komatsou, Rappleeye 2021) ontological individualism views society as something that “comes into existence only through the voluntary contract of individuals trying to maximize their own self-interest”, thus leading to a range of social, economic, and cultural institutions that both reflect and re-create this worldview. Ontological individualism valorises “autonomy and self-reliance”, even to the point of denying that anything exists beyond the individual.

The student-centered approach at Frederick University is not interpreted in the terms of ontological individualization but rather concerns how we treat our students and reflects the support they receive during their studies by the faculty and the university community, as well as their role and initiative in their education.

Our educational ideal, is not an individualistic one, but we aspire to promote the humanist ideal in education, which aims to the gradual development of the persons as spiritual beings and harmonious personalities embracing their self-existence as individuals (αυθύπαρκτος – innate predisposition of humans), their totality (development of all their spiritual functions), and universality (integration of all basic elements of human culture as part of a broader community). The humanist philosophy does not neglect the learners' identity and individual needs but at the same time it does not ignore the fact that the individual is also member of a greater social totality, establishing thus a balance between the “me” and the “we”.

4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

(ESG 1.4)

Sub-area	Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant
4.1 Student admission, processes and criteria	Compliant
4.2 Student progression	Compliant
4.3 Student recognition	Compliant
4.4 Student certification	Compliant

Areas of improvement and recommendations

4.1 *The committee encourages to make the admission process more interactive and revealing by adding an interview component and a task, prospective students would need to carry out that would help the programme in deciding who to admit to the program. The assessment of digital literacies should be documented in the admission process*

The admission criteria already request the submission of a document prepared by the candidate (expression of interest). This as explained to the candidates by our admissions officers, is a document where they present their prior experiences with the masters' context, explain their interest and motivation, what they expect to gain and how they expect to use this degree.

Candidates are also encouraged to submit any other relevant qualifications, work or publications, conference attendance certificates or presentations they might, have relevant to the master for which they apply.

Interviews with the candidates are up to the program's committee to decide to conduct. It is evident that if the number of candidates is larger than the number of students the program can admit, and all candidates fulfill the other admission criteria, then an interview will be conducted in order to assist and document the selection of admitted students.

The list of prerequisite digital literacy and equipment that the student should have available in order to participate and be an active member of the program include:

- Access to reliable broadband internet
- Computer with camera and microphone capacity
- Ability to send and receive emails and files
- Ability to operate within a web digital environment such as the learning platform
- Ability to manage word-processing, presentation and other basic office application functions.

A questionnaire that assess student digital literacy has been developed based on relevant literature. The students are expected to complete the questionnaire. Based on their responses, various trainings and support sessions are organized. Please check Annex 2 – Digital Literacy Questionnaire.

The admission requirements are listed on the University's website ([Link](#)). Please note that as the programme is submitted with a revised title, the website will be updated after the accreditation, as per the CYQAA guidelines.

5. Learning resources and student support

(ESG 1.6)

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

There are no serious issues related to the overall DL course development and student support systems. Here are just a few general and minor recommendations:

- 5.1 *Nowadays there is a tendency in DL, online education and MOOCs to get learners away from their screens. This may sound contradictory but the general idea being here that students can do investigations and research on their own in and on their own daily conditions, places and spaces, the process and outcomes of which they can then share online. This leads to more hybrid and varied forms of learning. The program could consider looking into the possibility of doing so as well.*

One of the pillars of the Pedagogical Framework developed and implemented by the DLC, is the online interactive activities. Part of the online interactive activities (either weekly exercises or graded assignments) are the asynchronous activities, where the students are expected to work on their own (i.e study materials, conduct investigations and research and then develop reports/ and or share their findings and experiences from their daily routines in discussion forums and blogs). Asynchronous, hybrid and differentiated forms of learning are part of the teaching and learning experiences provided to our students.

5.2 Since more and more digital media and tools are also applied in face-to-face settings, faculty training in the use of digital media for teaching and course development should be coordinated and offered by one central unit. Given the rapid growth of distance learning and the high workload in this area to provide professional student and faculty support services, the university should consider investing more resources into the ODLC.

Please refer to answer 3.1 and 3.2

5.3 The opportunities that learning analytics afford to implement an early warning system for students at risk could be exploited more systematically. Student data should be fed back to the Learning Support Unit and used to provide proactive student support, guidance and counselling

Part of DL Instructor's responsibilities is to check and evaluation students' attendance and participation using the data learning analytics provided at Moodle. There is a quality assurance mechanism established and implemented in order for the DL instructor to communicate with the student after 5 days of non-participating or attending any kind of activity within the course website. Additionally, the DL Instructors get also information from the learning analytics in regards to what educational materials the students download and view in each course. The data collected from learning analytics help and guide the DL instructors to personalize and adjust their materials and teaching strategies accordingly. In order to further promote and enhance the use of learning analytics the University is planning to organize workshops/trainings that include related themes, i.e. the use of Moodle and its tools (activities and resources), Moodle interface and the advanced use of Moodle (i.e data analytics, use of H5P)

5.4 Furthermore, it could be considered to use more open educational resources and textbook

The Distance Learning Pedagogical Framework calls for the use of more Open Educational Resources and the DL Instructors are encouraged to integrate such sources in their courses.

This was addressed during the revision of the key readings and additional readings of our course descriptions (See **Annex 1**).

6. Conclusions and final remarks

This is an innovative and timely MSc program that likely will gain traction in the coming years as nations and regions will need to find responses, including education ones, to emerging global sustainability crises. The program is supported by highly qualified staff and nested in a healthy university environment with excellent support structures. Students are given space of input in the program and are involved in the extensive quality assurance mechanism that has been created. The committee finds that the program is compliant in all EQF indicator areas covered in this document.

Apart from learning together in the online classes, further opportunities for international experiences for the distance learners could be explored, e.g. by inviting international visiting experts (virtual internationalization) and considering more hybrid forms of Distance Learning.

The committee believes that in order to attract international students to an English-language based online MSc Masters on ESD, also in light of more of such programs arising worldwide, will be to identify a specific niche that builds upon the expertise and history of the program but also on the topics chosen in relation to regional, Mediterranean qualities and conditions. The niche could be the inter- and transdisciplinary approach that includes the humanities, arts-based approaches, values and ethics and the natural sciences, but also its focus on capacity-building, competence development, social change and empowerment. Profiling, having a clear identity and marketing will be essential for attracting sufficient students.

Firstly, we would like to sincerely thank the External Evaluation Committee for their hard work, the constructive discussions held during the virtual visit, and the valuable recommendations made for improving our proposed program. We are particularly happy that the EEC has identified that the proposed program is innovative and supported by highly qualified staff in a healthy University environment with excellent support structures and is compliant in all EQF indicator areas.

In relation to the recommendations made by the EEC, we believe we have taken the necessary actions and have fully adopted them, as evident from our responses in sections 1 to 5 of this response.



We are looking forward to the positive decision by the Cyprus QAA and are eager to commence running the program from the coming academic year.



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CYPRUS AGENCY OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION



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B. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

Name	Position	Signature
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Prof. George Demosthenous Rector

