Doc. 300.1.2

Higher Education Institution's Response

Date: 29/03/2023

- **Higher Education Institution:**
University of Nicosia

- **Town: Nicosia**

- **Programme of study**
Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)

In Greek:

Συστήματα Μετασύμπαντος (1*-1.5 έτη, 90 ECTS, Μάστερ, Εξ Αποστάσεως) [* = Επιλογή μεταπτυχιακής διατριβή]

In English:

Metaverse Systems (1*-1.5 years, 90 ECTS, Master of Science, E-Learning) [*=Thesis option]

- **Language(s) of instruction: English**

- **Programme's status:** New

- **Concentrations (if any):**

In Greek:-N/A
In English: N/A

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

A. 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 300.1.1/1 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. The answers' documentation should be brief and accurate and supported by the relevant documentation. Referral to annexes should be made only when necessary.*

- *In particular, under each assessment area and by using the 2nd column of each table, the HEI must respond on the following:*

    - *the areas of improvement and recommendations of the EEC*
    - *the conclusions and final remarks noted by the EEC*

- *The institution should respond to the EEC comments, in the designated area next each comment. The comments of the EEC should be copied from the EEC report **without any interference** in the content.*

- *In case of annexes, those should be attached and sent on separate document(s). Each document should be in *.pdf format and named as annex1, annex2, etc.*

Dear EEC,

We want to thank you sincerely for thoroughly evaluating and providing feedback on our proposed MSc program in Metaverse Systems. Your recommendations have been valuable and constructive, and we appreciate the time and effort you spent reviewing our program.

We have taken into consideration your recommendations and have responded by outlining the actions we have taken to address and meet each of the areas for improvement and recommendations proposed by the EEC members. Among other things, we have redesigned, restructured, and renamed the program, as well as revised and better aligned the learning objectives.

1. Study programme and study programme's design and development

(ESG 1.1, 1.2, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9)

Areas of improvement and recommendations **by EEC**	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
1. Currently there is no specific policy of review process of the programme to include the external stakeholders' input in a formal context. It is recommended to specify a policy with a target to have the programme review panel and aim on reviewing the curriculum. The industry external advisors (given the innovative area of Metaverse applications) should have an active role in the reviews since the role of the courses needs to be more strategic in the context of Metaverse in consideration of the current expectations of employers in the sector.	We recognize that we may not have provided sufficient clarity on this matter. As illustrated in slide 18 of our presentation delivered during the EEC visit, our new MSc program undergoes a rigorous design, approval, monitoring, and review process. This process actively solicits input and ideas from various external entities, such as our Metaverse advisors, students, graduates, external collaborators, and the broader metaverse and blockchain community. To ensure that the program reflects the latest industry trends and best practices, our program development committee maintained frequent communication with these stakeholders and incorporated their feedback into the program's design and course offerings. Additionally, we adhered to all formal procedures defined by the University, as documented in Annex 6 of our application, to ensure the program's compliance and quality. In addition, we consulted with the above stakeholders regarding the EEC review and, with their assistance, we restructured our program and content.	
2a. It is not clear how the actual student workload is in accordance with the workload expressed by ECTS.	2a. We thank the reviewers for bringing this point to our attention. In response to your comment, we have revised the study guides to ensure greater clarity for our students. We have added a table outlining the workload distribution for each course. We follow the international standard that considers 1 ECTS equivalent to 25 hours of study time. Please note that in each course syllabus and study guide we have added a table that shows the breakdown of the workload as below:	

<table>
<tr>
<td>2b. There is no clear plan incorporating students into faculty research activities.</td>
<td>
Table 1: Student study effort expected
<table>
<tr><th>Student Study Effort Expected</th><th>Hours</th></tr>
<tr><td>Lectures</td><td>12h</td></tr>
<tr><td>Assignments</td><td>80h</td></tr>
<tr><td>Interactive activities and forum participation</td><td>20h</td></tr>
<tr><td>Reading and research</td><td>135h</td></tr>
<tr><td>Exam</td><td>3h</td></tr>
<tr><td>Total</td><td>250h</td></tr>
</table>

2b. Thank you for your comment regarding the incorporation of students into faculty research activities. We appreciate the opportunity to clarify that the Department of Digital Innovation (DDI) has a clear plan for incorporating students into its research activities. As evidence, we would like to share with you a list of current or ex-students who have worked on various research activities since 2020, as follows:
• Alexis Nicolaou (Block.co (UNIC spin-off))
• Andreas Vlachos (Researcher, teaching assistance)
• Demetris Tseas (Researcher, training manager, MOOC support)
• Evgenia Kapassa (Researcher, teaching assistant)
• George Agathangelou (Block.co (UNIC spin-off))
• Irenee Dondjio (Researcher, teaching assistant)
• Katerina Ramountzaki (Researcher, MOOC support)
• Lambis Dionysopoulos (Researcher, teaching assistant, MOOC support)
• Leonidas Katelaris (Researcher, teaching assistant, MOOC support)
• Marios Touloupos (Researcher, teaching assistant)
• Rachel Cardoso (Researcher)
• Stamatis Papangelou (Researcher, teaching assistant, MOOC support)
• Enrico Zanardo (Researcher, teaching assistant)

In addition, our students have the chance to participate in the activities of our DLRC research center, as well as our annual global conference "Decentralized," which is attended by more than 1300 delegates from industry and academia. We believe that these activities offer our students a unique opportunity to interact with people and researchers from our space.

Furthermore, the DDI has established and maintains a network of 35+ chapters around the globe where our students and other members from our ecosystem participate.
</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The link between learning outcomes and assessment could be further enhanced.</td>
<td>In response to the reviewers' comment, we have revised and improved both the learning outcomes and assessment methods. In addition we added the following table in each course syllabus and study guide.

Table 2: Assessment Methods in alignment with intended learning outcomes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td></td><td>
<table>
<tr><th rowspan="2">Assessment Method</th><th rowspan="2">Weighting</th><th colspan="4">Intended Learning Outcomes to be assessed</th></tr>
<tr><th>LO1</th><th>LO2</th><th>LO3</th><th>LO4</th></tr>
<tr><td>Interactive activities</td><td>15%</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td></tr>
<tr><td>Assignments</td><td>25%</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td></tr>
<tr><td>Exams</td><td>60%</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td></tr>
</table>
</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>4. The programme is not clearly designed with an application focus and an intention to integrate theory and practice.</td><td>Based on the reviewers' comment we have redesigned and revised our MSc program and its content to provide a better integration between theory and practice. For examples the program is incorporating more hands-on and project-based learning opportunities. We have also enhanced case studies, simulations, and group projects, allowing students to apply the knowledge and skills they've gained in a practical context. Moreover, we are planning to offer internships which will further assist in integrating theory with practice.</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>5. The University is encouraged to keep applying for recognized external accreditations to evaluate the quality assurance of its programmes.</td><td>The School of Business is committed to providing high-quality education and is currently undergoing the rigorous process of obtaining recognized external accreditations such as AACSB and EQUIS. These accreditations serve as a testament to the School's academic excellence, and demonstrate our ongoing dedication to meeting the highest standards in business education.</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>6. The EEC recommends that student representation is formally placed in the internal quality review process (including meetings) at all times. The scope of this review should include an analysis of the learning outcomes of the program to identify who are the exact intake of prospective applicants and the content of each course regarding the market needs in Metaverse Systems. If an industry and/or student representative is not present, the meeting should not take place.</td><td>We share the same view as the reviewers regarding the representation of students in the internal quality review process. In the development of this program, our student Evgenia Kapassa participated in the meetings. Moving forward, we intend to continue this practice to assess and improve the program once it has been launched.
Additionally, we followed all formal procedures defined by the University, as documented in Annex 6 of our application, to ensure compliance and quality of the program.</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>7. The thesis component should be compulsory as it is unclear with the current curriculum, if a student opts to not take the thesis component, how the Learning Outcome No8 will be achieved.</td><td>The learning outcome 8 seeks to "Exhibit such skills that are required to participate in research and development work or to independently work in other qualified areas as well as be able to continue studies towards a doctoral degree.". We believe that while requiring a master's thesis can be beneficial, it may not be the only way to meet the learning outcomes that exhibit the skills required to participate in research and development work or to independently work in other qualified areas, as well as being able to continue studies towards a doctoral degree.</td><td></td></tr>
</table>

	Although a master's thesis provides an excellent opportunity for students to demonstrate their research skills and ability to work independently, we suggest considering alternative assessment methods, such as course projects, assignments, case studies, literature reviews, software development, or presentations, which can also achieve the same learning outcomes. Moreover, students who opt not to undertake a master's thesis can still pursue a doctoral degree. In addition and in accordance with the internal policy of the University of Nicosia regarding Masters theses and according to the practice followed by the Cypriot universities (we note that there is no national requirement by any law/policy for a compulsory thesis), the thesis is elective in Master-level programmes and thus the MSc in Metaverse abides by this policy to offer flexibility that responds to the needs of the market and to our students' pedagogical needs for a broader professional development. For example some students prefer to take additional courses that will further support the development of academic skills instead of Thesis. We note that an important number of our students are mature and experienced practitioners, who choose to enrol in our programme to get a broader scope of knowledge through a number of different areas in the field of Metaverse offered within our electives, rather than through the implementation of research on one topic of specialisation. Nonetheless, recognising the value of the thesis element and the significant immediate and long-term benefits associated with completing a Master's-level dissertation, the programme faculty has committed itself to more strongly encouraging students to opt for the thesis option. We also aim to encourage them to opt for the thesis option through student mentoring and advising.	
8. The alignment of some courses with the Metaverse theme is not clear. For example, the topics covered by the META525DL Interactive Design seem geared towards artistic interactive installations with unclear connections to how these physical installations could be experienced through the Metaverse. Similarly, COMP523DL Game Programming seems a classical game development unit and does not seem to establish a clear connection with games for the Metaverse.	We are grateful to the reviewers for their valuable feedback, which has enabled us to enhance the quality and relevance of our courses. As a result of their comments, we have made some significant changes to our offerings: • We have replaced the course COMP523DL, with a new course called "Metaverse Game Development." This course has been designed specifically to address the reviewers' feedback and provide students with up-to-date skills and knowledge in this rapidly evolving field. • We have redesigned the course "Interactive Design" to incorporate new topics from UX and UI, among other areas. We believe that this course now better aligns with the needs of our students and the demands of the industry, and we are excited to see how it will be received. Overall, we feel that the changes we have made are a testament to our commitment to delivering high-quality education that prepares our students for success in the Metaverse.	

9. In general program focus within the list of compulsory courses is on Blockchain and only some courses are on Metaverse development skills. For clarification purposes Blockchain is used to establish decentralized network of virtual worlds and 3D spaces known as Metaverse. Anyone can utilize the user-friendly Metaverse platform to build their own virtual world or 3D environment. It is a place where people can connect in all facets of their lives. NFTs are digital assets on a blockchain, while Metaverse is an online virtual world where users can explore and interact with each other. Each has its own set of benefits and drawbacks, but they both provide an opportunity for people to express themselves digitally in unique ways. The EEC recommends for the institution to consider the two different routes in terms of the title of the program and the content of the curriculum depending on what the learning outcomes are and what the targeted markets the graduates will be employed upon graduation. The following changes are recommended based on the choice of the title of the MSc program:	Thank you very much for your constructive feedback. Based on it, we have made several changes to the structure and content of the program, which we would like to bring to your attention. Before doing so, we would like to re-emphasize that the proposed MSc degree will be offered by the School of Business, not by the School of Engineering or Computer Science. Therefore, our main objective has been to provide students with a holistic foundation to the Metaverse, which is a very broad and diverse domain that requires a variety of skills and competencies beyond technical ones. Some of the most in-demand metaverse skills include 3D modeling and design, VR/AR development, blockchain/NFT, data skills, project management, marketing, communication, creativity, collaboration, etc[1]. With the above guiding principle, and considering your valuable feedback, we propose an alternative title for our program that reflects our focus on a holistic approach to Metaverse education, while allowing students to specialize either in technological or in managerial aspects. We therefore suggest “MSc in Metaverse” with two thematic areas: “Metaverse Management” and “Metaverse Development” that clearly differentiate between alternative learning paths for our students. Based on this structural change, we made corresponding changes in the structure and content of the curriculum, as per your recommendations. The revised program is presented in Table 3. Table 3: MSc in Metaverse - revised program **MSc in Metaverse** **Compulsory courses** **Code** | **Course Title** | **Semester** | **ECTS** META511DL | NFTs and the Metaverse | 1 | 10 META512DL | Metaverse Technologies and Applications | 1 | 10 META513DL | Open Web Architecture and Digital Assets | 1 | 10 META514DL | Extended Reality | 2 | 10 META515DL | Virtual World Architectures | 2 | 10 META516DL | Social, Legal and Ethical Issues in the Metaverse | 2 | 10 **Elective courses** **Course Title** | **Semester** | **ECTS** **Thematic Area 1: Metaverse Management** META521DL | Metaverse Entrepreneurship | 3 | 10 META522DL | Metaverse Token Economics | 3 | 10 META523DL | Emerging topics in the Metaverse | 3 | 10 META524DL | Virtual Economies in the Metaverse | 3 | 10 META525DL | Data Science for the Metaverse | 3 | 10 **Thematic Area 2: Metaverse Development** META526DL | Virtual and Augmented Reality Development | 3 | 10 META527DL | User Experience and Interactive Design | 3 | 10 META528DL | Smart Contract Programming for Metaverse Applications | 3 | 10 META529DL | Metaverse Game Development | 3 | 10 **Other electives if no thematic area is selected** META551DL | Master Thesis | 3 | 30 The justification of the above changes is as below:	

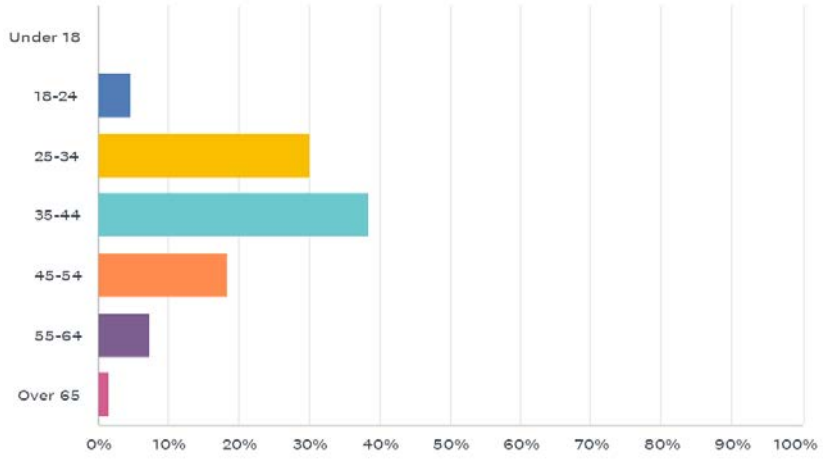
[1] See, for example, The Most In-Demand Metaverse Skills Every Company Will Be Looking For (forbes.com) and Embracing The Metaverse: What New Skills Will Businesses Need To Succeed? (forbes.com)

• *"Option 1: MSc in Metaverse Applications: The curriculum currently with the choices of compulsory and elective courses is an MSc for Blockchain specialization. EEC recommends to make sure that the design of the program addresses the basic knowledge and processes needed for the Metaverse applications. Hence, depending on the background of the student intake there can be two different streams under this MSc title, with compulsory courses on Metaverse and 3D development skill set, which can then lead to one of the two following streams, depending on the choice of specialisation the student selects:* o *Stream 1: Metaverse development (specialised elective courses should reflect specialisation).* o *Stream 2: Blockchain application in Metaverse (specialised elective courses should reflect specialisation).*	• It has been decided that our program does not currently offer a comprehensive course on Metaverse applications and technologies. As a result, the course "Blockchain Systems and Architectures" will be replaced with "Metaverse Technologies and Applications". This new course will be mandatory and aims to enhance students' knowledge and understanding of these relevant fields. • Following the recommendation of the EEC, two thematic areas are introduced to the program: (a) "Metaverse Management" and (b) "Metaverse Development". The elective courses will be reorganized accordingly. To comply with the EEC comments, courses that overlap with other programs are replaced with new ones that better align with the program's goals. Therefore, the courses "Game Programming", "Smart Contracts Programming", and "Token Economics" are substituted with "Metaverse Game Development", "Smart Contracts Programming for Metaverse Applications", and "Metaverse Token Economics". This new set of electives is Metaverse-specific and is expected to enhance students' knowledge of these topics. • To accurately reflect their content, we rename "Web 3.0 Architecture and Digital Assets", "Monetizing Digital Creativity" and "Virtual Economies" to "Open Web Architecture and Digital Assets", "Metaverse Entrepreneurship" and "Virtual Economies in the Metaverse", respectively. • In line with the EEC recommendations, the content of the course "Interactive Design" is revised to include UX design. Consequently, the course title is amended to "User Experience and Interactive Design". The aforementioned changes will enhance the program's curriculum and ensure that it remains relevant to the evolving Metaverse technological landscape.	

Option 2: MSc in Blockchain for Metaverse Applications: The curriculum currently with the choices of compulsory and elective courses is an MSc for Blockchain specialization and several courses should be included on UX design and a skillset for the development of Metaverse applications. The academics have a strong background and included an adequate number of courses in terms of the Blockchain curriculum in the current courses offerings		
10. EEC completely understands that adding heavy programming skills requirements might frustrate some of the students who want to focus on the applications of the Metaverse . At the same time it is important to add some essential competence on Metaverse development, such competence will not frustrate students who want to focus on the usability part and at the same time will allow some students to gain an essential metaverse-development knowledge.	As the program is offered by the School of Business, we have decided not to introduce compulsory programming courses. Our decision is based on data from the MSc in Blockchain and Digital Currency program, which indicates that such courses would likely frustrate most students and increase the dropout rate. In fact, only one-sixth of our students choose to enroll in programming courses. We believe that our proposed program restructuring strikes a good balance between different types of courses. The core courses cover important areas related to the Metaverse and provide a solid foundation on which students can further develop their skills. Depending on their interests and career goals, students can then choose to take more specialized courses in Metaverse development or management. Overall, we are confident that this approach will give our students the best possible education and prepare them for success in the fast-changing world of digital business.	

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

Areas of improvement and recommendations **by EEC**	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
11. An improvement would direct a larger percentage of students, if not all, towards writing a Master's thesis and bring together the knowledge gained from the modules taken.	We appreciate EEC feedback and will encourage our students to undertake a Master thesis. In accordance with the internal policy of the University of Nicosia regarding Masters theses and according to the practice followed by the Cypriot universities (we note that there is no national requirement by any law/policy for a compulsory thesis), the thesis is elective in Master-level programmes and thus the MSc in Metaverse abides by this policy to offer flexibility that responds to the needs of the market and to our students' pedagogical needs for a broader professional development. For example some students prefer to take additional courses that will further support the development of academic skills instead of Thesis. We note that an important number of our students are mature and experienced practitioners, who choose to enrol in our programme to get a broader scope of knowledge through a number of different areas in the field of Metaverse offered within our electives, rather than through the implementation of research on one topic of specialisation. Nonetheless, recognising the value of the thesis element and the significant immediate and long-term benefits associated with completing a Master's-level dissertation, the programme faculty has committed itself to more strongly encouraging students to opt for the thesis option. We also aim to encourage them to opt for the thesis option through student mentoring and advising.	
12. Placement and internship were not available when discussed with the program team. These are crucial and students can take advantage of the rich research and professional networks that the University participates in. A challenge might be to support DL students to benefit from such opportunities.	We understand that there may have been a lack of clarity regarding this matter and we appreciate the EEC members' feedback on the importance of internships for students. While we agree that internships can be a valuable learning experience, we would like to clarify that most students in this program are likely to be mid to upper-level career professionals from various industries. Our data from the "NFTs and the Metaverse" MOOC shows that 95.3% of our students are over 25 years old, and 66.3% over 35 years old. The students are coming from 193 different countries. Figure 1 shows the distribution of students' age. Figure 1: MOOC students' age	

	 In light of this, introducing "traditional" internships to the program may present challenges that are not practically feasible. Since our students are located around the globe, arranging internships for them would be a complex task. Furthermore, many of our students are already employed, making it difficult for them to participate in internships. To address these challenges, we are exploring the development of a Metaverse-based internship initiative. Through this initiative, UNIC aims to invite Metaverse companies from around the world to offer virtual internships to students. This will provide students with valuable opportunities to gain industry experience and enhance their skills in a cutting-edge environment.	
13. A week-by-week structure of the curriculum to be made visible in the VLE and to be available to the students before the program starts.	We would like to express our gratitude to the reviewers for their comment. As stated in slide 24 of our presentation delivered during the EEC visit, the materials will be made available to the students prior to the commencement of the program, as it is a standard practice followed by our institution.	

3. Teaching staff
(ESG 1.5)

Areas of improvement and recommendations **by EEC**	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
14. The panel recommends in terms of the new area of the Metaverse a formal induction of all staff involved needs to be provided. The EEC recommends for the department to establish a 3-5 recruitment plan to anticipate needs of increased student intake, to have the resources for the programme to achieve the strategic objectives.	In regard to the formal induction of our staff, please be advised that our academic faculty has already completed 40 hours of relevant training. Additionally, in 2022, we created a Discord channel exclusively for the Metaverse, where both our staff and members of the community participate and exchange their views and updates. With the above we ensure that our faculty members are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to deliver a high-quality educational experience to our students. In terms of the recruitment plan, we have carefully considered the projected student numbers and have estimated that in Year 2, we will recruit 2 additional faculty members to support the program. The detailed financial analysis based on three scenarios (Conservative, Moderate, and Optimistic) that we have provided in our application (pages 26-28) demonstrates that we have taken into account the anticipated needs of increased student intake. Furthermore, we have already added Dr. Ariana Polyviou to our faculty. Dr. Polyviou is an Assistant Professor at the School of Business, University of Nicosia, and has significant expertise in the area of Metaverse. Her research outputs in Metaverse include 2 journal articles, 2 conference papers, 1 journal special issue, and 1 conference track. In case the student numbers exceed our estimates, we will reassess the situation and take additional measures accordingly to ensure that our program achieves its strategic objectives.	
15. Although the department has a rich portfolio of research projects, the EEC did not observe a clear synergy between the research and the teaching within the new program offered.	Although we recognize that we may not have adequately conveyed this interconnection, we wish to emphasize that there is a clear synergy. To begin with, UNIC is the coordinator of a 4€ million Marie Curie project on Metaverse Business and Social Value. We seek to recruit 16 PhD students and generate research outputs that will undoubtedly be converted into teaching material. In particular, the research that will be produced by this project may support multiple courses of the program such as "Social, Legal and Ethical Issues in the Metaverse", "Metaverse Entrepreneurship", "Virtual Economies in the Metaverse" etc. The UNIC META-U applied research project has made significant progress in Metaverse education. Specifically, the project is concentrating on building the UNIC Metaverse campus and has already been utilized to provide the first-ever on-chain course in the Metaverse. The course was launched in the Fall of 2022 and had an impressive enrollment of 22,500 students. The project has already published some of its research findings, with more expected to come. This showcases how the META-U project is	

	successfully merging research and theory to create a practical Metaverse educational environment for our students, and this clearly demonstrates synergy between our research and teaching. Our research in EUBOF project resulted in the publication of a report on Metaverse that covers various areas including Metaverse applications, typologies, use cases etc. Clearly, the report can be used as teaching material within the new program. We are also participating in the NEOLAiA-European Universities Alliance, where we will lead the work package for Metaverse and digital transformation in a 14.4€ million research proposal. NEOLAiA will generate additional research outputs that will be used as teaching material in our MSc program. Moreover, our research in Blockchain, digital currencies, and NFTs supports the Metaverse Decentralization and the Metaverse Economy layers and thus it is used in the courses of our curriculum. The limitations of traditional Metaverse platforms, such as the limited ownership and usage of virtual items or the lack of interoperability, are being addressed by blockchain-based Metaverse platforms, which enable decentralized ownership and management of virtual assets, providing a high degree of transparency, security, immutability, and interoperability. These have an impact on the design and implementation of Metaverse applications such as games. In addition to these, the study guides (reported in Annex 2 of our application) include numerous research works published by the faculty which demonstrates the synergy between research and teaching. For example in the areas of AR,VR,XR there are 18 faculty research works listed as teaching material. Last but not least, our team has run tracks or minitracks on Metaverse in conferences like HICSS 2023, HICSS 2024, EMCIS 2022, EMCIS 2023, MCIS 2023. We are also organizing ECIS 2024 conference in Cyprus and we will offer two minitracks and one industry event on Metaverse. All these generate research works that can be used by our MSc and demonstrate a synergy of our research and teaching activities.	
16. In terms of gender balance, the EEC recommends the self assessment process through the Athena SWAN award (https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/equality-charters/athena-swan-charter).	We value your input and suggestion regarding gender balance in our MSc in Metaverse. At UNIC, we focus on gender balance and diversity and have established the Centre of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion to address such matters. We will inform the Centre about your recommendation and initiate a discussion on this topic.	
17. The University has good incentives in place	We appreciate your recognition of UNIC's incentives for high-quality research publications, and we fully agree that maintaining a balance	

for increasing the output of high-quality research publications. A balance needs to be achieved however, in order to make sure that faculty continues to have incentives, motivation and time to innovate also on the pedagogical/teaching side.	between research and teaching is crucial for the success of our faculty and students. At UNIC, we are committed to providing our faculty members with the necessary resources and support to innovate on the pedagogical/teaching side. To achieve this balance, we have implemented various initiatives, such as regular training and professional development opportunities, a supportive environment for the development of new teaching methodologies, and feedback mechanisms to ensure that our faculty's efforts in teaching are recognized and valued. These initiatives are run by our Pedagogical Support Unit (PSU) and e-Learning Pedagogical Support Unit (ePSU), which play a continuous and important role in teaching and learning at UNIC. In terms of Metaverse pedagogy, we would like to draw your attention to our response to EEC recommendation 15, which highlights our work on the development and testing of a new way of delivering courses on-chain in the Metaverse through our META-U project. This project represents an innovative approach to teaching in the Metaverse and has already yielded impressive results, with 64% of META-U participants expressing a preference for taking their online courses within META-U over other e-learning platforms.	

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

Areas of improvement and recommendations **by EEC**	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
18. To attract larger numbers of students, it may be helpful to actively promote and advertise the positive outcomes and high potential of the existing MOOC, although a clear definition of the new program title and its objectives need to be presented for the applicants to have clear expectations on the subject of study (please refer to Section 1).	Thank you for your suggestion. Please be informed that our marketing department in collaboration with the DDI will be responsible for promoting and advertising the new MSc program. We are happy to report that more than 250 participants from our MOOC have already expressed interest in pursuing an MSc in Metaverse. Furthermore, we have found that 56% of our MOOC students learned about the course through Twitter.	
19. Moreover, it is recommended for the students to have access to the results of the course and program evaluation, including actions taken in response to the program evaluation results.	We will certainly take this recommendation into consideration and bring it to the attention of the Senate for discussion as decisions for faculty assessment are taken by the Senate.	
20. The institutional strategy needs to define the position of the department and institution within the educational market for a program in Metaverse and the program's place internationally to attract EU and non-EU students, which is likely to increase students' intake.	We thank you for this recommendation. We will begin discussions at the Departmental, School, and University levels. We are working with the University to create a detailed marketing and positioning plan for our new program. This plan will highlight the program's unique value proposition, clearly outline its objectives and learning outcomes, identify the target audience and their specific needs, and consider the competitive landscape. Additionally, it will include strategies for attracting both EU and non-EU students, such as developing partnerships with other organizations in the field, offering scholarships or financial incentives, and promoting the program through targeted marketing campaigns.	

5. Learning resources and student support
(ESG 1.6)

Areas of improvement and recommendations **by EEC**	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
21. The range of technologies available to DL students needs to be revisited and reviewed to ensure that it is on a par with the technologies and setup offered to on campus students. The DL experience should be broadly similar including equivalent tools and online learning environments in Metaverse. Given the remote delivery of the program, the EEC recommends the provision of the appropriate hardware for students' access to Metaverse.	To align with this recommendation, we will offer to our e-learning students the same headset (e.g. Meta Quest 2 headset) used by our on-campus students and we will grant them remote access to our lab computers and software. In doing so, the experience will be the similar.	
22. Even though support services for students with special needs and mental services do exist, it seems that students are not entirely aware of what is available and how they can utilize it. There needs to be better communication from this perspective and make sure that all students are aware of how they can get support.	We will consult with the UNIC Centre of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion to address these concerns and improve our communication with students regarding this matter. Additionally, all pertinent information will be posted on both the program's and the Department's website.	
23. The School needs a rigorous process of data collection in terms of reviewing the pipeline and year on year alumni of the students and not	Thank you for your suggestion. We are planning to discuss this issue with the School and suggest ways to improve the whole process like: • conduct regular surveys (e.g. once per year), • use social media to keep in touch with our alumni (e.g. utilize platforms like LinkedIn to stay connected with them and track changes in their employment status and profession) and	

to rely on the alumni services with data 18 months post graduation.	• utilize data analytics tools to analyze the information we collect from them. This will help us to identify trends and patterns in their employment status and profession, and make informed decisions based on this data.	
24. Furthermore, a formal induction on Metaverse is required for both students and staff involved in the MSc.	Regarding the staff induction, we have addressed this in our response to EEC recommendation 14. As for student induction, we already offered a pre-course induction for our MOOC. Moreover, following the EEC suggestion and will prepare relevant material for students to attend induction session.	
25. The Department should continue to periodically assess (every year) the adequacy and suitability of resources and inform the responsible services of the University for their actions given the target of steady increase of the student intake year on year for this program.	We would like to express our gratitude to the reviewers for their suggestion. As you may have observed during your visit, UNIC is well-organized and fully prepared to provide exceptional service to our students. Prior to launching the program, we invested hundreds of thousands of euros in constructing our physical labs and developing our META-U platform. We are committed to continuing these efforts and taking all necessary measures to accommodate the increasing number of students.	

6. Additional for doctoral programmes

(ALL ESG)

Areas of improvement and recommendations **by EEC**	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY

7. Eligibility (Joint programme)

(ALL ESG)

Areas of improvement and recommendations **by EEC**	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY

B. Conclusions and final remarks

Conclusions and final remarks **by EEC**	Actions Taken by the Institution	For Official Use ONLY
Conclusions and final remarks are the same as above.	Please refer to our responses provided for the recommendation 1-25 in Section A.	

C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

Name	*Position*	*Signature*
Professor Angelika Kokkinaki	Dean of School of Business	
Professor Soulla Louca	Head of Department of Digital Innovation	
Professor Marinos Themistocleous	Programme coordinator	

Date: 29/03/2023

5 Lemesou Avenue, 2112, Nicosia
T: + 357 22 504 340
F: + 357 22 504 392
e-mail: info@dipae.ac.cy