

Doc. 300.1.1/2

Date: Date.

External Evaluation Report (E-learning programme of study)

- **Higher Education Institution:**
NEAPOLIS UNIVERSITY PAFOS
- **Town:** PAFOS
- **School/Faculty (if applicable):** School of Social Sciences, Arts & Humanities
- **Department/ Sector:** Department of History, Politics & International Studies
- **Programme of study- Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)**

In Greek:

Μεταπτυχιακό στις Διεθνείς Σχέσεις, τη Στρατηγική και την Ασφάλεια (MSc) (Εξ Αποστάσεως)

In English:

Master of Science (MSc) International Relations, Strategy (Distance / 1,5 years/ 90 ECTS)

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

In Greek: Concentrations

In English: Concentrations



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. Introduction

This part includes basic information regarding the onsite visit.

The onsite visit of the EEC took place on 4 March 2024 from 9.00h till 18.35h. The current report was written by the EEC members on 5 March 2024 from 9.00h till 17.00h.

B. External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>University</i>
Prof. Luis Lobo-Guerrero	Chair	Groningen University
Prof. Annika Björkdahl	Member	Lund University
Prof. David Galbreath	Member	University of Bath
Prof. Santi Caballe Llobet	Member	Open University Catalunya
Mr Alexandros Evgeniou	Student	Open University Cyprus

C. Guidelines on content and structure of the report

- *The external evaluation report follows the structure of assessment areas.*
- *At the beginning of each assessment area there is a box presenting:*
 - (a) *sub-areas*
 - (b) *standards which are relevant to the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)*
 - (c) *some questions that EEC may find useful.*
- *The questions aim at facilitating the understanding of each assessment area and at illustrating the range of topics covered by the standards.*
- *Under each assessment area, it is important to provide information regarding the compliance with the requirements of each sub-area. In particular, the following must be included:*

Findings

A short description of the situation in the Higher Education Institution (HEI), based on elements from the application for external evaluation and on findings from the onsite visit.

Strengths

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

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

- *The EEC should state the compliance for each sub-area (Non-compliant, Partially compliant, Compliant), which must be in agreement with everything stated in the report. It is pointed out that, in the case of standards that cannot be applied due to the status of the HEI and/or of the programme of study, N/A (= Not Applicable) should be noted.*
- *The EEC should state the conclusions and final remarks regarding the programme of study as a whole.*
- **The report may also address other issues which the EEC finds relevant.**

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

Sub-areas

- 1.1 Policy for quality assurance**
- 1.2 Design, approval, on-going monitoring and review**
- 1.3 Public information**
- 1.4 Information management**

1.1 Policy for quality assurance

Standards

- *Policy for quality assurance of the programme of study:*
 - *has a formal status and is publicly available*
 - *supports the organisation of the quality assurance system through appropriate structures, regulations and processes*
 - *supports teaching, administrative staff and students to take on their responsibilities in quality assurance*
 - *ensures academic integrity and freedom and is vigilant against academic fraud*
 - *guards against intolerance of any kind or discrimination against the students or staff*
 - *supports the involvement of external stakeholders*

1.2 Design, approval, on-going monitoring and review

Standards

- *The programme of study:*
 - *is designed with overall programme objectives that are in line with the institutional strategy and have explicit intended learning outcomes*
 - *is designed by involving students and other stakeholders*
 - *benefits from external expertise*
 - *reflects the four purposes of higher education of the Council of Europe (preparation for sustainable employment, personal development, preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies, the development and maintenance, through teaching, learning and research, of a broad, advanced knowledge base)*
 - *is designed so that it enables smooth student progression*
 - *is designed so that the exams' and assignments' content corresponds to the level of the programme and the number of ECTS*
 - *defines the expected student workload in ECTS*
 - *includes well-structured placement opportunities where appropriate*
 - *is subject to a formal institutional approval process*

- *results in a qualification that is clearly specified and communicated, and refers to the correct level of the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area*
- *is regularly monitored in the light of the latest research in the given discipline, thus ensuring that the programme is up-to-date*
- *is periodically reviewed so that it takes into account the changing needs of society, the students' workload, progression and completion, the effectiveness of procedures for assessment of students, student expectations, needs and satisfaction in relation to the programme*
- *is reviewed and revised regularly involving students and other stakeholders*

1.3 Public information

Standards

- *Regarding the programme of study, clear, accurate, up-to date and readily accessible information is published about:*
 - *selection criteria*
 - *intended learning outcomes*
 - *qualification awarded*
 - *teaching, learning and assessment procedures*
 - *pass rates*
 - *learning opportunities available to the students*
 - *graduate employment information*

1.4 Information management

Standards

- *Information for the effective management of the programme of study is collected, monitored and analysed:*
 - *key performance indicators*
 - *profile of the student population*
 - *student progression, success and drop-out rates*
 - *students' satisfaction with their programmes*
 - *learning resources and student support available*
 - *career paths of graduates*
- *Students and staff are involved in providing and analysing information and planning follow-up activities.*

You may also consider the following questions:

- *What is the procedure for quality assurance of the programme and who is involved?*
- *Who is involved in the study programme's design and development (launching, changing, internal evaluation) and what is taken into account (strategies, the needs of society, etc.)?*
- *How/to what extent are students themselves involved in the development of the content of their studies?*
- *Please evaluate a) whether the study programme remains current and consistent with developments in society (labour market, digital technologies, etc.), and b) whether the content and objectives of the study programme are in accordance with each other?*
- *Do the content and the delivery of the programme correspond to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)?*
- *How is coherence of the study programme ensured, i.e., logical sequence and coherence of courses? How are substantial overlaps between courses avoided? How is it ensured that the teaching staff is aware of the content and outputs of their colleagues' work within the same study programme?*
- *How does the study programme support development of the learners' general competencies (including digital literacy, foreign language skills, entrepreneurship, communication and teamwork skills)?*
- *What are the scope and objectives of the foundation courses in the study programme (where appropriate)? What are the pass rates?*
- *How long does it take a student on average to graduate? Is the graduation rate for the study programme analogous to other European programmes with similar content? What is the pass rate per course/semester?*
- ***How is it ensured that the actual student workload is in accordance with the workload expressed by ECTS?***
- *What are the opportunities for international students to participate in the study programme (courses/modules taught in a foreign language)?*
- *Is information related to the programme of study publicly available?*
- *How is the HEI evaluating the success of its graduates in the labor market? What is the feedback from graduates of the study programme on their employment and/or continuation of studies?*
- *Have the results of student feedback been analysed and taken into account, and how (e.g., when planning in-service training for the teaching staff)?*
- *What are the reasons for dropping out (voluntary withdrawal)? What has been done to reduce the number of such students?*

Findings

- The EEC found that in general terms the overall programme objectives are in line with the institutional strategy and have explicit learning outcomes.

- The information that was provided in the documentation prior to the visit combined with the overall discussions and presentations during the visit demonstrated that the University has a strong understanding of its student body and an awareness of the ways in which quality assurance operates.
- The EEC was impressed with the engagement with stakeholders, namely security agencies, when designing the curriculum and teaching activities. However, when exploring the characteristic identity markers of the MSc in relation to similar programs in Europe, the EEC found that the distinctive features of the programme could be defined, and developed more clearly. It was stated, for example, that the geopolitical characteristics of Cyprus were part of this identity. Yet, students commented that more could be done around this issue.
- Progression of students along the programme was found to follow a logical structure that could, however, benefit from a modernisation of the curriculum to include various aspects of security studies and more emphasis on more contemporary approaches to International Relations, in particular with regards to bibliography.

1.3 Public information

The information in the documentation provided an understanding and awareness of the overall structure with regard to the nature of the selection criteria, pass rates, graduate learning opportunities, and the qualification being awarded. There was an understanding of the alignment with learning outcomes.

1.4 Information Management

The EEC was impressed with the management information systems in place for quality assurance and standards. However, information on Key Performance Indicators for the programme were not provided in advance. They were again requested during the site visit and were not received by the EEC.

The EEC were given information relating to the way in which student feedback is collected and processed according to University policies. However, it was not possible to compare student feedback across courses to appreciate how it works in practice. Some qualitative information was provided during the visit through one specific course, which the EEC found to be outstanding. However, it was not clear how feedback fed into the programme's overall quality enhancement approach.

Students demonstrated a strong satisfaction with their overall courses and this seems to be influenced by the positive staff student ratios.

The EEC were impressed by the learning resources that were available, both in terms of the teaching spaces and the investment that was visible such as in relation to the use of new technologies for teaching and learning purposes. The Committee were impressed by the learning resources in the library and the access to wider electronic journal and book resources that students and staff could access.

The University takes great pride in the overall career progression of its students. The EEC were informed of the high employability rate that many students had. However, this needs to be viewed within the context that many of the students were already in employment.

Strengths

- The overall design of the MSc in International Relations, Strategy and Security benefits from interdisciplinarity including international law, strategic studies, international political economy, and international relations.
- The MSc programme benefits from external contributions that enhance the student and staff experience. This includes the positive collaborations as demonstrated by the signing of Memorandums of Understanding with the University of Buckingham and Haifa University.
- The EEC found that students are generally satisfied with the program and with the pastoral support provided.
- The EEC was satisfied with the understanding of the local student market and the development of Erasmus partnerships.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

- The EEC found that including recent epistemological trends in the study of International Relations, and widening the agenda of security studies, to include, for example, the varieties of critical security studies, will benefit the formation and future employability of students.
- The EEC found that more emphasis on research methodologies would allow the programme to enhance the sustainable employment of its students towards allowing them to encompass a wider variety of phenomena in their analysis.
- The EEC had concerns with the level of criticality encouraged amongst students. For example, the MSc programme on International Relations and Security learning outcome refers to a 'basic understanding' and the Committee considered that this could potentially be presented in a more advanced manner. Critical engagement from the start of the programme would be desirable.

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

Sub-area		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
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

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

Sub-areas

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

2.2 Practical training

2.3 Student assessment

2.4 Study guides structure, content and interactive activities

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

Standards

- *The e-learning methodology is appropriate for the particular programme of study.*
- *Expected teleconferences for presentations, discussion and question-answer sessions, and guidance are set.*
- *A specific plan is developed to safeguard and assess the interaction:*
 - *among students*
 - *between students and teaching staff*
 - *between students and study guides/material of study*
- *Training, guidance and support are provided to the students focusing on interaction and the specificities of e-learning.*
- *The process of teaching and learning supports students' individual and social development.*
- *The process of teaching and learning is flexible, considers different modes of e-learning delivery, where appropriate, uses a variety of pedagogical methods and facilitates the achievement of planned learning outcomes.*
- *Students are encouraged to take an active role in creating the e-learning process.*
- *The implementation of student-centered learning and teaching encourages a sense of autonomy in the learner, while ensuring adequate guidance and support from the teacher.*
- *Teaching methods, tools and material used in teaching are modern, effective, support the use of modern educational technologies and are regularly updated.*
- *Mutual respect within the learner-teacher relationship is promoted.*
- *The implementation of student-centred learning and teaching respects and attends to the diversity of students and their needs, enabling flexible learning paths.*
- *Appropriate procedures for dealing with students' complaints regarding the process of teaching and learning are set.*

2.2 Practical training

Standards

- *Practical and theoretical studies are interconnected.*
- *The organisation and the content of practical training, if applicable, support achievement of planned learning outcomes and meet the needs of the stakeholders.*

2.3 Student assessment

Standards

- *A complete assessment framework is designed, focusing on e-learning methodology, including clearly defined evaluation criteria for student assignments and the final examination.*
- *Assessment is consistent, fairly applied to all students and carried out in accordance with the stated procedures.*
- *Assessment is appropriate, transparent, objective and supports the development of the learner.*
- *The criteria for the method of assessment, as well as criteria for marking, are published in advance.*
- *Assessment allows students to demonstrate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved. Students are given feedback, which, if necessary, is linked to advice on the e-learning process.*
- *Assessment, where possible, is carried out by more than one examiner.*
- *A formal procedure for student appeals is in place.*
- *Assessors are familiar with existing testing and examination methods and receive support in developing their own skills in this field.*
- *The regulations for assessment take into account mitigating circumstances.*

2.4 Study guides structure, content and interactive activities

Standards

- *A study guide for each course, fully aligned with e-learning philosophy and methodology and the need for student interaction with the material is developed. The study guide should include, for each course week / module, the following:*
 - *Clearly defined objectives and expected learning outcomes of the programme, of the modules and activities in an organised and coherent manner*
 - *Presentation of course material, and students' activities on a weekly basis, in a variety of ways and means (e.g. printed material, electronic material, teleconferencing, multimedia)*
 - ***Weekly schedule of interactive activities and exercises (i.e. simulations, problem solving, scenarios, argumentation)***
 - *Clear instructions for creating posts, discussion, and feedback*
 - *Self-assessment exercises and self-correction guide*
 - *Bibliographic references and suggestions for further study*
 - *Number of assignments/papers and their topics, along with instructions and additional study material*
 - *Synopsis*
- *Study guides, material and activities are appropriate for the level of the programme according to the EQF.*

You may also consider the following questions:

- *Is the nature of the programme compatible with e-learning delivery?*
- *How do the programme, the material, the facilities, and the guidelines safeguard the interaction between students, students and teaching staff, students and the material?*
- *How many students upload their work and discuss it in the platform during the semester?*
- *How is it monitored that the teaching staff base their teaching and assessment methods on objectives and intended learning outcomes? Provide samples of examination papers (if available).*
- *How are students' different abilities, learning needs and learning opportunities taken into consideration when conducting educational activities?*
- *How is the development of students' general competencies (including digital skills) supported in educational activities?*
- *How is it ensured that innovative teaching methods, learning environments and learning aids that support learning are diverse and used in educational activities?*
- *Is the teaching staff using new technology in order to make the teaching process more effective?*
- *How is it ensured that theory and practice are interconnected in teaching and learning?*
- *How is practical training organised (finding practical training positions, guidelines for practical training, supervision, reporting, feedback, etc.)? What role does practical training have in achieving the objectives of the study programme? What is student feedback on the content and arrangement of practical training?*
- ***Are students actively involved in research? How is student involvement in research set up?***
- *How is supervision of student research papers (seminar papers, projects, theses, etc.) organised?*
- ***Do students' assessments correspond to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)?***
- *How are the assessment methods chosen and to what extent do students get supportive feedback on their academic progress during their studies?*
- *How is the objectivity and relevance of student assessment ensured (assessment of the degree of achievement of the intended learning outcomes)?*

Findings

- Neapolis University Pafos (NUP) has within a relatively short period expanded its portfolio of programmes and now provides a BSc, a MSc and a PhD programme in International Relations and Security. The MSc requires 90 ECTS, including 60 ECTS course work and 30 ECTS thesis work.
- The EEC was provided with a vast number of documents, study guides, MSc-thesis, course descriptions relating to the structure of the proposed MSc programme in International Relations and Security but all were not necessarily of relevance to the evaluation. The programme follows a structure where all students take the same courses and as such there is no limited opportunities for students' to select courses based on their curiosity and interests. The programme concludes with a MSc thesis of 30 ECTS. The presentation of one

of the courses in the Msc programme provided an excellent example of the course curricula, the use of the online platform Moodle 3, and the student-centered approach to teaching and learning, clear assessments and deadlines for submissions, reading instructions as well as instructions for the various assignments.

- The EEC notes that the development of the course curriculum is at the discretion of the academic staff. No student evaluations were provided. Discussions with alumni and MSc students provided some insights to how the students perceived the teaching and learning. The students and teachers are receiving inhouse training to manage e-teaching and learning as well as the technological innovations available for variation in teaching and learning.
- The EEC finds the nature of the programme is compatible with distance learning delivery, and the methodology provided is appropriate for the specific programme of study.
- The university's learning management system, based on Moodle 3.11, supports basic online education and administration services. It features synchronous (via MS Teams) and asynchronous tools for student engagement with tutors and content. The system includes e-assessment options, such as quizzes with immediate feedback, to gauge student understanding. More complex e-assessment methods for skills, such as critical thinking, exist but were not presented during the meetings.
- Each course offers 6 hours of teleconferences/ online seminar (every 2 weeks, with a duration of about 2 hours each), ensuring sufficient live interaction between tutors and students. Teleconferences aim to crystalize the knowledge acquired previously by studying the materials and performing the weekly interactive activities, following the flipped classroom methodological approach. These teleconferences are recorded for those students unable to attend in real-time, though most students typically do.
- Collaboration between teachers and students, and among students, takes place synchronously via teleconferences and asynchronously through Moodle's online forums. Student collaboration is further encouraged through group work activities in small teams. However, the structure, process and technical support for these group activities are not formally defined, providing tutors and students with the flexibility to organize and manage groups autonomously.
- Formative course assessment includes a mid-term assignment that contributes to 20% of the final grade, providing personalized feedback during the course. The summative assessment comprises a mandatory final exam worth 60% of the grade. Course assessment also involves four graded interactive activities (5% each), which count for the remaining 20%, thus ensuring that students remain continuously engaged in the e-learning process.
- Despite a broad range of interactive activity types, such as jigsaw, wikis, presentations, group work and simulations, it was not clarified how they align with this specific programme. In addition, the tutor's formative feedback provided from these graded activities was general at the class level. Finally, optional non-graded interactive activities, such as formative self-assessment with indicative answers, in-class discussions and case studies, are included

weekly to help students self-evaluate their understanding and skills. All interactive activities come with detailed rubrics, outlining how students will be assessed and facilitating their learning from these evaluations.

Strengths

- The EEC believes that continually evaluating the quality assurance of distance learning by non-mandatory external accreditation organizations, such as EDEN, is a good practice. Therefore, the university is encouraged to keep applying for external accreditations (EFQUEL, EADTU, etc.) to evaluate the quality of its distance learning model.
- The EEC considers the university's distance learning model to be in line with the specific profile of online part-time students who have professional and family duties and need to learn effectively and in a timely fashion. The EEC notes that students benefit from a good student-teacher ratio (1:15) and student feedback is positive.
- The provision of personalized feedback in the submitted assignments and during the teleconference sessions, as well as the feedback based on rubrics, are considered best practices. In addition, the EEC recognizes the many benefits of collaboration among students promoted by collaborative activities and discussions organized in online teams. Finally, the very detailed weekly study guides, which allow the students to determine the work to be done every week, are also considered a best practice. The EEC urges the university to maintain these strong elements of their distance learning model while reinforcing them when possible.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The EEC recommends regular updates of course curricula and readings of the MSc programme.
- The EEC suggests enhancing the processes of formative assessment and feedback during the MSc thesis writing process.
- The EEC also recommends a study guide for the thesis writing and clear instructions in terms of criteria for assessment of MSc thesis as well as a transparent process of selection of MSc supervisors.
- The EEC urges the University to upgrade to Moodle 4 to improve the user experience with its cleaner and more intuitive interface. This upgrade would make navigation and content management more user-friendly for both tutors and students. Although the current version

is functional, it does not have the user-focused design of Moodle 4, which could greatly enhance the platform's ease of use and accessibility.

- The EEC noted students' comments on the lack of detailed formative feedback on certain assignments, which is essential for guiding student understanding and highlighting areas for improvement. Therefore, the EEC strongly advises providing more in-depth and specific feedback, and directly within the submitted documents, rather than separately on the platform, aiming to support more effective learning outcomes for students. In addition, a note was collected from the students regarding poor peer interaction during teleconferences, attributed to the fact that most participants keep their cameras off.
- The EEC recommends requiring all participants to have their cameras on during teleconferences to enhance peer contact and collaboration.
- Concerning the administration of online final exams, the EEC urges the university to carefully consider the implications of proctoring these exams. While ensuring academic integrity is crucial, it is also essential to stay abreast of the latest advancements in online examination technologies, which offer various methods to secure exams without compromising fairness or privacy for students. The committee suggests exploring innovative solutions that balance integrity with a positive final exam experience for all participants.
- The EEC has also identified a significant misunderstanding regarding the implementation of the flipped classroom methodology. Despite the intention to foster a more interactive and engaged online learning environment, the teleconferences following the pre-class work tend to resemble traditional lectures rather than the intended collaborative discussions. This discrepancy suggests a gap in both the execution of the flipped classroom model and in communicating its objectives and benefits to students. As a result, students have expressed unawareness and confusion about the methodology's application in their courses. To address this issue, the EEC recommends a two-fold approach: (i) to enhance training for tutors on the effective use of the flipped classroom methodology, ensuring they are equipped to facilitate dynamic and interactive sessions that fully leverage pre-class work; (ii) to improve communication with students about the expectations and advantages of the flipped classroom approach, helping them understand how it contributes to their learning process and how they can actively participate in these sessions.
- The EEC suggests the university prepares for potential challenges if attracting more international students across remote time zones, highlighting the importance of enhancing asynchronous online interaction and collaboration, while constantly adapting the distance learning model to meet their needs.

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

Sub-area		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
2.1	Process of teaching and learning and student-centred teaching methodology	Compliant
2.2	Practical training	Not applicable
2.3	Student assessment	Compliant
2.4	Study guides structure, content and interactive activities	Compliant

3. Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

Sub-areas

- 3.1 Teaching staff recruitment and development**
- 3.2 Teaching staff number and status**
- 3.3 Synergies of teaching and research**

3.1 Teaching staff recruitment and development

Standards

- *Institutions ensure the competence of their teaching staff.*
- *Fair, transparent and clear processes for the recruitment and development of the teaching staff are set up.*
- *Teaching staff qualifications are adequate to achieve the objectives and planned learning outcomes of the study programme, and to ensure quality and sustainability of the teaching and learning.*
- *The teaching staff is regularly engaged in professional and teaching-skills training and development.*
- *Training, guidance and support are provided to the teaching staff focusing on interaction and the specificities of e-learning.*
- *Promotion of the teaching staff takes into account the quality of their teaching, their research activity, the development of their teaching skills and their mobility.*
- *Innovation in teaching methods and the use of new technologies is encouraged.*
- *Conditions of employment that recognise the importance of teaching are followed.*
- *Recognised visiting teaching staff participates in teaching the study programme.*

3.2 Teaching staff number and status

Standards

- *The number of the teaching staff is adequate to support the programme of study.*
- *The teaching staff status (rank, full/part time) is appropriate to offer a quality programme of study.*
- *Visiting staff number does not exceed the number of the permanent staff.*

3.3 Synergies of teaching and research

Standards

- *The teaching staff collaborate in the fields of teaching and research within the HEI and with partners outside (practitioners in their fields, employers, and staff members at other HEIs in Cyprus or abroad).*
- *Scholarly activity to strengthen the link between education and research is encouraged.*
- *The teaching staff publications are within the discipline.*
- *Teaching staff studies and publications are closely related to the programme's courses.*
- *The allocation of teaching hours compared to the time for research activity is appropriate.*

You may also consider the following questions:

- *Is the teaching staff qualified to teach in the e-learning programme of study?*
- *How are the members of the teaching staff supported with regard to the development of their teaching skills? How is feedback given to members of the teaching staff regarding their teaching results and teaching skills?*
- *How is the teaching performance assessed? How does their teaching performance affect their remuneration, evaluation and/or selection?*
- *Is teaching connected with research?*
- *Does the HEI involve visiting teaching staff from other HEIs in Cyprus and abroad?*
- *What is the number, workload, qualifications and status of the teaching staff (rank, full/part timers)?*
- *Is student evaluation conducted on the teaching staff? If yes, have the results of student feedback been analysed and taken into account, and how (e.g., when planning in-service training for the teaching staff)?*

Findings

- From the meeting with the coordinator of the MSc programme, relevant administrative staff and with alumni and students from current courses, the panel agrees that the pre-defined and published regulations regarding student admission are in place and that access policies, admission processes and criteria are implemented consistently and in an institutionally transparent manner. The panel notes that information regarding student progression was given from the information pack and was shown during the meeting. We also recognise the pre-defined and published regulations regarding student progression are

in place. Processes and tools to collect, monitor and act on information on student progression, are further in place.

- Fair recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, are essential components for ensuring the students' progress in their studies, while promoting mobility.
- Students receive certification explaining the qualification gained, including achieved learning outcomes and the context, level, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed.
- The university has a DL unit that provides training for distance learning in terms of seminars, mentoring and technical support to faculty members from the different university's departments. Faculty members can participate in training programs to enhance their skills for conducting high-quality online teaching. These training programs are certified as professional development pertaining to distance learning. to enter text.

Strengths

- Staff have obtained high standing doctoral degrees and have had international experience in education and/or employment.
- Evidence shows the important role of teaching staff in programme development, student advising and learning achievements.
- Strong support from the University and College in supporting the department to deliver this programme.
- Staff research performance through publications and funding is of the standard expected.
- The provision of teaching development programmes for staff and inclusion of teaching outcomes as part of the promotion system.
- We recognise the important support that is provided to the teaching staff by the education pedagogy and technology support team at the University.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The EEC recommends the department to consider growing the epistemological and methodological areas of the department to better complete a picture of International Relations in the MSc.
- The EEC recommends the department to consider the gender balance of the department in future appointments.
- The EEC recommends the department to consider the appointment of visiting female scholars to add to the breadth of the learning experience.

- The EEC would like to note that the current policy does not require online teaching experience for faculty members to begin teaching online or transition from conventional programs. This approach may lead to problems, such as reduced student engagement and higher dropout rates. The university is strongly encouraged to revise its hiring criteria to require online teaching experience for new faculty members.

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

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

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

Sub-areas

- 4.1 Student admission, processes and criteria**
- 4.2 Student progression**
- 4.3 Student recognition**
- 4.4 Student certification**

4.1 Student admission, processes and criteria

Standards

- *Pre-defined and published regulations regarding student admission are in place.*
- *Access policies, admission processes and criteria are implemented consistently and in a transparent manner.*

4.2 Student progression

Standards

- *Pre-defined and published regulations regarding student progression are in place.*
- *Processes and tools to collect, monitor and act on information on student progression, are in place.*

4.3 Student recognition

Standards

- *Pre-defined and published regulations regarding student recognition are in place.*
- *Fair recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, are essential components for ensuring the students' progress in their studies, while promoting mobility.*
- *Appropriate recognition procedures are in place that rely on:*
 - *institutional practice for recognition being in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention*
 - *cooperation with other institutions, quality assurance agencies and the national ENIC/NARIC centre with a view to ensuring coherent recognition across the country*

4.4 Student certification

Standards

- *Pre-defined and published regulations regarding student certification are in place.*

- *Students receive certification explaining the qualification gained, including achieved learning outcomes and the context, level, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed.*

You may also consider the following questions:

- *Are the admission requirements for the study programme appropriate? How is the students' prior preparation/education assessed (including the level of international students, for example)?*
- *How is the procedure of recognition for prior learning and work experience ensured, including recognition of study results acquired at foreign higher education institutions?*
- *Is the certification of the HEI accompanied by a diploma supplement, which is in line with European and international standards?*

Findings

- Prospective students can find information about the University through its web presence and find out what it has to offer. In order to submit an application, students must complete a B2 or higher level of education of English Knowledge.
- Furthermore, students should have a BSc degree that correlates with the program of International Relations and Security, or otherwise have a BSc on any program that belongs to the Faculty of Social Science and Humanities. However, it was noted that for Cypriot and international security serving personnel that educational onboarding through introductory courses would be considered for those without cognate degrees.
- The EEC noted that due to the program being online, the students should upload a certificate of their bachelor's degree and a copy of their ID in the application.
- The total administrative cost for the Master's program is €5.000, which is much lower than the non-european students which goes up to €10.000.
- The university's Moodle platform offers an extensive range of learning analytics tools to monitor student progression and performance. These tools are based on log data from students with limited participation or uncompleted activities, flagging potential concerns for students at risk and prompting tutors and academic advisors to contact or meet with the student to address the issues. However, the learning benefits of these tools, such as enhanced performance and lower dropout rates, were not demonstrated during the meetings.
- The university is currently implementing advanced learning analytics mechanisms, particularly those based on AI and Machine Learning. These tools can monitor and predict student performance and dropout rates, enabling the institution to take proactive corrective actions. However, these advanced tools were not shown during the meetings.

Strengths

- The EEC was very impressed with the coordinator especially given the short amount of time she has had at the University. We recognise the department's progress in innovating the distance learning programme where asynchronous lectures are just some of the challenges to existing pedagogy. We would like to commend the work of the IT department (CIO) who have illustrated a continued excellence in supporting staff and students with student admissions and progression. We also note the planned improvements of the VLE (Moodle). We would also point to the work of the educational technologist in working with academic staff to provide innovative solutions to learning. From the evidence provided and the interviews, we can also commend the academic staff for engaging with innovative solutions to learning, whether driven largely by the pandemic or through new pedagogies.
- The University takes a deep look at the details of each prospective student's admission and evaluates them with their course of studying and experience in their CVs.
- The University has collaborated and cooperated with many Universities internationally and can recognize many Degrees and modules that their students have accomplished and completed.
- A strength was noted around the low 6% drop-out rate at the university level. In addition, student feedback is mandatory at course end and is also actively sought on an on-going basis throughout course delivery. However, the effectiveness of this information in terms of specific measures for quality improvement taken by the university was not clear during the meetings.
- The study guide is designed to provide comprehensive and very detailed information, which supports the prospective students to gain a thorough understanding of the University's and the program's context. The particular introduction in the study guide also enhances the students' interest.
- A significant majority of students have successfully secured employment which correlates to their academic studies.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The University's main page contains a few areas of missing information regarding information for admissions, such as the tuition fees.
- Student feedback should be taken into account to fulfill the student's needs, if possible and practical. The academic staff should consider the immediate response to its students' messages and requests.
- The EEC recommends that innovations and best practices in education and learning could be more transparent and celebrated in the department.

- In online classes, the ways of teaching are very limited, meaning the staff should seek innovative ways to tutor. This involves adopting teaching methods and strategies which leads to effective ways of active learning and interested students.
- The university should create a structured representation, outlining the academic workload expected for students to complete by the end of each semester, while over-viewing their academic responsibilities and deadlines, which leads to planning for their coursework.

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

Sub-area		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
4.1	Student admission, processes and criteria	Compliant
4.2	Student progression	Compliant
4.3	Student recognition	Not applicable
4.4	Student certification	Compliant

5. Learning resources and student support (ESG 1.6)

Sub-areas

5.1 Teaching and Learning resources

5.2 Physical resources

5.3 Human support resources

5.4 Student support

5.1 Teaching and Learning resources

Standards

- *Weekly interactive activities per each course are set.*
- *The e-learning material and activities take advantage of the capabilities offered by the virtual and audio-visual environment and the following are applied:*
 - *Simulations in virtual environments*
 - *Problem solving scenarios*
 - *Interactive learning and formative assessment games*
 - *Interactive weekly activities with image, sound and unlimited possibilities for reality reconstruction and further processing based on hypotheses*

- *They have the ability to transfer students to real-life situations, make decisions, and study the consequences of their decisions*
 - *They help in building skills both in experiences and attitudes like in real life and also in experiencing - not just memorizing knowledge*
- *A pedagogical planning unit for e-learning, which is responsible for the support of the e-learning unit and addresses the requirements for study materials, interactive activities and formative assessment in accordance to international standards, is established.*
- *Adequacy of resources is ensured for changing circumstances (change in student numbers, etc.).*
- *All resources are fit for purpose.*
- *Student-centred learning and flexible modes of e-learning and teaching, are taken into account when allocating, planning and providing the learning resources.*

5.2 Physical resources

Standards

- *Physical resources, i.e. premises, libraries, study facilities, IT infrastructure, are adequate to support the study programme.*
- *Adequacy of resources is ensured for changing circumstances (change in student numbers, etc.).*
- *All resources are fit for purpose and students are informed about the services available to them.*

5.3 Human support resources

Standards

- *Human support resources, i.e. tutors/mentors, counsellors, other advisers, qualified administrative staff, are adequate to support the study programme.*
- *Adequacy of resources is ensured for changing circumstances (change in student numbers, etc.).*
- *All resources are fit for purpose and students are informed about the services available to them.*

5.4 Student support

Standards

- *Student support is provided covering the needs of a diverse student population, such as mature, part-time, employed and international students and students with special needs.*
- *Students are informed about the services available to them.*
- *Student-centred learning and flexible modes of learning and teaching, are taken into account when allocating, planning and providing student support.*

- *Students' mobility within and across higher education systems is encouraged and supported.*

You may also consider the following questions:

- *Evaluate the supply of teaching materials and equipment (including teaching labs, expendable materials, etc.), the condition of classrooms, adequacy of financial resources to conduct the study programme and achieve its objectives. What needs to be supplemented/ improved?*
- *What is the feedback from the teaching staff on the availability of teaching materials, classrooms, etc.?*
- *Are the resources in accordance with actual (changing) needs and contemporary requirements? How is the effectiveness of using resources ensured?*
- *What are the resource-related trends and future risks (risks arising from changing numbers of students, obsolescence of teaching equipment, etc.)? How are these trends taken into account and how are the risks mitigated?*
- *Evaluate student feedback on support services. Based on student feedback, which support services (including information flow, counselling) need further development?*
- *How is student learning within the standard period of study supported (student counselling, flexibility of the study programme, etc.)?*
- *How students' special needs are considered (different capabilities, different levels of academic preparation, special needs due to physical disabilities, etc.)?*
- *How is student mobility being supported?*

Findings

- The courses have a complete syllabus plus highly detailed weekly student-centred study guides, which include relevant information: objectives, learning outcomes, material to use, interactive activities to perform, complementary bibliographic references, and recommended study time. In addition, study guides include a Student Handbook very well presented in an engaging way, which motivates students in the learning process. This is considered by the EEC as a best practice.
- The university's DL unit is responsible for providing pedagogical support for the creation and evaluation of online courses. This unit is supported by a Pedagogical Planning Committee (PPC), which ensures study materials, interactive activities, and both formative and summative assessments align with international standards. The DL unit also offers a Faculty Handbook, detailing guidelines for distance learning course development and delivery. Even if not shown during the meetings, this handbook is a valuable reference that ensures consistent quality across the University's distance learning courses.
- Currently, the DL unit is exploring the integration of cutting-edge technologies, such as AI, into their online programs. The EEC acknowledges the efforts and concerns of the DL unit to continuously improve the distance teaching and learning experience.

Strengths

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

- The DL unit is considered a best practice, due to its potential structure, resources and services devoted to enhanced distance learning. The EEC believes that it can be a powerful support for guaranteeing and maintaining the quality of the teaching provided while offering a solid base to faculty members seeking to enhance their distance learning expertise.
- Online courses incorporate multi-format learning materials, including e-books, articles and videos, all beneficial for distance learning. In addition, recorded teleconferences and video lectures include the tutor in all videos for non-verbal cues, and include subtitles for accessibility.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

- The EEC notes that the workload of the required readings is not well calculated, needing more time than informed to read and understand these materials. It is recommended to revise the required materials to study along with the recommended study time, to make the course readings more manageable while helping students plan their study effectively. The EEC believes there is room for improvement in this area.
- The EEC suggests exploring the use of interactive videos to enhance engagement among online students during teleconferences, with features like quizzes, navigation options and additional resources embedded in the videos (e.g., Mentimeter). In addition, the EEC recommends exploring more advanced feedback methods, such as intelligent tutoring systems and conversational pedagogical agents enriched with learning analytics and gamification strategies for immediate and automatic student feedback.
- The EEC recommends that both the study guides and the student handbook be updated to include policies and best practices related to generative AI, along with academic guidance for students on the opportunities and risks these technologies present in education. This advice should also be extended to faculty staff.

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

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

D. Conclusions and final remarks

The EEC found that the MSc met the conditions and standards commensurate with a distance learning postgraduate degree in International Relations. Herein, we identify innovation and best practice as well as room for further improvement. The EEC was impressed with the overall achievements of NUP and the department given the short amount of time since its founding and the establishment of this degree. The EEC recognised the overall merits of the programme and were impressed with the support that was provided to staff with regards to the delivery of the distance learning MSc.

As stated in the report the content of the MSc programme in International Relations and Security needs to expand to include more critical and contemporary research in the field. The EEC hopes that the points outlined in this report will be of value to the University as the department continues to grow and innovate, especially in the field of distance learning.

The EEC is grateful for the support provided by the University on the day and the materials that were distributed in advance. We are grateful to the contributions from staff and students and are particularly grateful for the excellent support from the CYQAA, in particular Dr. Christiana Maki.

E. Signatures of the EEC

Name	Signature
Prof. Luis Lobo-Guerrero	
Prof. Annika Björkdahl	
Prof. David Galbreath	
Prof. Santi Caballe Llobet	
Mr. Alexandros Evgeniou	

Date: 5 March 2024