

Doc. 300.1.1/2

Date: 19 November 2022

External Evaluation Report

(E-learning programme of study)

- **Higher Education Institution:**
Open University of Cyprus
- **Town:** Nicosia
- **School/Faculty (if applicable):** Faculty of Economics and Management
- **Department/ Sector:** N/A
- **Programme of study- Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)**

In Greek:

Δίκαιο της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης (1.5 ακαδημαϊκά έτη, 90 ECTS, Μεταπτυχιακό, Εξ αποστάσεως)

In English:

European Union Law (1.5 academic years, 90 ECTS, Master of Arts, E-Learning)

- **Language(s) of instruction:** Greek
- **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 External Evaluation Committee (EEC) visited the Open University of Cyprus for the purpose of the evaluation of the LLM programme of study. The evaluation took place onsite on Friday, November 18, 2022. The members of the EEC studied the application for the accreditation of the programme of study as well as extensive additional information and the below assessment was further informed by a thorough discussion with the University's officials at the subsequent site visit.



B. External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>University</i>
Ramses. A. Wessel	Vice-Dean and Professor of European Law	University of Groningen (NL)
Natalia Szablewska	Professor in Law and Society	The Open University (UK)
Emmanuel Voyiakis	Professor of Law	LSE
Giorgos Kyriakou	Lawyer	University
Santi Caballé	Professor of Learning Engineering	Open University of Catalonia
Panayiotis Antoniadis	Student	University of 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

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.

The EEC has studied the study programme, as well as its design and development and concludes that the programme meets all the set standards.

The OUC has an internal evaluation committee/quality assurance officer who leads the evaluation of the programmes and provides an assessment of the programme's constitutive elements and processes against the required standards.

With input from the staff, the Programme Coordinator was involved in the (re)design of the programme, taking into account the lessons learned over the period that the course was running until the current re-evaluation. A number of steps were taken to make the programme more competitive:

- the prescribed length of the programme was reduced to 1.5 yrs (from 2yrs) to attract students who wish to complete it in a short period of time;
- fees were lowered to make the programme more accessible to the wider pull of students;
- the programme was redesigned by removing two least popular modules (based on student feedback) and adding modules that are not offered by other HEI in Cyprus, including DEE221: State Aid Law as an elective, to find a competitive edge for the programme.

The External Evaluation Committee (ECC) reviewed the sample syllabus (DEE221: State Aid Law) as well as recorded classes which are in line with common standards for similar programmes.

All the modules are delivered in Greek, but students are required to have a basic understanding of the English language as some of the prescribed literature and materials are in English.

Students are required to have a basic understanding of and further develop their technological competencies and digital literacy in order to fully participate in the programme.

The student feedback is collected on a regular basis (via anonymous student survey) which is then taken into account by the module Academic Coordinator and the School Management in reviewing the individual modules and programme as a whole, as well as to develop and share good teaching practices among staff.

Strengths

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

The EEC notes a very clear process for the programme and its evaluation which is commended. The proposed study programme is internally coherent and comprehensive, as well as consistent with developments in society.

The EEC is satisfied that there is a good and clear philosophy behind the programme, which was evidenced by the data presented prior to and during the site visit as well as during interviews with the teaching and administrative staff. The use of formative assessment is also to be commended, as a good pedagogical practice, which is not common across HEIs in Cyprus.

Student participation in the questionnaires at the module level is as high as 60%. The EEC considers this a strong feature in order to collect representative student feedback and take effective measures for improvements when needed.

As the Programme is open to students without a background in law, the first module (*DEE111: Institutional Law of the European Union*) has been designed to provide an overall introduction to the subject area. This is a strong feature of the programme as it allows for students who might be new to studying law in general, and EU law in particular, to ease their way into the programme.

The EEC notes that the programme fills a gap in the Cypriot higher education landscape by providing an opportunity for students who otherwise might not be able to enrol in a master's programme. It does so by ensuring that the mode of teaching is flexible catering to students with competing professional/familial commitments and responsibilities as well as due to its lower fees in comparison to the competitors on the market. Thus, there is a clear social function for the programme, which facilitates access to education for disadvantaged groups in Cyprus and beyond.

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 believes that the weekly estimation of study time, which helps online students to plan their study time effectively, provided in the study guides is very high and should be revised. The EEC recommends that students are provided with clearer messaging on the expected workload for each module, this is especially important given the profile of students that the university is aiming to attract, that is students who are already in employment. For example, based on the sample syllabus (*DEE221: State Aid Law* provided), it is prescribed 13h for a 25% weighted assignment which is not only unrealistic but also not justifiable given the weighing of the assignment. As the Faculty aims to encourage their students to become independent learners, it is advisable to emphasise the hours that students will have to spend on self-learning rather than prescribe that level of hours for the assignments, in particular those with a smaller weighing. This may also have an impact on attracting *new* students to the programme as, currently, it might discourage potential students from enrolling given the prescribed hours and distribution of those hours.

Another weakness identified by the EEC relates to the Learning Outcomes (LOs) for the programme as a whole as well as for individual modules. Based on the written material provided, there are currently 36 LOs for the programme as well as for the individual module. The purpose of LOs is to inform students what knowledge and skills they will acquire at the programme/module level, which is then assessed by the specific assessment items (thus they need to be measurable). As it stands at the moment, there are too many of those identified, and those at the programme level should be of a more generic (higher-level) nature rather than being a (random) selection of those from the individual modules. It might be considered to have fewer categories (focusing on 'knowledge' and 'skills', with the latter one potentially further broken down to 'cognitive skills' and 'practical/professional' skills) so students are clear when they complete their learning. For a postgraduate-level programme, it would be also advisable that the LOs are of a higher/more advanced level than those at the undergraduate level (which is not currently the case), which could include LOs such as: compare/contrast/justify; critically examine/apprise/evaluate/analyse etc., which are then clearly aligned with the taxonomy of assessment domains. Also, the LOs could be

scaffolded to ensure that students' learning continues to advance to new levels across the programme. This would require a more systematic mapping of the LOs across the modules, taking into account the specific deliverables of each as well as when they are introduced within the programme, notwithstanding that students could pose/suspend their studies at different points in the degree.

The EEC recommends also the use of inclusive and non-discriminatory language (whether in written materials or otherwise) by ensuring, e.g., the use of gender-neutral language. Also, the references to 'English law' should be consistent with the accepted form, that is 'English and Welsh law', including in relation to the content covered in the programme.

The ECC further encourages closing the feedback loop by communicating with students about how their feedback is taken into account and improvements at the programme and module level are implemented. This can be achieved via, e.g., utilising the existing virtual environment.

Finally, while the EEC recognises that it is more difficult for an online programme, it advises to consider ways to familiarise students with the practice of law in Cyprus, for instance by inviting guest speakers from practice and/or by organising visits to the Court.

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 – centered 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

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.

The nature of the programme is compatible with distance learning delivery and the methodology provided is appropriate for the particular programme of study. The university's quality assurance is evaluated by external and voluntary accreditations, such as EDEN (European Distance and E-Learning Network) and EADTU (European Association of Distance Teaching Universities). Following these accreditations, OUC guarantees quality assurance of technology-enhanced learning while fostering innovation and continuous improvement in line with the principles, recommendations and best practices of the European community of e-learning.

The University's learning management system supports online teaching, learning and administrative processes. This is a Moodle installation (eClass) with all the basic online services available. The

platform specifically provides synchronous (through Blackboard Collaborate), recorded video and streaming (through Panopto) as well as asynchronous tools to support the interaction needs of students with the lecturers, the other students and the teaching materials. The platform also provides e-assessment procedures through quizzes with automatic feedback in order to assess students' knowledge. The provision of more complex forms of e-assessment to assess competencies and skills, such as critical thinking, was not shown in the specific assessment procedures during the meetings.

Each course has an adequate number of hours of synchronous communication between instructors and students through live teleconferences, which are recorded for further reuse.

Collaboration among teachers and students (and among students) is conducted through the online forums of the subject and other forums that can be created ad-hoc for those facing special needs. In addition, in-class collaborative activities among students are promoted during the teleconferences, even though the design and procedure of these activities were not detailed during the visit.

Formative assessment of the courses is based on two submitted mid-term assignments with the provision of personalised feedback weighing 20% of the final grade, while summative assessment is based on a mandatory final exam counting to 70% of the final grade. The assessment procedure during the course is completed with a number of interactive activities weighing 10% of the final grade. Optional formative (self-assessment) activities are included in the weekly study guides in order to self-assess student knowledge and skills of the course.

Strengths

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

The EEC believes that continuously evaluating the quality assurance of distance learning by non-mandatory external accreditation organisations, such as EDEN and EADTU, is a good practice.

The EEC considers the OUC's distance learning model to be in line with the specific profile of full and part-time online students who have professional/familial responsibilities and commitments (given the average students' age is 41) and need to learn effectively and in a timely fashion. The EEC would like to note that students benefit from a very good student-teacher ratio and student feedback is very positive.

The provision of personalised feedback in the submitted assignments and during the teleconference sessions are considered best practices. In addition, the EEC recognises the many benefits of collaboration among students promoted by in-class collaborative activities and discussions as well as the provision of assessment based on rubrics.

Finally, the weekly study guides, which allow the students to determine the work to be done every week, is also considered the best practice. The EEC urges the university to keep up these strong elements of its distance learning model while reinforcing them when possible.

The EEC also notes that the OCU uses in-house produced virtual reality (VR) applications (included in a video for a module that can be reused for other purposes). VR is considered to provide students with memorable and immersive experiences, which shows OCU's commitment to investing in innovative teaching technologies and learning aids.

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, given the lack of a research component (Master's Thesis), the involvement of students in research is limited. It is not something that necessarily needs to be changed by adding a stand-alone research component. However, it needs to be taken into consideration when designing assessment regimes and scaffolding of LOs by, for example, considering adding a more substantial research assignment in one of the latter courses to give students an opportunity to advance their research skills.

While the EEC emphasises the benefits of any form of interaction and collaboration, the online synchronous teleconferences and real-time collaboration among students might be hard to scale if in the future years the programme is expanded internationally and/or attended by many students across different time zones. It was not clear how the university would support this type of collaboration from the coordination perspective while recommending the constant adaptation of their distance learning model to support this situation by increasing the asynchronous online interaction and collaboration.

Finally, in relation to face-to-face exams, which was indicated would not be re-introduced following last year's practice in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the EEC wants to point out that onsite final exams may not be in line with the learning style of online students, while online exams supported by proctoring methods cannot scale. Instead, the EEC recommends reinforcing the collaborative learning activities and formative continuous assessment through written assignments during the course, if allowed by the governing and/or legal framework.

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-centered teaching methodology	Compliant
2.2	Practical training	Compliant
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

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.

Based on the CVs received, the teaching staff are highly qualified and experienced in both teaching and research.

The vast majority of staff have international experience, which further facilitates the introduction and maintenance of internationally recognised standards and best practices.

As it became apparent based on the formal presentations and interviews with teaching (and administrative) staff, there is a high level of enthusiasm and passion for the work and to make the programme succeed.

Strengths

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

The EEC commends the very strong CVs of both the permanent and adjunct staff who would be easily appointable as permanent members elsewhere.

Based on the documentation received, it is clear to the EEC that there are strong synergies between teaching and research, which is not always the case, thus even more commendable.

The mode of teaching and the delivery of other duties remotely offers staff more flexibility, which was also noted during the staff interviews.

The guest lectures and visiting speakers programme provide the students with additional means of engaging with the wider academic and professional community, which is noted and further encouraged by the EEC.

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.

As a public institution, OUC is subject to serious regulatory constraints on its mode of operation, budget and staffing. One consequence of those constraints is that the majority of staff are adjuncts (employed on temporary contracts) rather than permanent members of staff. The EEC has formed the view that this situation is not within the control of the OUC, but within the control of the Cypriot State. However, the practical effect of the current model is to create job insecurity and inequality in terms of the different modes of employment. The ECC acknowledges that the adjunct staff are encouraged and supported to maintain their research profiles, including as the nexus between teaching and research is important for the delivery of successful HE programmes. However, the current model, with two permanent staff, is not sustainable, as it makes it more difficult to attract staff based on their availability and other work commitments. As the Programme Coordinator recognised during the evaluation meeting, the University's reliance on adjunct faculty sometimes creates a situation in which an adjunct staff is hired only a couple of weeks before the module starts. This can have an adverse impact on the running of the programme, as it limits preparation time. Moreover, the fact that the current model forces the OUC to rely on adjunct staff has a clear exploitative implication. The model expects adjunct staff to continue producing research that will benefit the OUC's research culture, but does not provide them with any remuneration for it.

The University has a Distance Learning module (LEMM), which provides technical training and support in distance learning to the teaching staff of the different University faculties. Faculty members can participate in training programs to increase their skills to conduct quality online teaching. The EEC encourages the further provision of e-learning and teaching training for staff. The effectiveness of the e-learning training programmes could perhaps be better illustrated with the provision of certification relevant to distance learning, which would also highlight the professional development of staff.

The EEC suggests incorporating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN Agenda 2030 in the training programmes for the teaching staff in order to redesign the teaching materials accordingly with the aim to empower students with emerging competencies and skills (climate change, gender equality, global and ethical engagement, etc.) to take action for a more sustainable world.



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	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

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.

The University's eClass platform based on Moodle provides a wide range of learning analytics tools for monitoring student progression and performance based on collecting information from the student (lower grades, poor participation, undelivered activities, etc.). However, it was not clear the extent to which the Faculty staff use this information to support their students on a daily basis.

Student feedback is collected by questionnaires at the module end and measures for improvement are considered, though the effectiveness of these measures taken by the university was not shown during the visit.

Strengths

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

The programme is open to students without prior experience of studying law or EU law, providing opportunities for study for students who otherwise would not be able to undertake a Master's degree or in the subject area. Thus, the programme fills the gap and facilitates access to education for varied groups. Unsurprisingly, the majority of students (60%) are women.

To further facilitate access to students from disadvantaged backgrounds, the OUC provides opportunities for fee reductions, including for students with special needs, unemployed students or students with large families.

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 at the university level the dropout rate from registration and graduation is around 20%, but no data was available during the visit about the dropout rate at the programme level, but it was indicated it might be lower than the university average. The level of dropout is broadly in line with other distance learning institutions. However, there is scope for improvement, and thus the OUC should have a rigorous process for the data collection on the dropout rate year on year while providing measures to mitigate it.

Should it be feasible and within budgetary reach, more sophisticated forms of learning analytics mechanisms based on AI and specifically Machine Learning are encouraged to be used to monitor and predict student performance and dropout in order to be able to provide timely corrective measures.

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	Compliant
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

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.

The University's DL unit (LEMM) is responsible for providing pedagogical support for creating and evaluating online courses. The DL unit addresses the requirements for study materials, interactive activities, and formative and summative assessments in accordance with international standards.

Even if not shown during the meetings, the DL unit also provides guidelines for the development and delivery of distance learning that establish the main characteristics a distance learning course should have. They should be a good reference that guarantees the quality and homogeneity of the distance learning courses throughout the University's Faculties.

The OUC has Internal Regulations for Persons with Disabilities that sets out the rights of people with disabilities, covering those with visual, hearing, motor, mental and intellectual disabilities as

well as speech impairment, and the level of support that the university offers to ensure that these rights can be fulfilled. As noted earlier, there are also further provisions for students from certain backgrounds with tuition fee reductions.

The OUC has an agreement with 22 academic libraries in Greece, in addition to a number in Cyprus, as well as has recently established a collaboration with The Open University (UK) to provide its students with access to digital resources and continues to expand on its inter-library loan services.

Strengths

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

Because of the relatively small cohort, the level of support offered to students is very good and provided on almost an individual level. There are also specific provisions in place to ensure a high level of support, including contracts for Adjunct staff that specify the timeframe within which students can expect to receive a reply to their inquiries/emails (within 48h), which in many ways is above the common standard across Europe.

The University provides very detailed weekly study guides, which allow the students to determine the work to be done every week. The level of detail in the Study Guides offered is above the standard across HEIs in Cyprus.

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.

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 there are specific regulations in relation to students misbehaving, including in relation to plagiarism or academic misconduct. To further facilitate the development of supportive communities of students, the EEC encourages further development of rules, and communicating them clearly to students, to prevent online (as well as offline) bullying and harassment and to educate students about privacy rights in the online environment.

On the basis of the sample of a recorded video, the EEC recommends the recorded teleconferences and video lectures to be more usable and accessible for students by making them shorter, include the teacher in all the videos to provide non-verbal communication, and add subtitles to increase accessibility.



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

Please provide constructive conclusions and final remarks which may form the basis upon which improvements of the quality of the programme of study under review may be achieved, with emphasis on the correspondence with the EQF.

The EEC believes that the re-designed programme is clearly compliant with the applicable standards of assessment and gladly recommends its verification. The documentation in the application pack was very thorough and comprehensive, and our interaction with the teaching and administrative staff of the Faculty and the University during our onsite visit was informative, open and constructive.

Enthusiastic and committed teachers who teach in their area of expertise created a properly designed distance learning environment. Teaching and regular student engagement events appear to create fruitful collaborations with wider society. The networks of the academic staff and the university offer opportunities for further developments in societal and academic collaborations. Academic staff receive valuable training in e-learning and teaching, which can be further augmented by the provision of certification of attainment.

The nature of the programme is compatible with distance learning delivery and the methodology provided is appropriate for the particular programme of study.

Despite the conclusion that the programme is fully compliant with the applicable standards, the EEC wishes to provide the Faculty and University with a few recommendations, of which the most important ones include:

- to revise the weekly estimation of study time and provide students with clearer messaging on the expected workload for each module;
- to reconsider the number and classification of the Learning Outcomes and more clearly relate the overall programme level to the LOs of the various modules;
- to adapt more gender-neutral and inclusive language throughout all documents;
- to close the evaluation circle of course assessments by providing feedback to students on the way in which suggestions have been incorporated;
- reconsider ways in which students can be involved in research and get acquainted with research skills;
- to ensure that forms of interaction and collaboration through online synchronous teleconferences and real-time collaboration among students are sustainable in the future years when the programme is expanded internationally and/or attended by many students across different time zones;
- to reinforcing the collaborative learning activities and formative continuous assessment through written assignments during the course, to prevent having to rely on onsite examination at distant locations;
- to start a discussion on how to make sure that research activities by adjunct staff are rewarded as they form the basis of good academic teaching;
- to consider introducing more sophisticated forms of learning analytics mechanisms based on AI and specifically Machine Learning;



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



eqar /// enqa.

The EEC appreciates the Faculty's commendable commitment to excellence and we would like to wish lots of success with the programme of study.



E. Signatures of the EEC

<i>Name</i>
Prof.dr. Ramses A. Wessel (chair)
Prof. Natalia Szablewska, PhD
Prof. Emmanuel Voyiakis
Giorgos Kyriakou
Prof. Santi Caballé
Panayiotis Antoniadis

Date: 19 November 2022