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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 (8 semesters, 240
ECTS)**

In Greek:

Διοίκηση Επιχειρήσεων (Πτυχίο)

In English:

Business Administration (Bachelor)

- **Language(s) of instruction:** Greek and 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 site visit at the Open University of Cyprus took place on the 4th of October 2022. During the site visit the committee had the opportunity to meet with a full range of institutional and faculty leaders, teaching staff, administrative staff, and current and former students. The work of the committee was supported by ample documentation which was provided to the committee in advance. The documentation was extensive and helpful in assessing the programme according to the criteria set by the agency. The committee members benefited from a number of informative presentations on the institution and the planned programme. In addition, the committee found that all participants were very thoughtful and open during the discussion.

B. External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>University</i>
Kevin Orr	Professor	University of St Andrews
Louis Brennan	Professor	Trinity College, Dublin
John K. Christiansen	Professor	Copenhagen Business School
Marco Kalz	Professor	Heidelberg University of Education
Petros Efstathiou	Student Member	University of Cyprus
Name	Position	University

C. Guidelines on content and structure of the report

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

The institution has a formal quality assurance policy, which the committee had sight of. At the moment of writing this report, we could not identify an accessible public version of this policy. The policy contains appropriate structures, regulations and processes and is a proof of a systematic approach to policy implementation. External stakeholders are involved via the council. A policy against plagiarism is in place and the institutional website has a values statement which includes commitments to academic integrity and against discrimination and intolerance.

1.2 Design, approval, on-going monitoring and review

The BA programme of study is designed with clear learning objectives and the program is adapted to expected market needs. There is an ongoing process and serious effort to engage with stakeholders, with particular sectors in mind reflecting the local environment. The institutional leadership seems to be well attuned to changes in the sector.

The programme benefits from external expertise drawing upon the professional networks of teaching staff as well as guest speakers. The institutional mission to make higher education more easily available and accessible for non-standard students is reflected in the design and delivery of this programme.

The design and operation of the programme lends itself to smooth student progression. The ECTS practice is appropriate and consistent with sectoral norms. The other standards of the programme are in line with regulations and national and European policies.

1.3 Public information

The selection criteria and a general course description and assessment criteria are available.

1.4 Information management

There is a systematic approach to collecting data about students' demographic profiles, as well as progression, completion, and satisfaction. This information was discussed with the committee during the site visit. The staff and leadership demonstrated a good knowledge of this information and there is good evidence that they use it actively to inform their approach across their provision. There is a systematic approach to module evaluation.

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 study programme is compliant in all dimensions. The programme demonstrates considerable strengths. Below are suggestions to build on these strengths.

Strengths

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

The programme supports the mission and vision of the institution particularly in relation to social impact.

There are appropriately-ambitious objectives for the content of the modules and for student development.

The research strengths of faculty members are reflected in the course content. All teaching staff have a PhD and experience of teaching in the business and management area.

The administrative staff and support staff showed clear commitment to their colleagues and to the student experience.

We were struck by the good quality of working relationships in the institution.

The committee was impressed by the leadership in teaching teams, as well as at Faculty and institutional levels.

The committee heard evidence from students that the programme will 'add value' to graduates' career prospects.

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 committee welcomes and supports the plans to develop relationships with alumni.

We see potential for the better explication of existing practice-based experiences for students during their programme. Existing examples and opportunities could be made more explicit in the programme documentation.

We see some scope for the improvement of the articulation of student progress across the curriculum. i.e. the accumulation of skills from one semester to the next.

We would encourage the comprehensive use of student feedback in considering improvements in the programme design and content for the future.

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

The Open University of Cyprus is a recognised university for distance learning and has very considerable experience to draw upon when delivering and reviewing the programme.

The E-Learning methodology is very appropriate for the study programme, and it provides a good mix of pacing and flexibility.

The design and development of the infrastructure is appropriate to effective learning and teaching on the programme.

The e-Class environment benefits from up-to date tools and platforms. Training and guidance are provided to support the students.

Students and staff benefit from induction processes before they start. These can also be undertaken up to one year after they have started.

We saw evidence of student-centred approaches to learning and teaching, e.g. all synchronous activities are also accessible as recorded sessions.

Standards

2.2 Practical training

There are practice-based engagements built into the programme. These are appropriate in helping students explore how theory and practice are interconnected. These opportunities could be better explicated in the course documentation.

Teaching staff draw upon their industry and professional networks to the benefit of course content.

2.3 Student assessment

From the illustrative course materials we received, the level of detailed guidance on assessment is appropriate. There is some minor inconsistency in the course descriptions regarding how the assessment process is communicated. The assessment expectations are set out clearly in the example module guides. The evaluation criteria are appropriate and transparent and in line with programme objectives. There is evidence of a structured approach to student feedback, including formative discussion. A clear policy on grading is available.

2.4 Study guides structure, content and interactive activities

From the illustrative course materials we received, the study guides provide essential information. Nonetheless, the communication of assessment procedures could be optimized. In addition, the diversity of interactive and productive learning activities is not mirrored in the module description for which often a standard description is used about e-Class. From the sample reviewed, study guides, material and activities are appropriate for the level of the programme according to the EQF. The presentation of e-platforms during the site visit showed evidence of a well-structured approach to learning and teaching

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 study programme appears to be fit for purpose. It is well designed for e-learning delivery. The supporting materials and allied services speak to a well-implemented programme.

Strengths

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

The individual preferences and circumstances of the student population are respected and supported. All staff appear to be sensitive to student needs.

The programme offers a good mix of pacing and flexibility for students, including for example options to take a smaller number of modules in light of individual circumstances.

A variety of different learning and assessment practices is employed in the programme, reflecting a systematic approach.

Faculty appreciated the importance of connecting class materials to 'real life' examples.

Faculty and lecturers were very supportive in enabling learning through flexible support options and a general availability for the support of their students.

The quality of the study programme is enhanced by a highly dedicated and very professional support and administrative staff. Faculty were enthusiastic in their appreciation of this support.

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.

There is scope to build in more coverage of the ethical dimensions of management in the programme content. Doing so would also help develop a critical orientation among students. Equally, the coverage of innovation and entrepreneurship in the programme, which currently appears to happen in the module 'Contemporary Topics in Business Administration', might be re-positioned as a dedicated module in this area.

Related to our previous comments about students' academic progression, there may be scope to re-visit the sequencing of particular modules.

It would be good if the same description would be used for the assessment overview of each module. The description of the online-activities should include the specific interactive and productive learning activities rather than a standard-text about e-Class.

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	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

Faculty members and associated lecturers have an excellent research profile as well as impressive international experience and standing in the research community. The productivity and quality of the core staff is especially visible through high international standards and a healthy number of research projects, study programmes and collaborations.

Staff selection practices follow a transparent and clear process and the quality of the applicants is high. Several examples of professional development opportunities and peer-to-peer exchange were highlighted in the documentation and during the site visit discussions and this is an important stream of effort going forward.

There is a good balance between continuity and rejuvenation of the teaching team. There is a standard methodology of induction for new staff unfamiliar with teaching practices at a distance teaching university.

3.2 Teaching staff number and status

The number of the teaching staff is more than adequate to support the programme of study. The teaching staff are highly experienced and occupy senior positions in their primary institutions and in the field.

3.3 Synergies of teaching and research

The committee was impressed by the many collaborations of the faculty members and the teaching staff. The faculty members' impressive contributions to their disciplines is evidenced by their published research outputs and participation in funded research projects and membership of editorial review boards in leading international journals.

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.*

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 committee was very satisfied with the teaching staff on the BA. The OUC has very dedicated staff members for this study programme. The committee was struck by a high level of enthusiasm and motivation amongst permanent faculty and adjunct faculty. The leadership and governance at institutional, faculty and programme level is well-integrated. The collaborative ethos benefits the programme.

Strengths

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

The research profile and teaching experience of the faculty, the collaborative ethos, and the strong administrative support are considerable strengths. There is an impressive depth of experience of distance taught provision, which benefits the programme.

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.

We identify the need for the institution to continue appropriate levels of administrative support to maintain the quality standards of the new programme. The research strengths of the faculty provide a sound basis for further drawing out the distinctiveness of the BA programme at OUC.

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

Clear regulations and admission criteria are in place and publicly available. They appear to be implemented systematically.

4.2 Student progression

Processes and regulations are in place and visible. Essential data is collected and used to monitor student progress. There is good institutional experience of doing so.

4.3 Student recognition

There are regulations and processes available for recognition of prior qualifications. In addition, discounts incentivise further study in the university after the completion of the BA.

4.4 Student certification

Clear regulations are in place regarding student certification. Certification at individual module level enables high flexibility for 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.

All dimensions in this area are appropriate.

Strengths

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

Nothing in particular arises here, but we are generally satisfied with standards and practices in this area.

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.

Here we simply note the need to maintain good practices and the adequacy of resources and systems.

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

A pedagogical planning unit is in place for the development of the courses and learning activities. Its work involves liaising closely with faculty to support their course development.

The combination of resources and pedagogical flexibility results in student-centred and responsive modes of learning. In general, the available resources appear to be fit for purpose.

We note that the university provides a high number of programmes and therefore the need to ensure adequate e-learning and administrative support.

5.2 Physical resources

The required resources are available for the study programme and there is support in place to help lecturers as well as students with issues arising during their learning and teaching processes. As previously noted, we identify the need to continually invest in this area in line with the ambitions of the university.

The IT-environment seems to be well-developed and benefits from state-of-the-art technologies for distance education, as well as experienced technicians.

The library offers access to appropriate digital resources. The staff undertake work to digitalize non-digital content and to ensure cross-language access to academic resources. The library services include providing access to other institutions in Cyprus and Greece, opening up a further array of resources and databases, on a level which is commensurate with other international universities.

5.3 Human support resources

A dedicated welfare service is available for students through which students have access to professional psychological support. In general, the faculty and admin staff appear to be very conscious of the need to ensure the pastoral care of their students, especially in the current climate. In general, the programme is underpinned by the excellent administrative staff at OUC.

5.4 Student support

Faculty members are available to advise students and to support their academic orientation and development. They appear to be aware of the importance of being responsive to the needs of 'remote' students and take a team-based approach to dealing with queries and student contact.

There are clear and dedicated office hours available to students and lecturers are actively promoting direct contact with students.

In general, there was a good awareness by staff of the distinctive needs of their students in a distance teaching context.

The programme participates in the Erasmus Plus scheme. This means, for example, that students can participate in 'Student mobility for studies' and 'Student mobility for placement actions.'

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 specialised skills needed to deliver effective e-learning seem to be embedded in the institution and Faculty. The programme seems to be well established on solid foundations.

Strengths

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

The dedication of staff (both faculty, and administrative) is a considerable asset for the programme.

The level of detail included in the illustrative study guides is helpful to students undertaking e-learning.

Given recent international developments which have impacted upon the strategic plans of the university, the institution has demonstrated impressive tenacity in reformulating its market targets. These will require careful monitoring and perhaps further flexibility.

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.

It is important for the institution to invest in administrative capacity. We were impressed with the professionalism of the administrative team but suggest continued investment in administrative and support services needs to be a priority for the institution, given its wider ambitions in general, and this new programme in particular. It is important that the institution does not take this key group of staff for granted.

The increasing need to provide support for students with special needs and to forge relationships with alumni emphasises the criticality of investment in administrative capacity.

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 learning and teaching practices of the study programme are appropriate to the aims and objectives of the BA programme. The format of the program is well-aligned to the needs of the students and consistent with the mission and vision of the institution.

The committee notes that the institution has a very strong leadership team in place.

During the site visit, the committee was impressed with the high levels of professionalism demonstrated by the members of the institution. Equally, the committee notes the extent of involvement by so many members of the institution in activities both pre- and during the visit. This was a welcome indication of commitment on the part of staff to the programme, and the process of evaluation.

Participants engaged openly and constructively with the members of the committee and responded well to comments from the committee. It is clear to us that they approached the process with a learning orientation.

A future strength of the programme could involve engagement by students with their local context and applying knowledge to practitioner challenges in their workplaces. Doing so could be a valuable contribution to the development of the students and to the integration of theory and practice. This aim could also be more strongly articulated in the programme.

The committee welcomes the plans to constitute an advisory board and invest in the development of more systematic relationships with alumni. Doing so will enhance the BA programme's connection to a wider group of stakeholders and practitioners, some of whom can act as ambassadors for the BA and for OUC. We note again, however, that such ambitious initiatives will require continuing investment in administrative support.

Finally, the committee wishes to express its gratitude and appreciation to the University for the warm reception that members experienced over the course of the visit. In addition, the support from CYQAA officers is gratefully acknowledged.



E. Signatures of the EEC

Name	Signature
Kevin Orr	
Louis Brennan	
John K. Christiansen	
Marco Kalz	
Petros Efstathiou	
Click to enter Name	

Date: 07.10.2022