ΔΙΠΑΕ CYQAA

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

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Date: 07.10.2022

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 English:**

  Master of Business Administration (MBA) (18 months, 90 ECTS, MBA, E-Learning)

    In Greek:

  ΜΠΣ Διοίκηση Επιχειρήσεων (MBA) (18 μήνες, 90 ECTS, MBA, Εξ Αποστάσεως)
- **Language(s) of instruction:** Greek and English

- **Programme's status:** New

- **Concentrations (if any):**

  In Greek: Concentrations
  In English: Concentrations

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 the 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 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)

Name	Position	University
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

- *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

The institution has a formal quality assurance policy. At the moment of writing, 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 value statement including commitments to academic integrity and against discrimination and intolerance.

1.2 Design, approval, on-going monitoring and review

The programme of study has been designed with clear learning objectives and there is evidence that it is being adapted to market needs. There is an ongoing process and serious effort to engage with stakeholders. The institutional leadership seems to be well attuned to market expectations. There is an opportunity to engage with a wider set of stakeholders as the programme continues to evolve.

The programme benefits from external expertise drawing upon the professional networks of teaching staff as well as guest speakers. The institution and the programme share a mission to make higher education more easily available and accessible for non-standard students.

The design and operation of the programme lends itself to smooth student progression. The latest initiative to adapt the Masters thesis towards an applied research project is a good example of optimization of academic and professional progression and adaptation to student needs. The ECTS level is appropriate according to the module description. The standards of the programme are in line with regulations and national and European policies.

1.3 Public information

The current application is a new version of an existing programme. Based on the previous iteration of the MBA we note that the selection criteria and a general course description and assessment criteria are available and we expect this to be the case for the new programme as well.

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1.4 Information management

There is a systematic approach to collecting data about students´ demographic profiles, as well as progression, completion, and satisfaction. Knowledge and analysis of existing information have informed the proposal for the new programme. Staff use a range of sources of information in adapting and revising content and modules.

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 in this area. The programme demonstrates considerable strengths, and the committee has some suggestions (below) to build on these strengths.

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

Ambitious objectives have been set for the content of the modules and student development.

The programme supports the mission and vision of the institution, particularly in relation to social impact. The research strength is impressive across a large number of permanent and adjunct faculty.

The applied business project (MBA618) is a good example of an innovation in the new programme.

The administrative staff and support staff demonstrate great ownership and commitment to the programme. Administrative staff also show an impressive agility and service orientation which is in turn very much appreciated by the academic staff. There seems to be a very healthy working atmosphere in the programme and institution (but we stress that it is important to continue to invest in an administrative capacity).

The programme revision and new orientation of the MBA, in particular, show evidence of impressive leadership and entrepreneurship and continue to add momentum to the social mission of the university.

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 would recommend that the coordinators of the programme seek to ensure that the course content is better aligned with the programme objectives.

Furthermore, the programme ethos should encompass a focus on the holistic development of students. The programme descriptions should better explicate the contribution to the personal development of the students as practitioners in ways appropriate to an MBA.

In this context we welcome and encourage the plans of the coordinators of the programme to establish an advisory board, as well as developing the work with alumni (taking into account their career paths). Doing so will increase the ambassadorial roles of alumni and create opportunities for students pursuing their MBA projects.

We would like to see an improvement of the articulation of the students´ development of academic skills across the curriculum in the programme documentation.

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

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

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

As the Open University of Cyprus is a recognised university in distance learning, the E-Learning methodology is very appropriate for the study programme, and it provides a good mix of pacing and flexibility. The instructional approach of the institution and in the programme, has been developed according to current standards of technology-enhanced learning.

The infrastructure is designed, developed and implemented to support a systematic approach to teaching and learning. The e-Class environment has been further developed and extended with up-to date tools and technologies. Training, guidance and support are provided to the students.

Students and staff have mandatory induction offers available to them before they start. This can also take place up to 12 months after they have started.

Standards

2.2 Practical training

The committee has seen several examples of how theory and practice are interconnected. Students´ assignment help to integrate practical knowledge and observation with the theoretical frameworks used in the study programme.

Due to the context of the students of the study programme there is some effort to connect the learning activities with the real-life context.

2.3 Student assessment

There is an assessment standard defined and all modules have a mix of two assignment, at least one interactive exercise and a final examination. The triple summative assessment is combined with formative assessment aspects. For some assignment, rubrics are used to communicate assessment criteria. The assessment practices are shared by lecturers.

Standards

2.4 Study guides structure, content and interactive activities

The study guides are very extensive and provide a sound orientation for students. On the other hand, 60 pages of reading per module at times might be too much information. The committee was not able to identify all interactive activities which have been mentioned during the site visit due to the amount of information contained in the study guides. The other standards for learning content and activities are met. There is a plethora of information on essential literature and a differentiated set of media and formats in the content.

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 well suited for e-learning delivery and in the material and study guides the professional approach of the institution but also the individuals involved in the programme is visible.

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

The programme offers a good mix of pacing and flexibility for students. By that, the individual preferences and circumstances of the student population are respected and supported. A variety of different learning and assessment practices is employed in the programme. Faculty appreciated the importance of practical orientation for the modules and learning activities. Faculty and tutors were very supportive in enabling learning through flexible support options and recognised the importance of making themselves available to support their students. The quality of the study programme is fundamentally enabled by a highly dedicated and very committed support and administrative staff. Lecturers have repeatedly communicated a very high appreciation for this support in a complex environment.

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.

Interactive activities and productive learning opportunities should be better visible in the study guides and reports. The variety of innovative learning opportunities presented during the site visit could be made more visible in the documentation.

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

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

3. Teaching staff *(ESG 1.5)*

<u>**Sub-areas**</u>

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 and an 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 high number of research projects, study programmes and collaboration. Staff selection practices follow a transparent and clear process, and the quality of the applicants is very high. Several examples were provided of professional development opportunities and peer-to-peer exchange. 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 is highly experienced. Faculty members occupy senior positions in their primary institutions and the field internationally.

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 are evidenced by their published research outputs and participation in funded research projects and membership of editorial review boards in leading international boards. This is an excellent basis for the new MBA.

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. The OUC has a very dedicated and high-profile staff members for the study programme. There is a high level of enthusiasm and motivation amongst faculty members and adjuncts. Considering the different tasks of the faculty members the committee was very satisfied with the overall approach of the staff members.

The committee recognizes the important role of the OUC top leadership in giving room for innovation activities like the MBA programme. The leadership and governance at institutional, faculty and programme level are well-integrated. The collaborative ethos benefits the current MBA proposal.

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

Strengths include the research profile, extensive and deep experience in e-learning pedagogy and collaborative leadership in the institution.

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 securing appropriate levels of administrative support to maintain the quality standards of the new programme. The ambitions of the new MBA may necessitate further investments in this regard.

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

Sub-area		Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant
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 essential data is collected and used to monitor student progress.

4.3 Student recognition

The regulations and institutional processes recognise prior learning. In addition, discount schemes are in place for specific target groups (police, military, fire service) or for students who continue after their first study programme in OUC.

4.4 Student certification

Clear regulations are in place regarding student certification. Certification on 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 well-developed, and the committee has no further comments.

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

Nothing arising.

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.

Nothing arising.

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

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

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

The exemplary weekly interactive and productive learning opportunities are available in different modules and formats. The development of the courses and learning activities is supported by a pedagogical planning unit which pro-actively approaches lecturers to support their course development together with the e-Class team. The combination of resources and expertise results in student-centred and flexible modes of learning. Available resources are fit for purpose.

Standards

5.2 Physical resources

The required resources are available for the study programme, and there is good support in place to help lecturers as well as students with issues arising during their learning and teaching process. The IT-environment seems to be well-developed and according to the state-of-the-art for distance education. This is also visible via several recent additions to the e-Class environment. The library offers access to a vast amount of digital resources, and staff there also undertake efforts to digitalize non-digital content and provide cross-language access to resources. The library services are even extended through libraries of other institutions in Cyprus and in Greece.

Standards

5.3 Human support resources

A dedicated welfare service is available for students through which they have access to professional psychological support. In general, the faculty and admin staff seem to be very committed to the pastoral care of their students. In general, the programme is enabled by the excellent administrative staff at OUC.

5.4 Student support

Every student has an advisor from the faculty available to support their academic orientation and development. There are clear and dedicated office hours available to students and lecturers are actively promoting direct contact with students. Mobility opportunities are communicated by the institution. In general, there was a good awareness by staff of the distinctive needs of students at a distance teaching institution and students with post-practice experience.

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 diversity and amount of resources and learning activities are impressive. Based on the site visit and documentation review, the institution and the proposed study programme give the committee a very good impression.

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

The dedication of staff is a huge asset for the programme. The level of detail in the study guides is robust and should ensure resilience.

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 have sufficient resources available to administrative staff to handle or develop the required support for students with special needs, the alumni work, and the adaptation of the admission practices. It is important to set priorities and to not stretch hard-working staff too thinly.

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

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

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 committee was very pleased with the degree of professionalism encountered during the site visit. The amount of people contributing either on location or online to the site-visit was a sign of the commitment of staff to the programme. Everyone engaged thoughtfully and openly with the committee members during the site visit.

The strength of the leadership team combined with the quality of staff and resources provides a strong position from which to further articulate the distinctiveness of the programme. In this respect the team may wish to consider emphasizing the research-led nature of the programme. One suggestion is that where appropriate the curriculum could embed some aspects of Greek philosophy, for example to inform the theorisation of management practices.

The learning and teaching practices of the study programme are implemented on a high-quality level and there is a very healthy mix of pace and flexibility enabling individual competence-development of the students. The format of the program is well-aligned to the needs of the students and supports the mission and vision of the institution. In general, the committee appreciated the holistic thinking behind the reconceptualization of the programme.

The committee welcomes the plans to constitute an advisory board and invest into the development of more systematic work with alumni. Doing so will enhance the programme´s connection to a wider group of stakeholders. These initiatives will require continuing investment in administrative support.

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