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Date: 11-6-2025

External Evaluation Report (E-learning programme of study)

- **Higher Education Institution:**
Open University of Cyprus (OUC) and Cyprus University of Technology (CUT)
- **Town:** Nicosia and Limassol
- **School/Faculty (if applicable):** OUC: Faculty of Economics and Management, CUT: Faculty of Management and Economics
- **Department/ Sector:** OUC: No departments, CUT: Department of Shipping
- **Programme of study- Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)**

In Greek:

Διδρυματικό Μεταπτυχιακό Πρόγραμμα Σπουδών (ΔΜΠΣ) στη Διεθνή Ναυτιλιακή Διοίκηση (18 μήνες, 90 ECTS, MSc, Εξ Αποστάσεως)

In English:

International Shipping Management (18 months, 90 ECTS, MSc, E-Learning)

- **Language(s) of instruction:** English
- **Programme's status:** New

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].

- **Concentrations (if any):**

In Greek: Concentrations

In English: Concentrations

A. Introduction

This part includes basic information regarding the onsite visit.

Following the invitation by the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education (CYQAA), the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) has evaluated the proposal for the MSc. International Shipping Management (by E-Learning) at the Open University of Cyprus (OUC) and Cyprus University of Technology (CUT), Cyprus. The visit was coordinated by Mr. Lefkios Neophytou and organised on the day by Mr. Avramis Despotis. This is a new programme from the two Universities.

The EEC consisted of the following academics:

- Professor Arnab Majumdar, Imperial College, London (Chair)
- Professor Edwin van Hassel, University of Antwerp (maritime and ports expert)
- Professor Jeroen Pruijn, TU Delft (shipping management)
- Professor Wilfried Admiraal, Oslo Metropolitan University (e-Learning expert)

Together with student member: Konstantina-Natalia Daliani (University of Cyprus)

The evaluation for the programme took place on the 10th of June, 2024. Prior to the visit, the EEC was supplied with a comprehensive documentation, which included the overall description of the University structure, facilities, programme approval and evaluation processes and other useful information, the internal evaluation of the program, a list of the courses together with their description and faculty qualifications, among others.

During the meetings, we were given presentations and ample time was allowed for clarifications and discussion.

The EEC met with the senior management team and academic faculty responsible for delivering the MSc. International Shipping Management programme, the administrative and other support staff from the two Universities for the programme. The EEC also met a number of students from the two Universities with varying experience of other e-Learning and in-class programmes.

In particular, during the visit, the EEC met with Professor Constantinos Leonidou from the OUC and Professor Photis Panayides from the CUT, who are the programme coordinators, at various times during the day. The EEC would also like to commend our meetings with Elena Gregoriou, Division

Head of the Academic Affairs and Student Welfare Services – Member of the Internal Quality Assurance Committee- OUC, who discussed in detail various administrative matters with the EEC. The discussion covered the programme under review, its structure, academic issues related to the programme, staff issues and organization, assessments, and resources. Sessions followed with the administrative staff and the teachers. Then, during the session with students, the EEC met with students who shared their experiences with similar in-person and online programmes.

Following the presentations in each session, the EEC had the opportunity to ask questions and collect further information. Specifically, the EEC asked questions related to the programme, such as learning objectives (LO), programme structure, delivery methods, assessments of learning (AoL), quality of learning (QoL), infrastructure, and IT support. Additionally, they inquired about the two Universities more broadly and their level of cooperation.

The visit concluded with a meeting and general discussion with the senior management team to clarify any questions from earlier sessions during the site visit. The EEC members found the discussions to be fruitful.

The committee would like to thank all parties involved for their cooperation and support during the online evaluation. Additionally, the EEC would like to express its gratitude to Mr. Lefkios Neophytou, the CYQAA coordinator, for efficiently managing the process.

As detailed below, we find that the programme under review is overall compliant with the stated criteria and standards, and we have suggestions for improvements in a limited number of areas.

B. External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>University</i>
Arnab Majumdar	Professor	Imperial College London
Edwin van Hassel	Professor	University of Antwerp
Jeroen Pruijn	Professor	TU Delft
Wilfried Admiraal	Professor	Oslo Metropolitan University
Konstantina-Natalia Daliani	Student Representative	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

- *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 Quality Assurance mechanisms followed by the respective Departments in the two Universities are aligned with international standards. Internal policies and procedures are in place to assure the quality of the programme (and overall for the Department of Economics) under review. The resulting Master's degree is clearly specified and conforms to international standards for this level.

The EEC examined the relevant information regarding the admission criteria, learning outcomes, the delivery method of the courses, the assessment procedures, as well as the main features of the learning environment.

Programme teaching is evaluated according to OUC policies, which take into account student evaluation, course results and teacher and tutor evaluation by the coordinator and includes policies for continuous improvement of teaching quality among experienced instructors.

The programme goals, requirements and structure are clearly documented and available to prospective students.

This is a new programme based upon the needs of the shipping industry in the country, together with the expertise of the two Universities. The Programme consists of 90 ECTS spread over 3 semesters with 60 ECTS devoted to compulsory courses (6), 20 ECTS devoted to the Master's thesis, and 10 ECTS to electives (2 options) and an additional 5 ECTS for a voluntary internship.

These needs were currently connected through one-on-one conversations with various key representatives in the shipping industry. In the session, all expressed their interest and support for this programme and would like to continue to contribute. It would seem proper to formalise this input in the form of an Industry advisory board for this, or a set of similar programmes of the CUT and OUC.

Admissions criteria are consistent with the requirements of the OUC and the CUT, as well as international standards, allowing the entry of graduates from different educational systems with a bachelor's degree background. The program's structure is designed to be competitive on an international level. In particular, this MSc Programme will provide graduates with the relevant analytical, critical thinking and managerial skills to meet the demand for skilled personnel in the shipping sector in Cyprus and beyond.

The comprehensive curriculum combines theoretical foundations with practical applications, providing students with the knowledge and the managerial skills needed for the shipping market.

The programme under review is well-designed with objectives and learning outcomes in line with the Department's strategy and international practice. The purpose, requirements, and learning objectives are aligned with the mission of the program. The structure and content include appropriate core courses. The Master's thesis in combination with the course on Research Methods in Shipping ensures a clear academic basis, while the other courses route the programme in the practice of Shipping.

The relevant Departments at the OUC and the CUT are well connected and able to link students to companies and thesis assignments. They will, if possible, support a student for an internship as well, yet the international character of distance learning, might not allow all students to benefit from this.

Assessment of learning is based on interactive exercises, examinations and written assignments, with all methods required to be used for each course grade. Additionally, self-evaluation tests (MC) and open questions are provided to help students assess their understanding while studying the modules of a course. All outcomes, including reading and watching materials, are tracked and monitored for progress. Course content, time planning and activities including effort in terms of ECTS units and time per week are clearly outlined.

Strengths

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

- The quality of teaching personnel and their involvement in high-level international research.
- The quality of two universities' facilities for teaching, learning, and student support.
- The potential to appeal to a wide range of local and international students, provided that suitable marketing strategies are implemented.
- The potential to connect to public and private sector employers in the shipping sector.
- The programme aligns with international best practices in graduate education.
- A rigorous system of student evaluations and how the feedback and actions are brought back to both the programme, teachers and students is in place.

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 has the following recommendations to strengthen the programme further and to utilize its full potential:

1. The documentation from of the courses matches well with the programme end terms, however some elements of the teaching could be brought up more strongly in the course learning goals, to highlight their importance and strengthen the links between objectives, end-terms and course learning goals. This is especially so for:
 - a. Decarbonisation and sustainable shipping
 - b. Dealing with upcoming regulations

- c. The presence and need for interdisciplinarity to tackle this.
2. Once the programme is up and running, we would suggest to create an industry advisory board, to ensure that the materials remain up to date and as routed in practice as they are today.

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	Not applicable
1.4	Information management	Compliant

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

Sub-areas

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

2.2 Practical training

2.3 Student assessment

2.4 Study guides structure, content and interactive activities

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

Standards

- *The e-learning methodology is appropriate for the particular programme of study.*
- *Expected teleconferences for presentations, discussion and question-answer sessions, and guidance are set.*
- *A specific plan is developed to safeguard and assess the interaction:*
 - *among students*
 - *between students and teaching staff*
 - *between students and study guides/material of study*
- *Training, guidance and support are provided to the students focusing on interaction and the specificities of e-learning.*
- *The process of teaching and learning supports students' individual and social development.*
- *The process of teaching and learning is flexible, considers different modes of e-learning delivery, where appropriate, uses a variety of pedagogical methods and facilitates the achievement of planned learning outcomes.*
- *Students are encouraged to take an active role in creating the e-learning process.*
- *The implementation of student-centered learning and teaching encourages a sense of autonomy in the learner, while ensuring adequate guidance and support from the teacher.*
- *Teaching methods, tools and material used in teaching are modern, effective, support the use of modern educational technologies and are regularly updated.*
- *Mutual respect within the learner-teacher relationship is promoted.*
- *The implementation of student-centred learning and teaching respects and attends to the diversity of students and their needs, enabling flexible learning paths.*
- *Appropriate procedures for dealing with students' complaints regarding the process of teaching and learning are set.*
- *For distance learning programs, the number of students in both undergraduate and Master's level postgraduate programs does not exceed 30 students per class.*

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 process of teaching and learning in the Programme follows the practices of OUC, an internationally recognized research university specialized in e-learning programmes. Where the core of the teaching staff is sourced from CUT which specialises in shipping.
- Within the courses different modes of delivery are offered such as regular lectures, guest lectures, case studies, interactive exercises, and so on.
- The study guide for the programme is incorporated into the faculty of Economics and Management OUC and the department of Shipping of CUT.

- Instructors are active researchers who can incorporate state-of-the-art research into course teaching offering students state of the art insights.
- Students can either have knowledge and experience of shipping, or can use this programme to enter the shipping sector as a next generation of shipping experts. In this programme the students are encouraged to develop a working knowledge of theory and applications in technology, innovation, and management, and to apply them to relevant class projects, culminating in the Master's thesis.
- Student needs and feedback are regularly monitored and incorporated into teaching.
- An induction is provided to all students at the start of the curriculum to ensure they are aware of how to use all the tools and materials, how distant learning differs from other forms of learning and where to find support for any kind of question they may have.

The programme allows for block course format attendance to accommodate student career choices and personal needs. In this way, professionals that are working in the shipping sector can use this programme (or parts of it) to be trained further. Key elements are offered outside office hours to accommodate this. Each semester students can decide to do three modules (full-time about 50hrs per week), or only one or two modules (part-time, about 17 hrs per week per course). Students who are also working have the opportunity to apply new knowledge and methods to their practical work as they progress through the courses and include this in the required exercises as much as possible.

Assessment is fully in line with international university standards, best practices, and Cypriot requirements, and it reflects the learning goals of the programme. It includes various testing and examination methods and supports the development of the learner. Based on the nature and content of the course, especially its online nature, the assessment specifically uses, interactive exercises, individual assignments, and a final examination. The criteria for the methods of assessments are included in the courses' description and published in advance.

Procedures are in place to address any complaints that students may have about the teaching and learning process.

Strengths

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

The EEC identified several strong points of the programme:

1. The programme benefits from the experience and engagement of the faculties in both Universities, which contributes to good practice in teaching and learning. There is a clear synergy between OUC and CUT where OUC is the lead expert in the e learning process, while CUT is offering the core teaching staff, who are the experts in the course materials.
2. An appropriate learning infrastructure and instructional methodology have been established.

3. The use of block teaching in the courses is considered a good practice for learning.
4. The programme receives significant administrative support and academic commitment.
5. Practical training is a supported component of the programme but not part of the curriculum.
6. The student assessment aligns with international university standards and programme learning goals.
7. The mandatory 5 meetings to follow the thesis process is a good practice to ensure that the students are working on the thesis.
8. The induction ensures that students are aware early on procedures, support and tooling.

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 suggests the following improvements:

1. Consider to make some of the interactive assignments or written assignments small group exercises to ensure a sense of student community.
2. It is advised to consider changing the ratio between the report and the oral defence / presentation of the thesis project. As the increased use of AI improves the reporting style and as such more emphasis could be placed on the defence part rather than assessing the report.
3. It is also advised to closely follow the teaching staff to ensure that the teaching staff keeps on:
 - a. integrating as much as possible their own papers/research projects,
 - b. and to ensure that real applications are used to explain the theory.

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

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

3. Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

Sub-areas

3.1 Teaching staff recruitment and development

3.2 Teaching staff number and status

3.3 Synergies of teaching and research

3.1 Teaching staff recruitment and development

Standards

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

3.2 Teaching staff number and status

Standards

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

3.3 Synergies of teaching and research

Standards

- *The teaching staff collaborate in the fields of teaching and research within the HEI and with partners outside (practitioners in their fields, employers, and staff members at other HEIs in Cyprus or abroad).*
- *Scholarly activity to strengthen the link between education and research is encouraged.*
- *The teaching staff publications are within the discipline.*

- *Teaching staff studies and publications are closely related to the programme's courses.*
- *The allocation of teaching hours compared to the time for research activity is appropriate.*

You may also consider the following questions:

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

Findings

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 Programme follows international best practices and a clearly described framework for faculty's workload, recruiting new faculty and tracking faculty development.

The number of teaching staff involved in the programme is sufficient and assured as most teaching staff is from CUT and can be extended with adjunct staff from OUC if needed. Additionally, guest lecturers are involved with considerable shipping experience, to increase the link with practice.

All faculty members involved are highly active in (international) research.

The programme is able to combine recent research findings and insights from both disciplinary and teaching and learning research with state-of-the-art teaching methods.

Strengths

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

The EEC notes the following strengths of the Programme:

- Innovative application of new teaching methods, especially important as this is an online distance learning course.
- The EEC identified that there is a synergy between teaching and research.

- The EEC observed that course coordinators are senior academics who have experience in their field for several years, all holding a PhD degree.
- This is complemented by the guest lecturers with considerable experience of the latest developments in the industry.
- Staff training on the optimal use of e-learning resource.

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.

Suggestions for improvement are listed below:

- Although the programme clearly capitalizes on the ease and versatility of complete online delivery, such programmes always have some difficulty in forming a cohesive academic community and in facilitating regular interaction among students. This could give rise to isolation, or lack of motivation and abandoning the studies. It is recommended to consider any of the suggestion below for further improvement of the programme:
 - Having more formal live sessions (e.g., interactive webinars, office hours, or discussion-based tutorials) to have active interaction among students and teachers.
 - Encouraging collaborative learning through teamwork, peer feedback exercises, and topic-based discussion forums.
 - Creating virtual informal communities to enable students to socially interact and build relationships beyond the learning activities (e.g., interest-based chat rooms or student lounge).
 - A buddy or mentoring programme, aimed at new or international students.

These actions would maximize the student experience through greater involvement, reducing isolation, and enhancing student retention in the online learning environment.

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 EEC met students, coming from both OUC and CUT. The EEC asked them about their experiences, why they chose OUC and CUT accordingly what they like (or don't like).

In general, the EEC noted that students are mostly positive about their studies, the programme they followed and especially the support received.

Main findings:

The course is a flexible and well-structured study option, which is ideal for students with other responsibilities and career professionals. The intensive blocks of teaching, though demanding, are perceived very positively by most students. Academic and administrative support is first class with good access to electronic resources, databases, and library facilities.

Students report that academics are available and communication is informal and direct, creating a supportive learning culture. Also, the informal mentoring practices by staff guarantee a student-oriented and embracing environment in which students are comfortable inquiring and asking for directions.

However, a completely online delivery model always presents some challenges. While one of the advantages is flexibility, there are no periodic chances for prompt interaction and community building does not come naturally. The absence of mandatory structured live sessions and communal spaces can lead to isolation among students and discussion with others is seen as part of your academic forming and contributes to the overall satisfaction. Although encouraged by the staff, including cooperation as part of one or two courses could further support this.

Overall, the programme succeeds in academic quality and accessibility and is potentially enhanced through increased efforts to more fully engage students and create a more cohesive academic community in the virtual setting.

Strengths

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

The main strengths of the programme are listed below:

- Students are motivated to undertake internships and thesis research that are relevant to the needs of the industry and their own company if possible.
- The programme is highly flexible, and this is especially advantageous for working professionals or students with other responsibilities.
- Students feel that academic staff are available and approachable, and communication is informal and direct when needed.
- The mentoring approach adopted by the majority of tutors guarantees a nurturing learning atmosphere, where students can easily ask questions and receive guidance.

In all, the programme constitutes an appropriately balanced academic experience combining structure and responsiveness, as well as a student-led approach guaranteeing participation, accessibility, and successful progression.

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.

Suggestions for improvement are listed below:

- Although the programme clearly capitalizes on the ease and versatility of complete online delivery, such programmes always face challenges forming a cohesive academic community and facilitating regular interaction among students. This could give rise to isolation, or a lack of motivation and ultimately abandoning their studies. The suggestion below could further improve the programme:
 - Having more formal live sessions (e.g., interactive webinars, office hours, or discussion-based tutorials) to have active interaction among students and teachers.
 - Encouraging collaborative learning through teamwork, peer feedback exercises, and topic-based discussion forums.
 - Creating virtual informal communities to enable students to socially interact and build relationships beyond the learning activities (e.g., interest-based chat rooms or student lounge).
 - A buddy or mentoring programme, aimed at new or international students.

These actions would maximize the student experience through greater involvement, reducing isolation, and enhancing student retention in the online learning environment.

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 EEC had the opportunity to visit the premises of OUC and were given presentations by the Library staff of the cooperating universities in Cyprus. In addition, we discussed resources with administrative personnel, such as student support, LEMM and Eclass-support. The EEC believes that the resources within these libraries are entirely adequate resources and a wide range of services to both students and teaching staff are provided, such as access to library materials (including online), IT infrastructure and support, databases, administrative support, career services, student well-being, and so on.

Administrative staff with great experience support the students throughout the programme under evaluation, including tests of key software beforehand such as proctoring software.

Special mention should be given to the library facilities, which feature a wide range of sources from reputable publishers, including books, e-books, journal databases, etc.

The universities also offer access to specialised databases and software related to the learning goals of the programme.

Strengths

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

- With regards to personnel, the EEC acknowledges the experience, well-educated, dedication, and enthusiasm. They cater to any need raised that is relevant for completing the programme.
- The library has excellent resources within the university environment and serves as a central hub of knowledge for students, faculty, and the broader community.
- The student support office is well organized and support is well in place.
- The e-learning support, both technical and pedagogical for both students and teachers, is well in place.

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.

Recommendations are listed below:

- There is a need to be aware of the resourcing of the administrative staff and support as the programme will grow in the future.
- Well-being issues of students might require more psychologists in the future as well.

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.

This programme has great potential to appeal both to Cypriot and international students interested in careers in the private sector, central banking, shipping finance companies, engineering companies, maritime affairs, regulatory bodies and so on.

The EEC has identified numerous strengths in the various sub-areas listed above, but has also made concrete recommendations for specific improvements with a view to meeting these objectives. Rather than summarising or selecting a subset of these recommendations, we prefer to refer the reader to the bullet lists in the relevant sections of this report, as we believe that all suggestions and recommendations should be carefully reviewed and considered.

Our overall conclusion for purposes of this evaluation is that the programme should be considered COMPLIANT with the recommendations listed in the relevant sections above.

Attracting international students beyond the Hellenic world will pose a challenge given the limited budgets. This maybe of importance in the future as the programme becomes embedded and goes from strength to strength. Further strengthening the aspects below could differentiate it from the competition, ensure continued relevance and increase the potential and popularity overall:

1. Embed the external partners advisory board in a formal manner with regular meetings, points of action etc. This will enable synergies between the partners to be strengthened.
2. Students should be encouraged to provide a reflexive account of their learning at the end of their programme to strengthen academic growth and provide valuable insights beyond the course contents.
3. Ensure a sense of community in the cohort by developing interactive, online group exercises, even if only 2-3 students interact per activity/assignment.

The EEC would like to thank all involved in the Open University of Cyprus and the Cyprus University of Technology for high engagement throughout the evaluation process - and for providing a rich set of supporting documents, before and during the site visit. We also appreciate the constructive, lively and reflective spirit during the visit as well as the commitment to continuous improvement, expressed by the various representatives of the programme.

We also thank Mr. Lefkios Neophytou for the smooth organization of the evaluation process.



Signatures of the EEC

Name	Signature
Arnab Majumdar	
Edwin van Hassel	
Jeroen Pruijn	
Wilfried Admiraal	
Konstantina-Natalia Daliani	
Click to enter Name	

Date: 11-06-2025

