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CYPRUS AGENCY OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

ΔΙΠΑΕ CYQAA

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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): Economics and Management**

- **Department/ Sector:** Department/Sector

- **Programme of study- Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)**

  In Greek:

  Οικονομικά των Επιχειρήσεων

  In English:

  Business Economics

- **Language(s) of instruction: Greek**

- **Programme's status: New**

- **Concentrations (if any):**

  In Greek: Concentrations
  In English: Concentrations

ΚΥΠΡΙΑΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ
REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS

A. Introduction
This part includes basic information regarding the onsite visit.

The External Evaluation Committee (EEC) visited the premises of the Open University of Cyprus (OUC) in Nicosia on the 9th of April 2025. Throughout the day, the EEC had the opportunity to meet with all relevant parties, starting with the Rector Professor Stavros Stavrou, the Vice Rector and Chair of the Quality Assurance Committee Professor Vayos Liapis, members of OUC's Quality Assurance Unit, members of OUC's Internal Evaluation Committee, the Dean of the School of Economics and Management Professor Michalinos Zembylas and the Coordinator of the program under evaluation Professor Christina Christou.

Excellent presentations were made throughout the various sessions which summarized key elements of the application of the program and expanded on some core areas. Documentation was of a high level of quality, thorough and very helpful in enabling us to understand the program structure, its management and the wider context.

The Committee also met members of the faculty teaching staff of various disciplines who assisted in the presentation of the program of studies.

Furthermore, the EEC interviewed a group of undergraduate students and members of the administrative personnel related to academic affairs, student welfare, library facilities, and research services. Finally, the EEC talked to the members of OUC's IT Services Department who explained some of the technicalities of the e-learning platform used to deliver the online courses and demonstrated the online resources accessible by students.

Every effort was made to help the EEC during the onsite visit, and everyone seemed very flexible to accommodate their program to the needs of the assessment committee.

The EEC's impression of the submitted material is that it conforms to the assessment requirements stated by the agency and contains the desired documentation and information, and we acknowledge all the efforts that have gone into the production and presentation of the material.

B. External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

Name	Position	University
Dimitrios Kousenidis	Professor	Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
Michael Vlassopoulos	Professor	University of Southampton
Dionisis Philippas	Professor	ESSCA School of Management
George Kampourakis	Professor	University of the Aegean
Andreas Hatzianastasi	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)

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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

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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.*

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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 BSc in Business Economics is a distance-learning (DL) 4-year program (8 semesters). The language of the program is Greek. Successful completion of the program requires a minimum of 240 ECTS. In general, the program is well structured, its objectives are in accordance with the overall strategy of the School and the University and the intended learning outcomes stem from and are consistent with the content of the program. The purpose, objectives, and learning outcomes are clearly communicated and well-justified. The expected learning outcomes of the program are known to the students from the first week of the semester through the course syllabi, the course outlines, the website of the program and the Moodle electronic platform. Overall, the program seeks to prepare students for leadership and managerial roles in profit and non-profit organizations in the global competitive business environment.

The structure and content of the program include an appropriate number of core and elective courses. The program's core requirements consist of 18 core courses, of 10 credits each (180 credits in total) and 6 elective courses, of 10 credits each (60 credits in total). The core courses are delivered in the first six semesters and the elective courses are delivered in the final two semesters. All available courses and their content are communicated to students through the program's website and the Moodle platform.

The admission criteria are adequate. The program is delivered in Greek and appeals only to students of Greek and Cypriot origin. The expected number of students in the program of study is between 30 and 40 students for the first year of implementation.

The assessment system and criteria regarding student course performance are clear, adequate and are well communicated to the students. In general, the program under review is carefully designed with learning objectives in line with the OUC's strategies as well as with international practices. The purpose, requirements, and LOs are aligned with the mission of the program as well as the needs of the Greek, Cypriot, and international job markets.

The EEC identified that there are internal policies and procedures in place to ensure the quality of the program. Quality assurance mechanisms are present and fairly well aligned with international standards. There is a number of quality assurance mechanisms and formal policies for the development and the management of the program of study.

The structure and content include a high-quality curriculum, which is an important element of the program. The program's modules have various thematic areas orientated towards economics, accounting, banking, finance, marketing and business. This curriculum has a disciplinary character,

covering most of the corporations' activities. Interdisciplinarity is strengthened via specific thematic areas within each module.

The School of Economics and Management of the OUC involves experienced academics who act as lecturers, online instructors and interact regularly with the students. Faculty members are mainly permanent although visiting lecturers are hired in the form of collaborating academic personnel. All lecturers are PhD holders and usually are faculty members of other Cypriot and Greek Universities. The latter is the modus operandi of OUC in all years of operation.

The final grade is based on three components: (a) the assignment part for 30% of the final grade, including 2 written assignments and self-assessment exercises, (b) interactive activities (10%), and (c) the final online exams for 60% of the final grade, delivered and monitored by Proctorio software. Re-sit exams are also in place.

The program coordinator Professor Christou confirmed the EEC that instructors and program teaching faculty design and update the module material regularly, in terms of written assessments and exams, and, if necessary, revise it accordingly.

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

The EEC believes that the programme has some important strengths, as follows:

• The programme is built on the established processes and the DL Unit of OUC, thereby offering continuity in learning processes.

• The courses are well orientated towards the program, and the elective courses are oriented towards the market needs.

• Management, faculty, and administrative staff appear to be committed to the planning and execution of the programme. The faculty members that teach this program's modules are qualified academic professors with years of teaching experience in the field and research expertise that meet the programme's expectations.

• The programme is financially sustainable in part by relying on the strong reputation and brand strength of the OUC.

• The learning and operational processes and the IT infrastructure meet learning expectations.

• The student performance assessment process, as presented by members during the visit, is in line with the expectations of a DL program, featuring both final exams, assessments, and interactive assessment activities for each module.

• The programme carries enthusiastic support from external stakeholders and there is general confidence that there is a viable market for 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.

The EEC suggests some improvements to be considered in the programme's design, structure, and delivery. These suggestions aim to improve the clarity of the learning offering and the sustainability of the programme in the long term, given the growing competition in the provision of educational services. These suggestions include the following:

1. The new programme offers some elective courses. Even though the courses are interesting and well designed, covering some important topics and fields, the EEC believes that other courses can be incorporated, particularly in the last two semesters. A modification to the structure of the courses can benefit the programme and enhance the programme dynamics enabling student needs for alternative options. Certain revisions in the curriculum content could be envisaged. Such revisions, if they are incorporated, may include (but not limited to) the following: (i) a course module on 'Business Strategy and Financial Performance' orientation. (ii) since there are 4 courses in the last two semesters relate to energy economics, a course(s) in another topic can be considered, within the management (business) field; (iii) the courses Corporate Finance and Introduction to Financial Theory can change places in the corresponding semesters; (iv) in addition to (ii), any asynchronous webinars covering the aforenoted specific topics in Energy Economics or any other topic that would be replaced or topics of highly ongoing interest (e.g., ESG and sustainability compliance, energy management, green accounting, etc.) are welcome.

2. The coordinators should consider in the future including an optional BSc dissertation that would enable learning of new skills and competencies such as critical thinking and reinforce students to work on new things, related to both research methodologies and their working environment.

3. Some courses in the 3rd and 4th years can be slightly mixed in order to have both core and electives courses in the last 2 semesters. If the OUC incorporates the EEC's suggestion in this case, we also have some minor suggestions, such as: (i) the students should be allowed to choose the supervisor professor who will be closer (as research field) to the topic of their thesis; (ii) a pool of dissertation topics should be available to students in advance to do their thesis, starting on the 3rd year, and after completing some of the fundamental core courses; (iii) datasets can be provided from professors on Institutions' internal clouds.

4.	The DL Unit should be further developed, in terms of both human capital and funding, to support instructional design, integrate latest educational technologies and to offer faculty professional development in online teaching and learning, but also to promote students' educational interests.

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

Standards

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

2.2 Practical training

Standards

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

2.3 Student assessment

Standards

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

2.4 Study guides structure, content and interactive activities

Standards

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

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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 main findings are the following:

Each module features study guides with clear Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs), defined material, and a well-structured format. The EEC deems the module descriptors adequate, and the reviewed study guides offer detailed explanations beneficial for both faculty and students, demonstrating significant effort from the module coordinators. The activity descriptions within these guides indicate an awareness of explicitly linking teaching and assessment with program objectives and learning

outcomes. The EEC has reviewed sufficient evidence of how these guides are translated into the online environment and course structure for online delivery.

Student assessment criteria are clear. Each module is assessed through written assignments and a final exam proctored remotely using specialized software (Proctorio).

The program's e-learning methodology is appropriate for geographically dispersed learners and follows the established OUC model. This includes bi-weekly online meetings, faculty online office hours, common individual assignments, dedicated and frequently moderated staff forums, voluntary student forums, and an end-of-module online exam. While primarily a repository for online materials, the HOU's platform, used for several years, has the potential for updates aligned with the latest distance learning guidelines and principles.

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

Leveraging its established distance learning expertise, the Open University of Cyprus (OUC), a small university in Cyprus, must expand internationally for growth, with offering global social science courses as a key strategy. The proposed Business Economics course will capitalize on OUC's existing distance learning infrastructure, experienced faculty, and dedicated Distance Learning Unit, which currently supports technical aspects and course procedures, and is slated to replace the existing Economics undergraduate program.

The program utilizes the established e-learning model of the OUC, ensuring student guidance and support through online synchronous presentations and discussions with Q&A. Interaction is primarily achieved via synchronous Zoom sessions, staff forum postings, voluntary office hour meetings, and voluntary student forum postings. Asynchronous learning relies mainly on independent study, supported by prerecorded lectures and uploaded learning materials on the e-class platform.

Comprehensive study guides support students in each course, providing all necessary information. The ideal student-faculty ratio (maximum 30:1) facilitates the achievement of module ILOs.

The planned student assessment aligns with traditional e-learning methodologies. Students receive feedback after each module assignment, and final exams are conducted remotely using well-established safeguarding practices and software (Proctorio).

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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.

Based on discussions (including with past students), the existing programs' traditional e-learning philosophy emphasizes individual student-teacher interaction and appears largely rooted in a teacher-centered approach, with limited peer collaboration beyond applicable group work. This presents an opportunity to enhance pedagogical approaches within the currently under-resourced Distance Learning Unit's focus, which currently leans more towards technical infrastructure and procedures. The key recommendations below explore potential avenues for moving beyond legacy e-learning practices.

1. Enhanced assessment and feedback strategies:

- Peer review of team assessments: Implementing peer review for team assessments offers a valuable opportunity for students to develop critical evaluation skills and gain deeper insights into the assessment criteria. By evaluating their peers' work, students actively engage with the material from a different perspective, fostering a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter and collaborative dynamics. This process not only provides constructive feedback to fellow team members but also encourages self-reflection on their own contributions and learning.

- Structured peer review: Implement a system where student teams anonymously review each other's work based on clear rubrics provided by the instructors. This not only gives students diverse perspectives on their work but also deepens their understanding of the assessment criteria as they evaluate others.

- Focus on specific aspects: Instead of reviewing entire assessments, focus peer review on specific components (e.g., methodology, argumentation, presentation quality). This makes the feedback more targeted and manageable.

- Feedback on feedback: Instructors can review the quality of the peer feedback provided, offering guidance to students on how to give constructive criticism.

- Tools for peer review: Utilize e-class or dedicated tools (like Peergrade, FeedbackFruits, or even simple anonymous surveys) that facilitate the distribution, review, and feedback process.

Formative assessments with automated feedback:

- Interactive quizzes and self-assessments: Use e-class features or external tools to create quizzes with immediate feedback, guiding students on areas they need to revisit. The EEC's findings confirm that OUC employs this practice.

- Branching scenarios: Implement interactive scenarios where students make choices and receive feedback based on their decisions, promoting deeper engagement and understanding.

- Automated feedback on submissions: Where possible (e.g., for structured writing tasks), use tools that provide automated feedback on syntax, style, or basic content understanding.

Instructor feedback beyond grading:

- Audio/video feedback: Instead of solely relying on written comments, instructors can provide more personalized and engaging feedback through short audio or video recordings.

- Targeted feedback sessions: Offer optional or required short one-on-one or small group feedback sessions via Zoom to discuss specific aspects of their work.

2. Collaborative learning and knowledge sharing:

- Team-based learning: Where possible, structure the course around team assignments and discussions. This encourages active learning and peer teaching. The process typically involves individual preparation, a readiness assurance test (individual and then team-based), and application activities done in teams.

- Project-based learning with collaborative elements: Assign complex projects that require teams to collaborate and apply their knowledge. Regular online check-ins and peer feedback within teams can enhance the learning process.

- Online discussion forums with structured prompts: Go beyond simple Q&A forums. Pose thought-provoking questions, case studies, or debates that require students to engage with each other's ideas and build upon them. Instructors can moderate and provide targeted input. The EEC's findings confirm that OUC employs this practice.

- Shared online documents and collaborative editing: Use tools like Google Docs or wikis for collaborative note-taking, brainstorming, or even co-creating parts of assignments.

- Virtual study groups: Encourage and facilitate the formation of student-led study groups via Zoom or dedicated e-class forums. This allows students to support each other's learning.

3. Enhancing interaction and engagement:

- Virtual guest speakers: Invite industry professionals or experts to give online talks and Q&A sessions via Zoom, broadening students' perspectives and connecting theory to practice.

- Interactive simulations and virtual labs: Utilize or develop simulations and virtual labs relevant to the course content to provide hands-on learning experiences in a remote environment. The EEC's findings confirm that OUC employs this practice.

- Gamification elements: Incorporate game-like elements (points, badges, leaderboards) into learning activities to increase motivation and engagement. The EEC's findings confirm that OUC employs this practice.

- "Flipped classroom" approach: Assign pre-class learning materials (videos, readings) and use Zoom sessions for interactive discussions, problem-solving, and application of concepts.

- Student-generated content: Encourage students to create and share their own learning materials, such as short videos explaining concepts, mind maps, or summaries. This promotes deeper understanding and peer learning.

4. Monitoring and adapting teaching:

- Learning analytics: Utilize the data available in e-class to track student engagement, performance on quizzes, and participation in forums. This data can inform instructors about areas where students are struggling and where teaching approaches might need adjustment.

- Regular feedback surveys: Conduct short, anonymous surveys throughout the semester to gather student feedback on the teaching methods, content, and online environment. This allows for timely adjustments.

- Office hours with a focus: Instead of just open Q&A, consider themed office hours focusing on specific topics or assignment challenges.

Implementing these approaches requires careful planning and clear communication with students about the purpose and benefits. Providing training and guidelines on how to give effective peer feedback is also crucial for the success of peer review activities. By diversifying the e-learning strategies beyond basic content delivery and synchronous meetings, you can foster a more engaging, collaborative, and ultimately higher-quality learning experience for your undergraduate students.

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)*

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.*

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CYPRUS AGENCY OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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> - *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 EEC met with the programme coordinator, as well as the module coordinators for the programme and the permanent/adjunct faculty members involved in the programme. The main findings are as follows:

- The EEC believes that the programme is supported by qualified faculty members, all of whom are experienced academics.

- The visiting (adjunct) faculty of the programme are respected and often distinguished professors coming from both Greek and Cypriot universities.

- The module coordinators have been very active in preparing the programme's materials and syllabi. Moreover, the remaining adjunct faculty who teach each module are contributing to the programme.

- The programme is well-supported by the DL unit of OUC and its administrative services.

- The faculty involved in the programme are highly qualified researchers recognised in international contexts.

Strengths

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

The EEC found the following strengths during the Q&A session with the faculty members:

- All the faculty members are qualified, experienced academics, involved in high-level research activities.

- The faculty is familiar with the DL schemes, workload, technology required, and new practices to be presented to the students.

- There is continuous training for the faculty involved in the programme.

- There is a well-balanced collaboration between administrative personnel and teaching faculty.

- The new offering is benefiting from the previous experience of staff in teaching a similar programme for over a decade.

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 are no major recommendations at this point.

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)*

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

<u>Standards</u>

- *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

<u>Standards</u>

- *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

<u>Standards</u>

- *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

<u>Standards</u>

- *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 with a student enrolled in another programme, as well as external stakeholders. The EEC asked them about their experiences during the years of study and postgraduation, their motivation to choose this Institution, their career prospects and experiences prior to and post-graduation, what they liked or did not like, as well as how the courses were being delivered in a DL mode. Moreover, the discussion with the stakeholders concerned the need of a new BSc in Business Economics in the local market. Notably, the student admission, processes and criteria are established and published on the OUC website. Regulations regarding student progression are in place.

- The EEC noted that the student is very positive about his studies, the programme he followed and the support received.
- The student admission requirements as well as the programme's outcome seem to be clear to all students and in line with the criteria set by the national frameworks. These are clearly communicated by the University to prospective students.
- The students are supported by the University in terms of teaching materials, IT support, and library access in existing programmes.
- Among the primary motivations of students in studying at the OUC programmes is the distance learning (flexibility) and the OUC brand. That was also validated from the stakeholders, who also validated the need of this Bachelor programme in Business Economics for the local job market.

- The student selection has an open approach allowing applications from different fields. This increases the interdisciplinary focus of the programme.
- Reflecting on the online delivery of teaching, the student was overall happy that he could adjust his schedule in line with his studies, yet they noted very few opportunities for peer interaction and communication within courses.

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

The EEC points out the following strengths.

- The students in general have good levels of communication with the faculty who always provided support with regards to the students' assessments or exams.
- The student admission requirements as well as the programme's LOs seem to be clear to all students and in line with the criteria set by the national framework. These are clearly communicated by the University to prospective students.
- The programme carries enthusiastic support from external stakeholders and there is general confidence that there is a viable market for 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.

The programme would benefit from strengthening the level of interaction between students and teaching staff, as well as among students themselves. To address this, we recommend the integration of more structured and regular opportunities for live engagement, such as virtual office hours, interactive webinars, and group discussion sessions. Encouraging the use of collaborative platforms (e.g., forums, group chats, or project-based learning tools) can also enhance peer-to-peer interaction and build a stronger sense of academic community. Additionally, feedback mechanisms, such as regular check-ins or surveys, could be implemented to monitor and improve the quality of interaction throughout the programme.

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

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.

Physical resources, i.e., premises, libraries, study facilities, IT infrastructure, are all in place and adequate to support the proposed study program. Students receive training about the availability of resources before they start their studies, and support is in place throughout their studies in these areas. Also, human support resources including staff, counsellors, and qualified administrative staff, are in place and adequate to support the study program.

During the visit, members of the staff clarified their intention to include weekly interactive activities per each course, as this is the offering of a new program. Some example activities were found in the study guides such as a debate in a forum, role playing, and problem-solving exercises applied to real-life settings. A pedagogical planning unit for e-learning with qualified staff is responsible for the technical side of learning as well as the provision of eLearning training and support to staff when designing their courses.

Strengths

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

The proposed program benefits from adequate physical and human resources. A specialized pedagogical planning unit with qualified staff actively collaborates with the program coordinator to deliver the e-learning methodology, providing training and organizing webinars.

Comprehensive student support is available at the start and throughout their studies. Students are well-informed about available online services, including e-learning facilities, computer labs, library support, career services, and alumni services.

The student workload per course/module appears balanced, and interactive activities are integrated into each course. The e-learning material and activities effectively utilize the virtual and audio-visual environment, although opportunities for further enhancement exist (see Section 2).

Dedicated offices manage key aspects of the DL program, including marketing, communication, admissions, applications, materials, and scheduling.

The library offers a robust collection of academic texts and research literature in both print and electronic formats, providing open access to resources from leading publishers.

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 offers the following recommendations:

To ensure teaching staff remain informed about advancements in distance learning and can apply them effectively, a minimum requirement of yearly pedagogy-focused training should be implemented for all teaching staff. This could include attending at least one webinar annually on new teaching and learning methods, supplementing the initial introduction training for new members. (Refer to Section 2 for specific suggestions.)

Each course should incorporate interactive activities that move beyond legacy e-learning methods, as outlined in Section 2.

A policy document may be developed detailing proactive interaction and communication strategies for teaching staff to ensure students are aware of their progress and receive timely support, even without direct requests. Such a policy should include a schedule for synchronous or asynchronous communication and regular monitoring of student engagement via the eClass tracking system or learning analytics tools.

Given the program's fully online delivery, the university should prioritize updating and diversifying its digital resources to facilitate innovative teaching strategies, as detailed in Section 2. While acknowledging funding limitations for state universities, efforts should be made to increase administrative personnel and staff within the eLearning unit.

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 DL BSc is a new programme that will be delivered by the Open University of Cyprus. It has a 4-year content, design, and the language of delivery is Greek. The EEC appreciates that significant progress has been made in building the new DL programme. This progress includes drawing upon faculty expertise, quality assessments, programme structure, and a high-quality curriculum that is consistent with high-level comparable programmes. The programme and module coordinators have drawn upon their experience and expertise in designing and running the DL BSc programme, along with the academic staff involved with considerable experience in DL platforms and teaching. The academic faculty has been active in designing the programme and has contributed to its creation. The programme is supported by the Distance Learning Units of Open University of Cyprus and its administrative services. The programme is expected to be successful in terms of recruitment, because of its excellent reputation.

To establish the sustainability and the competitive advantage of the programme over the coming years, and taking into account the recent developments, there is always room for improvement. Indeed, we have identified some areas where we see that further development is recommended, and we have elaborated on those in each section above.

The EEC also recommends to the senior management to provide more human capital resources and funding to the administrative staff and faculty members that would enhance their tasks and productivity.

The EEC would like to thank all involved in the Open University of Cyprus for the high engagement throughout the evaluation process - and for providing a rich set of supporting documents, videos and weblinks before and during the site visit.

Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to Mr. Costas Constantinou for organising and facilitating the evaluation process.

E. Signatures of the EEC

Name	Signature
Dimitris Kousenidis	
Michael Vlassopoulos	
George Kampourakis	
Dionisis Philippas	
Andreas Hatzianastasi	
Click to enter Name	

Date: 10/4/2025