Doc. 300.1.1/2

Date: July 6, 2021

External Evaluation Report

(E-learning programme of study)

- **Higher Education Institution:**

  Frederick University

- **Town: Nicosia, Limassol**

- **School/Faculty (if applicable): Education and Social Sciences**

- **Department/ Sector: Education**

- **Programme of study- Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle In Greek:**

  Εκπαίδευση για την Αειφόρο Ανάπτυξη και Κοινωνική Αλλαγή

  In English:

  MSc Education for Sustainable Development and Social Change (3 Semesters, 90 ECTS

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

- **Programme's status: Currently Operating**

- **Concentrations (if any):**

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

In Greek: Concentrations

In English: Concentrations

The present document has been prepared within the framework of the authority and competencies of the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education, according to the provisions of the "Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education and the Establishment and Operation of an Agency on Related Matters Laws of 2015 to 2019" [N. 136 (I)/2015 to N. 35(I)/2019].

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

The External Evaluation Committee (henceforth EEC) examined the documentation of the International Masters of Science on Education for Sustainable Development and Social Change (MSc-ESD) (1,5 Years, 90 ECTS) offered by Frederick University – both for the conventional version and for the distance learning version of the programme. Academic members of the EEC had a first online meeting with Dr Lefkios Neofytou, the CYQAA officer over Zoom on Tuesday June 15 of 2021 to discuss the online accreditation process. An online Zoom meeting with University representatives, including the Rector, the Vice-Rector of Academic Affairs and the President of the Council) took place on Wednesday June 30th of 2021. During this meeting, the academic management team, as well as the Chair of the School of Education and of the Distance Learning Committee presented, explained and elaborated on the university's overall vision, international standing, education and research strategy, the curriculum and support structures as well as other issues in further detail. Meetings were also arranged with academic and administrative staff, specifically connected to the MSc programme to understand their involvement in the design, execution and evaluation of the programme. The EEC also had a conversation with 8 students/alumni of the programme and its predecessor to reflect on the quality of the programme and its relevance for the world of work. The EEC also had the opportunity to virtually visit the premises of the College resources, class infrastructure, computer centre, library, online and recreational facilities. During the evaluation process and the writing of the report the EEC also had several exchanges via email about the assessment.

B. External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

Name	Position	University
Arjen Wals (Chair)	Professor	Wageningen University, The Netherlands
Olaf Zawacki-Richter	Professor, Distance Education Expert	University of Oldenburg, Germany
Jennie Winter	Associate Professor	Plymouth Marjon University, United Kingdom
Matthias Barth	Professor	Leuphana University, Germany
Constantinos Zacharia	Student Member	University of Cyprus, Cyprus

C. Guidelines on content and structure of the report

- *The external evaluation report follows the structure of assessment areas.*

- *At the beginning of each assessment area there is a box presenting:*
  (a) sub-areas
  (b) standards which are relevant to the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)
  (c) some questions that EEC may find useful.

- *The questions aim at facilitating the understanding of each assessment area and at illustrating the range of topics covered by the standards.*

- *Under each assessment area, it is important to provide information regarding the compliance with the requirements of each sub-area. In particular, the following must be included:*

  ### *Findings*

  A short description of the situation in the Higher Education Institution (HEI), based on elements from the application for external evaluation and on findings from the onsite visit.

  ### *Strengths*

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

  ### *Areas of improvement and recommendations*

  A list of problem areas to be dealt with, followed by or linked to the recommendations of how to improve the situation.

- *The EEC should state the compliance for each sub-area (Non-compliant, Partially compliant, Compliant), which must be in agreement with everything stated in the report. It is pointed out that, in the case of standards that cannot be applied due to the status of the HEI and/or of the programme of study, N/A (= Not Applicable) should be noted.*

- *The EEC should state the conclusions and final remarks regarding the programme of study as a whole.*

- ***The report may also address other issues which the EEC finds relevant.***

1. Study programme and study programme's design and development
(ESG 1.1, 1.2, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9)

Sub-areas

1.1 Policy for quality assurance
1.2 Design, approval, on-going monitoring and review
1.3 Public information
1.4 Information management

1.1 Policy for quality assurance

Standards

- *Policy for quality assurance of the programme of study:*
  - *has a formal status and is publicly available*
  - *supports the organisation of the quality assurance system through appropriate structures, regulations and processes*
  - *supports teaching, administrative staff and students to take on their responsibilities in quality assurance*
  - *ensures academic integrity and freedom and is vigilant against academic fraud*
  - *guards against intolerance of any kind or discrimination against the students or staff*
  - *supports the involvement of external stakeholders*

1.2 Design, approval, on-going monitoring and review

Standards

- *The programme of study:*
  - *is designed with overall programme objectives that are in line with the institutional strategy and have explicit intended learning outcomes*
  - *is designed by involving students and other stakeholders*
  - *benefits from external expertise*
  - *reflects the four purposes of higher education of the Council of Europe (preparation for sustainable employment, personal development, preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies, the development and maintenance, through teaching, learning and research, of a broad, advanced knowledge base)*
  - *is designed so that it enables smooth student progression*

- *is designed so that the exams' and assignments' content corresponds to the level of the programme and the number of ECTS*
- *defines the expected student workload in ECTS*
- *includes well-structured placement opportunities where appropriate*
- *is subject to a formal institutional approval process*
- *results in a qualification that is clearly specified and communicated, and refers to the correct level of the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area*
- *is regularly monitored in the light of the latest research in the given discipline, thus ensuring that the programme is up-to-date*
- *is periodically reviewed so that it takes into account the changing needs of society, the students' workload, progression and completion, the effectiveness of procedures for assessment of students, student expectations, needs and satisfaction in relation to the programme*
- *is reviewed and revised regularly involving students and other stakeholders*

1.3 Public information

Standards

- *Regarding the programme of study, clear, accurate, up-to date and readily accessible information is published about:*
  - *selection criteria*
  - *intended learning outcomes*
  - *qualification awarded*
  - *teaching, learning and assessment procedures*
  - *pass rates*
  - *learning opportunities available to the students*
  - *graduate employment information*

1.4 Information management

Standards

- *Information for the effective management of the programme of study is collected, monitored and analysed:*
  - *key performance indicators*
  - *profile of the student population*
  - *student progression, success and drop-out rates*
  - *students' satisfaction with their programmes*

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> o *learning resources and student support available*
> o *career paths of graduates*
>
> ● *Students and staff are involved in providing and analysing information and planning follow-up activities.*

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.

Fredericks University, based on the background materials provided, an exploration of its web-environment, a virtual tour of the campus and the conversations we had with various key people in the university (see the consultation agenda) appears to provide a healthy environment for education and research that meets and exceeds international standards. The MSc-programme reviewed is nested in the overall Quality Assurance Policy framework of Fredericks University which the committee found to be transparent, comprehensive, responsive and inclusive. Several quality control mechanisms have been built into the program at the level of the program as a whole, including by means of the program self-evaluation (to check coherence, continued relevance and the extent to which the program as a whole can be followed within the study load allocated by a reasonable effort on the part of the students, and at the course level with course end evaluations, frequent evaluation of the course web-site, alignment between what is taught and the latest research in the course area, and more standard evaluations of students' achievements/failure rates etc. From the conversations with staff and QA-representatives, we sensed there is a conscious effort to create an on-going improvement mindset among staff. Students are represented in the conversations about the quality assurance protocols.

The public information with regards to the content and nature of the program, as well as it's admission criteria and expected employment spheres upon graduation is clear.

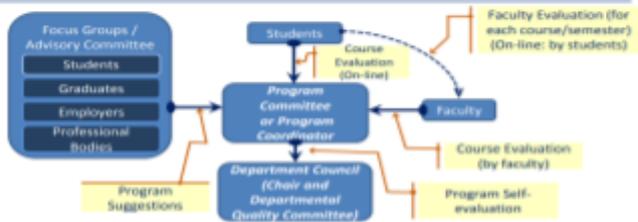The information management system of the university seems to be up to international standards.

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

The program is unique as there are not many ESD programs internationally at the Masters level. The program is historically grounded in its predecessor which has over the years enabled a critical mass of staff engaged in ESD from various disciplinary backgrounds to come together. The courses reflect the current state of the art in the field of ESD The staff impressed to committee in terms of its knowledge, commitment and inter- and transdisciplinary way of thinking. The connecting of social sciences, arts, humanities and natural sciences seems to work well in this program as was confirmed by the students and alumni the committee spoke with. The focus on systemic change, empowerment and the SDGs, using a students centred approach seems highly appropriate for a MSc of this kind. The expertise of staff as reflected in their CV's, acquisition of projects and their publications is impressive.

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In terms of quality assurance: In 2019, the university received the E-xcellence Associates in Quality label from the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU). Thus, Frederick University demonstrates its active engagement in a European quality network in the field of online distance learning and teaching. There are multiple feedback and evaluation loops in the program (see figure below) both in the academic program internal evaluation and the department internal evaluation. Committees involved include students and graduates as well as representatives from the world of work. The program design appears to be flexible and responsive to changing needs in society with regards to both pedagogical approach and with regards to sustainable development and social change. The program meets the EQFs.

Students seem to find employment in different spheres, some going on to do PhD-research, some establishing their own sustainability-oriented school or NGO, some working in the policy arena and some as teachers and/or school leaders. The program anticipates that in the future more schools and organisations will need to reorient to sustainable development and rethink their teaching and learning, as such it seems well positioned to attract more students internationally as well, especially from the Mediterranean region.

The general information about the program seems clear and accessible.

The committee is impressed by the percentage of drop-outs, which is very low in comparison to other programs offered at a distance. This suggests that students and staff are committed to the program and that the program is achievable by those admitted.

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 quality assurance scheme is very comprehensive but might also invite bureaucracy and lead to obligatory routines. The program will need to find a good balance between reflexivity and constructive dialogue between stakeholders in the program, and accountability.

While the shift to systemic change, social change, inclusivity and empowerment makes the program unique, there is a risk that the ecological-environmental aspect might be lost a bit. The committee recommends keeping a good balance.

The study load seems acceptable but the committee found the ambitions in terms of learning outcomes and reading load a bit high. Some courses seemed to have too many learning outcomes, more than could realistically be achieved in 10 credits, in others the suggested assessments were too diluted which suggests over assessment, or were not authentic reflections of the learning outcomes. The committee recommends revisiting, reducing and prioritizing the

learning outcomes in those courses and to make sure that the once selected and agreed upon can be assessed adequately (see also, section 3).

The research-orientation of the program is a strength as long as 'research' can also be design-oriented and activity-based, so as to avoid a conventional gap between research and practice.

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

Sub-area		Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant
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

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

Sub-areas

2.2 Process of teaching and learning and student-centred teaching methodology
2.3 Practical training
2.4 Student assessment
2.5 Study guides structure, content and interactive activities

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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:*
  - o *Clearly defined objectives and expected learning outcomes of the programme, of the modules and activities in an organised and coherent manner*
  - o *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)*
  - o ***Weekly schedule of interactive activities and exercises (i.e. simulations, problem solving, scenarios, argumentation)***
  - o *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.*

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.

Established in 2007, Frederick University is a young, private University. The first distance learning program was introduced in 2013. The Master of Science in Education for Sustainable Development and Social Change programme is offered in a distance learning (DL) mode. The distance learning methodology and pedagogical framework is described in a study guide (DLSESC501 – Sustainable Development Issues, Principles and Goals) – a dedicated document describing the e-learning methodology was not included in the Application for Evaluation, but the approach to online teaching and learning was discussion with the faculty members during the virtual site visit.

According to the study guide, DL courses run over 13 weeks during the semester with a maximum of 30 students that are taught by one faculty member. The Learning Management System (LMS) is the open source system Moodle.

In the pedagogical framework for distance learning interaction between students and faculty members and among students is emphasised as an important element of the pedagogical approach to online learning and teaching. Asynchronous as well as synchronous communication is used throughout the courses. The pedagogical framework rests on three pillars: directed learning, dynamic online interaction, and assessment.

The dynamic interaction is a crucial element to foster and sustain a learning community. Each DL course offers a minimum of 9-10 hours of synchronous teleconferencing (at least 4 webinars throughout the semester, using ZOOM). In addition, weekly asynchronous learning activities provide opportunities for interaction with the instructor(s) and among students.

Feedback is provided on a regular basis during the courses using the communication tools in Moodle as well as self-study questions and quizzes that are automatically graded for immediate feedback. Faculty members are expected to respond to students' questions and postings within 48 hours.

The expected learning outcomes, course goals and objectives, assignments, information on assessment, a bibliography, a weekly schedule, introduction to the course content supplemental resources, and self-assessment exercises and activities, and self-evaluation exercises are clearly described in a comprehensive study guide available in Moodle.

Each course is completed with a final exam that the students have to take physically on campus. The result counts 50 % towards the final grade, another 50 % is graded based on learning activities (mid-term exams, assignments, online participation, study groups) during the online courses.

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

Learning activities, exercises and projects are designed to promote collaboration among students in which they apply their knowledge to solve complex problems. A variety of digital tools are used to support collaborative online learning. Using weekly topics and assignments in the courses is a good practice in the context of distance learning. Lastly, the program does also try to get students to get away from their screens by doing inquiry-based activities on site and bringing their reflections on those back into the online sharing, this adds strength to the program.

The size of the classes limited to 30 students per section allows the instructors to work in close contact with the students providing the guidance and the encouragement needed especially in distance learning settings.

The students available in the interview appreciated the friendly and proactive support and guidance provided by the faculty members.

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.

Apart from learning together in the online classes, further opportunities for international experiences for the distance learners could be explored, e.g. by inviting international visiting experts (virtual internationalization).

The committee beliefs that in order to attract international students to an English-language based online MSc Masters on ESD, also in light of more of such programs arising worldwide, will be to identify a specific niche that builds upon the expertise and history of the program but also on the topics chosen in relation to regional, Mediterranean qualities and conditions. The niche could be the inter- and transdisciplinary approach that includes the humanities, arts-based approaches, values and ethics and the natural sciences, but also its focus on capacity-building, competence development, social change and empowerment. Profiling, having a clear identity and marketing will be essential for attracting sufficient students.

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

Sub-area		Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant
2	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.*

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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.*

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 staff and student contributions around teaching at the University are a testament to the high quality of work that is undertaken to ensure quality. Staff are employed by merit of teaching and research accomplishments and both activities are embedded in annual review and promotional criteria. All staff connected with the program are relevantly qualified in terms of both academic level (almost exclusively Assistant/ Associate Professor and Professorial level) and discipline (education and ESD). Many members of the team also hold external positions which is common practice in Cyprus and these often complement their academic roles.

Support for teaching is a developing centralized service. There are linked centers of support for campus based and distance learning. The former is not well established and there is no mandatory teaching development CPD for campus-based teaching. There is better provision in the latter, with a relevant and useful offering of a range of mandatory and just in time CPD for all staff. This to support the institutional drive to promote high quality distance learning especially at postgraduate level.

Teaching performance is subject to the University's quality assurance processes which are populated by students, staff, administration, and various voice instruments. Where support needs are identified, staff are provided with line manager/ mentor/ other support. student ratio. Although specific data on visiting staff was not included, the consensus is that these staff provide the mainstay of the educational offer including thesis supervision. All staff were full time and teaching workloads were disseminated equally amongst the Associate / Assistant professors.

Many of the team have been students or had tenure overseas and the research credentials of the team are impressive and cover a wide range of topics. All the team publish prolifically, one in the area of digital education - and this is a great strength of the unit. It was evident that the team published in areas that enriched taught content and indeed their own work featured in their curricula. The committee was unable to establish the extent to which teaching influenced research however staff talked enthusiastically about how teaching informed and challenged their

disciplinary perspectives, so it is possible this fed directly into research practice. The committee was unable to ascertain the extent to which the allocation of teaching hours was comparable to time spent on research however, staff had equitable teaching workloads and did not talk about workload as impinging on their ability to undertake either.

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

The enthusiasm and motivation of the team to design innovative teaching and the commitment to their discipline and to their students was very evident. The team have collated a diverse, niche and valuable set of educational experiences which is of evident value to a broad range of professionals. The alumni of the campus-based course of which this distance learning version has evolved are extremely positive about the impact of the course on their personal and professional identities. They reported that participation had led to the fulfilment of careers and to academic development via research and PhDs. Alumni were very positive about the calibre of the teaching and pastoral care of the campus-based course. There were no alumni available to discuss the distance-based offer. The team described a range of visiting and networked contacts from government, industry, employers and NGOs that engage in knowledge transfer/other contributions to the programme and clearly articulated how this enriched teaching and learning in an online environment. The team have a good grasp of research informed teaching and are engaged in research led, oriented, tutored and based interpretations of this approach. Research activity is communicated right through the course and alumni of the campus based version commented on this as a real strength of their experience. It is of note that students are welcomed as participants on staffs' funded research projects. The course descriptors and staff accounts of teaching methodologies described a range of teaching methods which are communicated via Moodle and thoughtful suggestions have been made to students to create individual field experiences throughout the COVID restrictions. Peer and collaborative learning are a core feature of the distance offer and the team were conversant about learning communities, student engagement and the importance of creating belonging in the digital space

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.

Scholarship in teaching and learning and ESD are both continually evolving fields subject to changes in the social, political, economic, and technological zeitgeist. Whilst the School team are well qualified, few of them hold qualifications in distance learning. Whilst they will all have undertaken the mandatory distance learning training there is a relevance in continuing to engage with distance learning CPD as this field is fluid, fast moving and potentially at odds with ESD philosophy. Whilst the Moodle sites were stacked with information and some interactive exercises, making sure that interactivity is a core, normative element which is regularly evaluated to assess participation (around self-assessment) will require continued monitoring, renewal and redesign. There is room for improvement with the Moodle design. Currently, although functional, the user interface is very samey throughout and very information focused. This could be enhanced by embedding video, visuals and podcasts. The School can have an important role in both communicating about ESD to the wider University audience and being in receipt of academic development in international contemporary HE. For example, teaching development could support staff to ensure that their courses are constructively aligned. Some courses had far too many learning outcomes than could realistically be achieved in 10 credits, in others the suggested assessments were too diluted which suggests over assessment, or were not authentic reflections of the learning outcomes. The team were uncritical of their commitment to student centred learning. Whilst this approach is widely advocated there is critique from within the ESD field that this does not sit well with the tenets of ESD which are about less individualistic epistemologies. In light of these observations the committee makes the following recommendations: (1) The department staff to participate

regularly in the CPD offer provided by the distance learning centre. (2) Staff to participate in development to enhance skills in accessing and using Moodle learning analytics to good effect. (3) Staff to develop skills to promote improved user interface design with Moodle. (4) The institution to create badging or awards to recognise participation in further participation in distance learning/ teaching development activity. (5) The team to peer review the course descriptions using a constructive alignment framework. Ask the questions - are all learning outcomes achievable and how do they translate to assessment criteria and assessment formats. (6) Staff to consider running a TESTA audit to get an overview of assessment burden on students. (7) The team to critique the notion of student centred learning V sustainability – a good start to this would be to read Silova, Komatsu, and Rappleye (2021).

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

Sub-area		Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant
3	Teaching staff recruitment and development	Compliant
3.2	Teaching staff number and status	Compliant
3.3	Synergies of teaching and research	Compliant

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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*

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> o *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.*

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.

Pre-defined and published regulations regarding student admission are in place. What "Good undergraduate degree" (more than Pass) means («Καλώς») and what grades, are needed for admission is not so clear. The committee realized that when the influx of students comes from different universities (public/private) and from different countries more reliance will need to be placed on admission tasks/projects, student portfolios and interviews, rather than just looking at diploma's and grades. At the moment there is recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. This might need to be made more transparent in the future.

Furthermore, a sufficient level of digital literacy is required for students being admitted to the distance learning program. However, it is not clear how digital literacies of prospective students are assessed.

Processes and tools to collect, monitor and act on information on student progression, are in place. When students lag behind a tracking system will identify such a student and student-specific support can/will be provided. The scale of the program and the staff student ratio is such that this is possible. Pre-defined and published regulations regarding student recognition are in place.

Appropriate recognition and alignment procedures are in place that recognize or adhere to the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and provide for cooperation with quality assurance agencies and the national ENIC/NARIC centre Pre-defined and published regulations regarding student certification are in place.

Students receive appropriate 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.

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

The committee finds that the procedures for student admission, progression, recognition and certification are overall quite clear and in accordance with international standards.

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 encourages to make the admission process more interactive and revealing by adding an interview component and a task prospective students would need to carry out that would help the programme in deciding who to admit to the program.

The assessment of digital literacies should be documented in the admission process.

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

Sub-area		Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant
4	udent admission, processes and criteria	Compliant
4.2	Student progression	Compliant
4.3	udent recognition	Compliant
4.4	udent 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:*
  - o *Simulations in virtual environments*
  - o *Problem solving scenarios*
  - o *Interactive learning and formative assessment games*
  - o *Interactive weekly activities with image, sound and unlimited possibilities for reality reconstruction and further processing based on hypotheses*
  - o *They have the ability to transfer students to real-life situations, make decisions, and study the consequences of their decisions*
  - o *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.*

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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.*

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 production of study materials and multimedia content for distance learning programmes is supported by the Open and Distance Learning Center (ODLC) in collaboration with the Audio-Visual Communication Department. The Distance Learning Unit is responsible for supporting faculty members in distance learning course design, learning material and multimedia production, as well as professional development and faculty training in online teaching methodologies. The center also supports the quality control process for distance learning programs. The ODLC closely works together with the Learning Support Unit (LSU), which is responsible for the maintenance and administration of the learning management system Moodle. However, the ODLC has only two staff members, one for pedagogical and one for technological support.

Around 90% of all students on the postgraduate level are enrolled in distance learning programs. The ODLC caters for about 2.250 distance learning students and 100 distance learning faculty members / instructors.

All faculty members involved in teaching distance learning courses have to take a mandatory training programme facilitated by the ODLC.

Admissions criteria for distance learning programmes include that the prospective students have a good level of digital literacy. New students can take a non-graded Distance Learning Introduction Course (DLISC100) that

introduces them to the distance learning mode of delivery. About 75 % of students take this course. In addition, each module starts with a pre-week (Week 0) to make students familiar with the goals and objectives of the course, the online learning environment and their fellow students.

Furthermore, 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. Special financial support is provided to students with financial hardship so as to improve inclusiveness and to avoid elitism.

Students are informed about the services available to them. In addition to the more generic services, like IT-support, library services, etc., include a Counseling Service (supportive services for students with emotional issues), a Disabilities Support Program (learning disabilities or physical),a Student Accommodation Program (follow-up program at the end of each semester), Career Services (employment at the University), and various online services.

Students also have obligatory counselling meetings with their professors after each semester. The committee was impressed by the good communication with and the comprehensive data collection from students. The overall quality of the program seems to result in an impressively low percentage of drop-outs.

The committee did not get a good sense of international student mobility within or supported by the program.

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

Students reported that they feel very well supported and are very satisfied with the institutional academic and administrative student support services. The organisational and technical support infrastructure operates in a professional way.

The infrastructure provided to students by the university in terms of hardware (ICT facilities, library services) and orgware (student support services, provisions for student participation) are quite strong and meets international standards. It's focus on inclusivity is critical for an MSc on ESD and social change, one that seeks to become a 'vibrant cell of change,' all the committee suspects this will be more challenging in the DL-version of the MSc than for the conventional one. 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.

There are no serious issues related to the overall DL course development and student support systems. Here are just a few general and minor recommendations:

Nowadays there is a tendency in DL, online education and MOOCs to get learners away from their screens. This may sound contradictory but the general idea being here that students can do investigations and research on their own in and on their own daily conditions, places and spaces, the process and outcomes of which they can then share online. This leads to more hybrid and varied forms of learning. The program could consider looking into the possibility of doing so as well.

Since more and more digital media and tools are also applied in face-to-face settings, faculty training in the use of digital media for teaching and course development should be coordinated and offered by one central unit.

Given the rapid growth of distance learning and the high workload in this area to provide professional student and faculty support services, the university should consider investing more resources into the ODLC.

The opportunities that learning analytics afford to implement an early warning system for students at risk could be exploited more systematically. Student data should be fed back to the Learning Support Unit and used to provide proactive student support, guidance and counselling.

Furthermore, it could be considered to use more open educational resources and textbooks.

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

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

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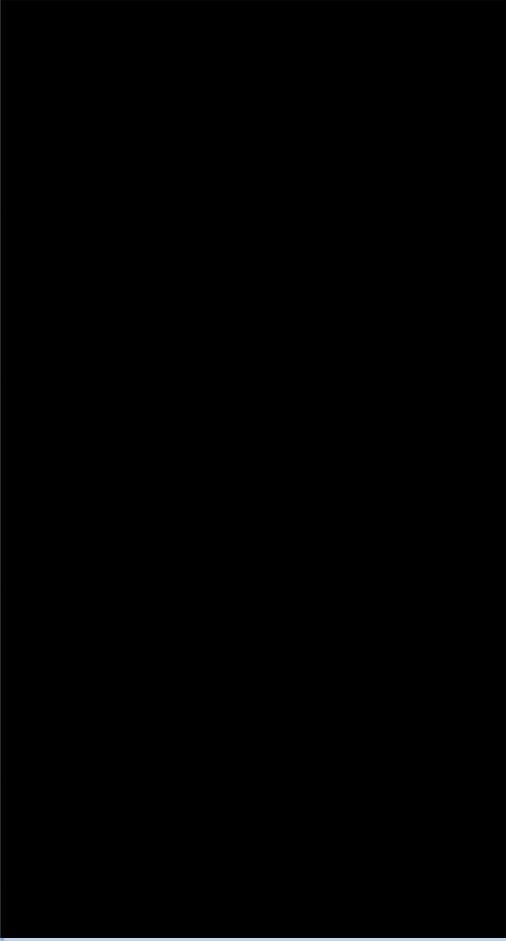
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D. Conclusions and final remarks

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 is an innovative and timely MSc program that likely will gain traction in the coming years as nations and regions will need to find responses, including education ones, to emerging global sustainability crises. The program is supported by highly qualified staff and nested in a healthy university environment with excellent support structures. Students are given space of input in the program and are involved in the extensive quality assurance mechanism that has been created. The committee finds that the program is compliant in all EQF indicator areas covered in this document.

Apart from learning together in the online classes, further opportunities for international experiences for the distance learners could be explored, e.g. by inviting international visiting experts (virtual internationalization) and considering more hybrid forms of Distance Learning.

The committee beliefs that in order to attract international students to an English-language based online MSc Masters on ESD, also in light of more of such programs arising worldwide, will be to identify a specific niche that builds upon the expertise and history of the program but also on the topics chosen in relation to regional, Mediterranean qualities and conditions. The niche could be the inter- and transdisciplinary approach that includes the humanities, arts-based approaches, values and ethics and the natural sciences, but also its focus on capacity-building, competence development, social change and empowerment. Profiling, having a clear identity and marketing will be essential for attracting sufficient students.

E. Signatures of the EEC

Name	Signature
Prof. Arjen E.J. Wals (Chair)	
Prof. Olaf Zawacki-Richter	
Dr. Jennie Winter	
Prof. Matthias Barth	
Constantinos Zacharia	

Date: June 6th, 2021