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Date:
22/6/2023

External Evaluation Report (E-learning programme of study)

- **Higher Education Institution: PHILIPS UNIVERSITY**
- **Town: NICOSIA**
- **School/Faculty: EDUCATION AND SCIENCES**
- **Department/ Sector: SOCIAL AND BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE**
- **Programme of study- Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle): ΠΕΡΙΒΑΛΛΟΝΤΙΚΗ ΔΙΑΧΕΙΡΙΣΗ ((18 μήνες / 90 ECTS, Μεταπτυχιακό MSc, Εξ αποστάσεως) ENVIROMENTAL MANAGEMENT (18 months / 90 ECTS, Master of Science (MSc), Distance Learning)**
- **Language(s) of instruction: ENGLISH/GREEK**
- **Programme's status: NEW PROGRAMME (UNDER EVALUATION)**
- **Concentrations:**
 - I. Αειφόρος Διαχείριση Αποβλήτων, II. Περιβαλλοντική Διαχείριση, Πολιτική, Οικονομία και Πράσινη Λογιστική, III. Περιβάλλον και Δημόσια Υγεία.**
 - I. Sustainable Waste Management, II. Environmental Management, Policy, Economics and Green Accounting, III. Environment and Public Health**

The present document has been prepared within the framework of the authority and competencies of the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education, according to the provisions of the “Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education and the Establishment and Operation of an Agency on Related Matters Laws” of 2015 to 2021 [L.136(I)/2015 – L.132(I)/2021].



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



A. Introduction

I. The External Evaluation procedure

The application for evaluation/accreditation was provided to the committee members in hard and digital copies. During the site visit at Philips University (*PU henceforth*) PowerPoint presentations were delivered by members of the Board, faculty and IT officers, followed by extensive discussions with the university leadership, faculty, representatives of various Administration Departments and graduate students of other MScs.

Additional information on standards, rules and technical procedures of CYQAA was also provided to the EEC through the CYQAA officer.

II. The Internal Evaluation procedure: The Application

The application was abundant in documents and accompanying material, albeit not fully prepared with the specific evaluation criteria in mind. Some elements were covered in the application, e.g., research and resourcing, admission procedures and ethics, as general properties of PU and not specified operationally regarding the particular MSc under evaluation.

Overall, the internal evaluation report prepared by PU did not raise any specific points of further improvements for the programme. From a quality assurance point of view, this casts a shadow on the institution's capacity for practicing reflection and continuously improving its educational and research activities and practices.

The EEC would like to thank Dr. Lefkios Neophytou and Mrs. Emily Mouskou for their support before and during the visit to the institution.

B. External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>University</i>
Andreas Troumbis	Professor	University of the Aegean
Matthew Cashmore	Professor	Norwegian University of Life Sciences
Luca Di Corato	Associate Professor	Ca' Foscari University of Venice
Stylianos Hatzipanagos	Professor	University of London
Ms. Ioanna Agathokleous	Student	University of Cyprus

The EEC focuses on Findings, Strengths and Recommendations specific to each of the five sections of the External Evaluation Report of the Program of Study “MSc in Environmental Management”, following the Standards and Criteria set and proposed by CYQAA. These standards and criteria remain in the corpus of the Report, to help for direct inspection and



comparison of comments, suggestions, concerns, recommendations and explanation of the marking proposed per area and sub-areas.

Section 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

Findings

Policy for quality assurance

An appropriate formal policy for quality assurance is in operation at Philips University.

External stakeholders are involved in the quality assurance system, but the examples given in the presentation were overwhelmingly from the accounting sector. There is a need to develop formal links with relevant environmental organisations and professional associations (e.g. the Environmental Ministry (or equivalent) in Cyprus or IEMA (Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment) in the UK is a well-known example of a relevant professional body).

Design, approval, on-going monitoring and review

The programme has been designed by a group of senior academics. Many of the academics have qualifications in business studies and economics, rather than environmental science per se. However, several more junior academics with greater experience in environmental science have also been involved in developing the syllabus. No evidence was presented that potential students have been involved in the development of the programme.

The programme addresses a clear need for academic education in environmental management and for highly qualified environmental practitioners. Links to the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the concept of sustainable development are made in the description of the programme's purpose and objectives. Relevant topical concepts are integrated into the programme design. The programme therefore appears topical and relevant to societal needs. It also adequately addresses the four purposes of higher education established by the Council of Europe.

The programme is designed around a common set of courses in semester 1, followed by a choice of three specialist streams in semester 2. The dissertation should be viewed by the students as an opportunity to gain further expertise in their chosen stream.

Progression in the programme could be aided by starting with a general introductory course that provides a common basis for understanding environmental management. This is especially important given that it appears that students with potentially quite diverse backgrounds will be

accepted onto the programme. The course 'introduction to sustainability' (ENV-120) appears to provide the basis for such an introductory course, with some adjustment. The incorporation of a course on research methodology into the core courses to be taken in semester 1 is a positive design choice.

In relation to progression in the individual courses, a highly structured approach has been developed in the study guide to help the students' progress through each course. The use of such a structured approach is to be commended as it provides a strong framework for helping the students to understand what work they must complete on a weekly basis. However, the breadth of content of the courses is extremely ambitious in many instances and this may create barriers to learning and progression. As an example, the students are expected to spend 1 week studying each of the following waste categories: industrial waste, agricultural waste and hazardous waste. Each of these are enormous topics. Journal articles (with inherently narrow focuses) are used as the recommended readings for these topics, whereas book chapters on waste management in general or specifically in relation to particular sectors would seem to be more relevant as grounding texts for students with a potentially limited background in the subject area. Furthermore, the recommended reading for the agricultural waste week appears of little relevance to the stated learning objectives and key concepts for that week. A similar example of progression can be raised in relation to the introduction to sustainability course, which starts, for example, with the concept of a circular economy, rather than introducing debate on the many meanings of sustainability/ sustainable development, the origins of the concepts, its current elaboration in terms of the UN SDGs etc.

The three streams are very diverse and the reason for their selection was not well articulated in the face-to-face discussions. It will not be possible (in three ten ECTS courses) to cover the specialised topics in much detail. This is evident, for example, in the description of the content on green accounting, a topic which is covered quite superficially. It is for this reason that it is emphasised that the dissertation topic should be linked to the chosen specialisation as this will provide the students with an opportunity to gain much needed expertise in their chosen area.

Philips University expressed a view that specialisations might potentially be further developed in the future into discrete MSc programmes.

Public information

There is no information in the public domain at present on this specific course, to the best of our knowledge, given that the programme is under review by the CYQAA. The quality of documentation produced by the university is high and there is no reason to suspect that adequate information will not be made public at the appropriate time.

Further thought should be given to setting out in the admissions text (see p. 11 of the main application) the types of academic and professional backgrounds that are relevant to the programme. This will help applicants understand whether they have an appropriate education/professional experience for the course. Some uncertainty was evident amongst the programme team in the discussions over admissions about what types of academic backgrounds and/or professional experience was appropriate or required: the example of an application from someone with a humanities background was used in the discussion. It is important that further

consideration is given to this and in relation to the particular streams: for example, are there prerequisites for the public health stream?

Information management

As a proposed programme, no information has been collected to-date on KPIs, etc. It is noted that there will need to be a fairly considerable scaling up of services for collecting such data if the programme is launched and achieves the stated goal of attracting 60 students per year. The provision of administrative support for 'information management' needs to be carefully planned for if/when the programme is approved.

Strengths

- The structured course design provides a strong framework for student progression.
- Considerable work has been undertaken to-date in developing the course outlines and content.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Progression across the programme and within individual courses requires further consideration. It is recommended that a common introductory course is developed for semester 1, possibly using ENV 120 (Introduction to sustainability) as a basis. Further consideration should also be given to progression within individual courses as the content appears very broad and ambitious in some instances.
- Choice of recommended readings should be given further consideration. The extensive use of journal articles as core readings might not be the most effective strategy from a pedagogic viewpoint, particularly given that students may come from academic or professional backgrounds where they have limited experience with key concepts or subjects.
- Give further thought to specifying what types of backgrounds applicants are expected to come from. This will aid prospective students in understanding whether the programme is appropriate for them, plus help the institution develop a position on what kind of applicants it is seeking to recruit.
- The dissertation should be positioned as part of the programme of specialisation in one of the three themes, if this is not already the case.
- Links with relevant professional associations and environmental organisations should be developed to provide input to (a) quality assurance procedures and (b) continuous development of the programme.



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

2. Section 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.*
- **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

The nature of the programme is suitable for e-learning delivery. The technical infrastructure that could support the delivery of e-learning at the institution is in place, including both an infrastructure (managed by the Distance Learning Unit), plus a set of technologies that can support the delivery of programmes in an online environment. The basic technical infrastructure comprises a VLE (Moodle), and technologies that are either part of the VLE, such as discussion fora or are integrated with the VLE, e.g. Turnitin for assessment and feedback purposes.

The design and implementations of online learning programmes at the University and all related initiatives are supported by the Distance Learning Unit. Quality assurance processes seem to be adequate.

The EEC had the opportunity to meet 2 students from the Addictions MSc and canvas for views about their student experience. Both students were happy with their studies at the university and satisfied with the level of support they received (administrative and academic).

The EEC reviewed the programme documentation and study guides for all courses. The study guides had the appropriate level of detail, providing a week-by-week description of content and activities, including formative and summative assessments. The EEC thought that the learning outcomes were of mixed quality and not consistent throughout the programme. We thought that verb descriptors such 'familiarise', 'know' and 'understand' did not correspond to a postgraduate level of study.

There was a demonstration of the online environment of a course from another programme ENV-124 which seemed to be adequate in terms of design and structure. The EEC had the opportunity to have hands-on experience with ENV-124 on the institutional VLE and to watch a video of a role playing exercise in CNS-126 ‘Μοντέλα Συμβουλευτικής’ (Spring 2023), which was of good quality and pedagogically robust but did not take advantage of learning technologies. Videos of instruction that the EEC had access to demonstrated the expertise and experience of instructors, however they followed a mostly teacher-centred, transmission of content model and did not provide opportunities to students to learn from each other.

The EEC had the opportunity to review a sample exam paper which was provided for review. It was observed that some questions were overly descriptive (e.g. “list and describe sources of wastewater”) and not considered appropriate for assessing student achievements at Masters level. Other sample questions did, however, strike a balance between descriptive and analytical/critical elements (e.g. how are electronic wastes treated and managed?). Further attention should be given to ensure alignment of examination questions with expectations for Masters level education.

Exams take place in a face-to-face environment. The exam environment (i.e. at examination centres with invigilators) allows this approach. A related innovation would be about allowing the students to use a computer while taking the exam rather than using pen and paper. This is very much linked to digital competences that students need to acquire and demonstrate by the end of their degree. There was no evidence of serious academic offenses or academic integrity issues.

Overall, design of assessment activities in continuous formative and particular summative assessments should take into account recent developments such as the proliferation of AI generative technologies like ChatGPT.

Strengths

- Student satisfaction and positive evaluation of the student experience, though this related to another programme (MSc in Addiction). The EEC did not have the opportunity to see any data from student evaluation of programmes of the University.
- Support infrastructure for distance learning students in the programme and via the university support services, inc. students with special needs.
- There were training and induction opportunities in e-learning for students and staff.
- Thesis is a compulsory component of this programme. This is certainly a strength and there is an adequate course (Research Methods) that prepares the students to embark on a research project and the production of an MSc dissertation.
- There is a career advice path towards employment which based on discussion with the programme team includes provision for distance learning students.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- There seems to be a disjunction between (1) the descriptions and intentions in the study guides, where inclusion of technologies such as simulations and serious games (conflated as ‘simulation games’), case based scenarios, interactive activities, group work online and (2) embedding such activities in the online environment. The EEC did not have the opportunity to see examples of such technologies used in this or other e-learning programmes of the institution. We would recommend an alignment between what is mentioned in the study guides and what is available on the online environment. This resulted in partial compliance for 2.4.
- Internship and placement opportunities for this MSc should be given consideration and linked to career advice the university provides to e-learning students. Such initiatives should take advantage of the university networks and partnerships.
- The programme team should consider strategies for building a student community to enhance the student experience. This is fundamental as the institution still has a small number of e-learning programmes. It was not clear to the EEC how the programme team employed approaches and strategies in doing this. This led to partial compliance for 2.1.
- There is a trend in distance learning to include the thesis in the modular structure of a programme rather than superimposing it a separate entity outside the modular structure. This helps with student tasks and progression towards the thesis production. We recommend that the university considers this approach.
- It was not clear at the time of the visit whether the programme would run in English or in Greek (depending on recruitment). We recommend that the team develops materials and two versions of the programme VLE (in English and in Greek) ahead of the commencement of the programme to accommodate both possibilities in recruitment for this MSc.
 - The programme team should consider trends in pedagogy towards authentic assessment opportunities while they design and produce assessment activities and exam papers, including an open book approach if applicable. This led to partial compliance for 2.3.

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

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

Section 3: Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

Sub-areas

- 3.1 Teaching staff recruitment and development**
- 3.2 Teaching staff number and status**
- 3.3 Synergies of teaching and research**

3.1 Teaching staff recruitment and development

Standards

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

3.2 Teaching staff number and status

Standards

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

3.3 Synergies of teaching and research

Standards

- *The teaching staff collaborate in the fields of teaching and research within the HEI and with partners outside (practitioners in their fields, employers, and staff members at other HEIs in Cyprus or abroad).*
- *Scholarly activity to strengthen the link between education and research is encouraged.*
- *The teaching staff publications are within the discipline.*
- *Teaching staff studies and publications are closely related to the programme's courses.*
- *The allocation of teaching hours compared to the time for research activity is appropriate.*

Findings

3.1 Teaching staff recruitment and development

Faculty staff engaged in the MSc in Environmental Management comprises renowned and experienced senior professors and well-motivated junior academic personnel. This leads to a mixture of experience and enthusiasm that should be highlighted. The Committee recognizes that the series of standards and quality criteria set by CYQAA (bullets 3.1.1-9) does currently exist in the narrative of the PU, at various levels (Direction and Boards) but it remains unclear “how” these are translated into practice and “who” is in charge to enforce and implement them.

For example, junior teaching staff will be heavily engaged in the daily delivery of the MSc in Environmental Management. It is unclear whether there is a plan to train them as teachers per se and even more as distance-learning teachers.

3.2 Teaching staff number and status

Twelve faculty members are involved in the MSc in Environmental Management. Eight of them are permanent staff of PU and four are visiting lecturers. This leads to a potential ratio of students to faculty of 5/1, and a ratio of 1/2 regarding visiting to permanent staff. However, the EEC raises concerns on the actual meaning of these indicators. First, most of the senior staff are engaged in other teaching activities, i.e., other programmes. Second, most of the senior staff are engaged in thesis supervision (semester III) and to segments or co-teaching of compulsory courses in semesters I and II. The involvement of staff, especially the junior ones, should be weighted by ECTS metrics, the number of compulsory courses taught, and the timing of these courses. Hence, if such recalculations are attempted, semester I (the core/common semester) includes i) 3 compulsory courses, or 22/30 ECTS which are actually taught by 2 junior members of staff and ii) 1 compulsory course, or 8 ECTS, which is taught by 4 full Professors assisted by a visiting

lecturer. There is an imbalance that PU should look at. Notice, further, that the situation might get more complex if the MSc in Environmental Management is offered in two languages, a condition that is currently unclear.

3.3. Synergies of teaching and research

The professional ethos of PU is clearly the promotion of research and the achievement of synergies between research and teaching (bullets 3.3.1-5). The EEC recognises that there is no clear time allocation, determined by a relevant policy, between various activities of the staff, at any level of seniority. On the contrary, there seems to be an allocation of substantial “classroom” teaching for junior staff and “research/thesis guidance” for the seniors. This might indirectly produce difficulties for career development and scientific maturation for junior staff, since most academic promotion criteria are related to research and publishing. It might be the opposite of a ‘win/win’ situation for students and junior staff.

Strengths

The EEC recognises the motivation and commitment of PU Presidency, Board Members, Faculty and Administrative personnel to develop and implement a successful MSc in Environmental Management.

The most obvious strength is the existing connections and networking of the Institution and/or individual members with the broader professional community of potential students and future employers. This is particularly applicable to the Stream II component (Green Accounting and Marketing).

Areas of improvement and recommendations

PU and the MSc in Environmental Management would likely benefit from:

- revisiting the operational rationale of the programme and re-allocating tasks, time and activities between junior and senior members of staff.
- transforming the general academic concepts, e.g., quality, research, synergy, etc., into specific and measurable goals and targets. This, hopefully, will guarantee a sustained path to continuous improvement in the future.
- engaging senior staff more actively in the teaching process.
- organising training for trainers, especially in the virtual mode of teaching selected for this programme.
- establish a medium term policy for supporting juniors to mature scientifically, improve their international presence and visibility, and cultivate the capacity for becoming the future leaders of PU, according to the vision of its Founder.

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

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

Section 4: Student admission, progression, recognition and certification (ESG 1.4)

Sub-areas

4.1 Student admission, processes and criteria

4.2 Student progression

4.3 Student recognition

4.4 Student certification

4.1 Student admission, processes and criteria

Standards

- *Pre-defined and published regulations regarding student admission are in place.*
- *Access policies, admission processes and criteria are implemented consistently and in a transparent manner.*

4.2 Student progression

Standards

- *Pre-defined and published regulations regarding student progression are in place.*
- *Processes and tools to collect, monitor and act on information on student progression, are in place.*

4.3 Student recognition

Standards

- *Pre-defined and published regulations regarding student recognition are in place.*
- *Fair recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, are essential components for ensuring the students' progress in their studies, while promoting mobility.*
- *Appropriate recognition procedures are in place that rely on:*
 - *institutional practice for recognition being in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention*
 - *cooperation with other institutions, quality assurance agencies and the national ENIC/NARIC centre with a view to ensuring coherent recognition across the country*

4.4 Student certification

Standards

- *Pre-defined and published regulations regarding student certification are in place.*
- *Students receive certification explaining the qualification gained, including achieved learning outcomes and the context, level, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed.*

Findings

4.1 The information provided to the EEC did not fully clarify what academic backgrounds prospective students should have in order to be accepted for admission. This information is crucial for students when they apply (see also section 1).

During the discussions on site, regulations and process for admissions were clearly explained. It was mentioned that for international students there is a different, more elaborate process to ensure the authenticity of student documentation. The university has to send these documents after their internal evaluation by the admissions committee to the Ministry of Education of Cyprus.

4.2 During the onsite visit, study guides were presented. From the presentation it was clear what a student should accomplish each week for each course. The student can communicate with tutors or administrative staff regarding any concern or question related to their subject. Moreover, tutors are also able to view and monitor student progress on Moodle and potentially reward them with points. This is a good approach to ensure that students do not fall behind, but it was not specified if the points they get contribute to their final grade.

The students interviewed during the onsite visit were satisfied with the behaviour from the teachers towards them and from how clear it was for them to follow the course they applied to. The students interviewed were graduates from a different Master's programme. They only raised a concern about the exams held on site, despite the fact that their MSc was a distance learning programme. This might be challenging for students living abroad.

4.3 PU has appropriate recognition procedures for any appropriate prior learning. Moreover, students can get an exception of up to 15 ECTS if they meet certain criteria.

4.4 Pre-defined and published regulations regarding student certification are present.

Strengths

The programme benefits from strong technical support.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Since the programme is offered for distance learning and the university has a strong technical infrastructure, the exams should also be offered online as well. The students should be able to choose if they prefer an online or onsite examination, depending on their location and/or ability to travel.

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

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

Section 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.*

- *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

5.1 Candidates for the Distance Learning (DL) program are required in addition to other admission criteria to have a satisfactory level of digital literacy and technical knowledge, as well as access to a computer with a broadband Internet connection, speakers, microphone and camera.

A Distance Learning Unit (DLU) has been established for supporting the provision of the DL materials and multimedia content. Further, this unit supports the teaching faculty members in the course design, implementation and evaluation. All these activities are undertaken in accordance with international standards.

Each course is associated with i) a syllabus and ii) a weekly study guide. Both documents provide relevant information concerning learning objectives and outcomes, study material and activities plus bibliographical references. Regarding the plan provided, the number of hours devoted to synchronous interaction between teacher and students is congruous. Assessment rubrics and mapping of LOs follow a robust design approach.

Based on the discussion the EEC had with the DLU director, the provision of services described above can be easily adjusted in order to address changed circumstances.

5.2 ICT infrastructure, library, premises and student facility are adequate. Also in this respect, the adjustment of these resources in response to changing circumstances does not seem an issue. All students are informed about their right to use the available resources.

5.3 An academic advisor is associated with each student in order to secure guidance and to monitor his/her progress over the entire programme duration. Further, tutors support the students for what concerns their study skills (note taking, essay writing, time management and exam strategy, etc.), IT and communication skills and abilities. The adjustment of these resources in response to changing circumstances does not seem an issue. All students are well informed about the availability of these resources.

5.4 PU has declared its commitment to student-centred learning and provides Careers Service, Counselling Service, the Disability and Dyslexia Service and Student Support Service. There is adequate support and planning for student's mobility and for addressing the needs of international students. All students are well informed about the availability of these services.

Strengths

PU is strong when it comes to physical resources (ICT, library, premises and study facilities services) and student support services, both definitely meet international DL standards.

The DL unit relies on its operation on some very experienced and highly reputed (teaching and supervision experience, research) senior profiles. The presence of highly reputed senior faculty (teaching and supervision experience, research, third mission) is also beneficial for the development of a programme aiming at the achievement of high international quality standards.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

In general, there are no major issues for what concerns physical resources, human support resources and student support services.

We would recommend:

- to assess before the programme starts the actual level of digital literacy and technical knowledge that the students have and organise, if needed, a DL course covering any gap in that respect.
- to assess previous experience and provide, if needed, training on DL to the newly recruited teaching faculty.
- to continuously monitor the knowledge and use of DL tools by the entire teaching faculty (including necessary updates).

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

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

C. 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.

It should be noted that in most instances there were no justifications/descriptions of how generic principles were applied to the programmatic level in the internal evaluation report. This to some extent reflects an adherence to quality assurance principles at institutional level, in accordance with national laws and guidelines, but were less evident at the specific programme level.

In our view, the programme under consideration is currently Partially Compliant.

We recommend that the following issues are addressed before approval.

Content

- Choice of recommended readings should be given further consideration. The extensive use of journal articles as core readings might not be the most effective strategy from a pedagogic viewpoint, particularly given that students may come from academic or professional backgrounds where they have limited experience with key concepts or subjects.

Learning design

- There seems to be a disjunction between (1) the descriptions and intentions in the study guides, where inclusion of technologies such as simulations and serious games (conflated as 'simulation games') as simulations and serious games (conflated as 'simulation games'), case based scenarios, interactive activities, group work online etc. and (2) embedding such activities in the online environment. The EEC did not have the opportunity to see examples of related technologies used in this or other e-learning programmes of the institution. We would recommend an alignment between what is mentioned in the study guides and what will be available on the online environment.
- The programme team should consider strategies for building a student community to enhance the student experience. This is fundamental as the institution still has a small number of e-learning programs (three, including the one under consideration).

Student admission and progression

- Give further thought to specifying what types of backgrounds applicants are expected to come from. This will aid prospective students in understanding whether the programme is appropriate for them, plus help the institution develop a position on what kind of applicants it is seeking to recruit.
- Progression across the programme and within individual courses requires further consideration. It is recommended that a common introductory course is developed for semester 1, possibly using ENV 120 (Introduction to sustainability) as a basis. Further consideration should also be given to progression within individual courses as the content appears very broad and ambitious in some instances.

- Internship and placement opportunities for this MSc should be given consideration and linked to career advice the university provides to e-learning students. Such initiatives should take advantage of the university networks and partnerships.
- It was not clear at the time of the visit whether the programme would run in English or in Greek (depending on recruitment). We recommend that the team develops materials and two versions of the programme VLE (in English and in Greek) ahead of the commencement of the programme to accommodate both possibilities in recruitment for this MSc.

Quality assurance

- Links with relevant professional associations and environmental organisations should be developed to provide input to (a) quality assurance procedures and (b) continuous development of the programme.

Programme structure

- Transforming the general academic concepts, e.g., quality, research, synergy, etc., into specific and measurable goals and targets. This, hopefully, will guarantee a sustained path to continuous improvement in the future.

Staff workload and career progression

- Revisiting the operational rationale of the Program and re-allocating tasks, time and activities between staff and between juniors and seniors.
- Engaging senior staff more actively in the teaching process.
- Establishing a medium term policy for supporting juniors to mature scientifically, improve their international presence and visibility, and cultivate the mind ground for becoming the future leaders of PU, according to the vision of its Founder.

Assessment

- The programme team should consider trends in pedagogy towards authentic assessment opportunities while they design and produce assessment activities and exam papers, including an open book approach if applicable.
- Since the programme is offered for distance learning and the university has a strong technical infrastructure, the exams should also be offered online as well. The students should be able to choose if they prefer an online or onsite examination, depending on their location and/or ability to travel.

Thesis

- The dissertation should be positioned as part of the programme of specialisation in one of the three themes, if this is not already the case.
- There is a trend in distance learning to include the thesis in the modular structure of a programme rather than superimposing it a separate entity outside the modular structure. This helps with student tasks and progression towards the thesis production. We recommend that the university considers this approach.

Staff and student training



- Organising training for trainers, especially in the virtual mode of teaching selected for this program
- Assessing before the programme starts the actual level of digital literacy and technical knowledge that the students have and organise, if needed, a DL course covering any gap in that respect.
- Assessing previous experience and provide, if needed, training on DL to the newly recruited teaching faculty.
- Continuously monitoring the knowledge and use of DL tools by the entire teaching faculty (including necessary updates are implemented).



D. Signatures of the EEC

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Professor Andreas Troumbis	
Professor Matthew Cashmore	
Associate Professor Luca Di Corato	
Professor Stylianos Hatzipanagos	
Ms. Ioanna Agathokleous	

Date: 22/06/2023