




THE CYPRUS AGENCY OF QUALITY ASSURANCE
AND ACCREDITATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION



Thematic analysis on E-learning Master programmes' evaluation

Report 4: June 2020

An abstract graphic in the bottom left corner consisting of several thin, curved lines in shades of blue and grey, resembling stylized grass or reeds.

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Introduction:

The context & general observations

Five private universities and one public university offer E-Learning Programs (ELP) in Higher Education in Cyprus. Private universities offer both face-to-face and e-learning programmes while the only public university in Cyprus offering distance education programmes is the Open University of Cyprus.

Table 1: Numbers and Percentages of E learning Masters' Program accredited or rejected in the period February 2019 – February 2020

YEAR	No & % of Master Programmes Accredited (per year)	No & % of Master Programmes Rejected (per year)	Total (per year)
2019	9/12 (75%)	3/12 (25%)	12
2020	4/4 (100%)	-	4
<i>Total</i>	<i>13/16 (81%)</i>	<i>3/16 (19%)</i>	<i>16</i>

Following the establishment of the CYQAA in 2015 and the development of external evaluation and accreditation procedures, a gradual improvement of the ELP has been recorded in comments made by the experts of the External Evaluation Committees (EEC). Thus, institutions offering ELP in Cyprus have progressively incorporated practises that distinguish ELP from conventional, face-to-face programs, therefore reflecting a positive trend. This trend refers to the year-to-year improvement of the structure of the programmes, their pedagogical support, infrastructure and delivery. Instructional processes begun to provide evidence, indicating a shift from mere uploading learning materials on e-platforms, towards an enriched learning environment that takes into consideration contemporary e-learning methods. This improvement was recorded in the Thematic analysis on Master programmes' evaluation issued by CYQAA on June 2019 (Report No 3) as well as in the comments made by EEC experts in the period examined in the current thematic analysis which records an overall of 154 references to strengths in an overall of 347 references (44%¹).

Nevertheless, the fact that 56% of the EEC's comments refer to required improvements, indicates that ELP are still in need of substantial changes. Experts identified points of improvement in all aspects of the ELP, spanning across the areas of content, teaching and learning, selection and development of teaching staff, student support and resources. More specifically, problems were identified in reference to the:

- lack of differentiation from conventional programs
- lack of clarity of the strategy and vision of the programs
- limited evidence about how critical thinking skills will be promoted
- lack of clarity pertaining the expected dedication time for students' activities
- absence of a systematic model for education for adult/mature learners.

¹ Refer to tables 2 to 7.

- absence of intelligent tutoring systems and adaptive feedback mechanisms for immediate provision of feedback to students.
- lack of establishment of internal marking policies.
- lack of clarity in terms of communicating expectations to students in syllabus and study guides
- excessive duration and the poor quality of the material used in DL.
- focus of DL units on technical issues rather than on instructional support.
- ID validation in examination/assessment procedures
- limited use of learning analytics to inform teaching and learning
- insufficiency of practical orientation
- overlaps between courses
- provision of electives
- compliance with Bologna Process & ECTS
- quality of objectives and learning outcomes
- limited research orientation of the program
- insufficiency of quality assurance mechanisms
- use interactive instructional methods
- provision of alternatives to written exams
- high teaching workload of faculty members
- limited involvement of the teaching staff in research
- absence of formal criteria on assessing the teaching quality of staff
- lack of regular opportunities for staff training (teaching methods & DL training)
- insufficiency of admission criteria to guarantee that students will cope up with the requirements of the program
- limited engagement of DL students in the life and activities of the broader community of the University
- limited number of permanent faculty members for effective mentoring
- not explicit process for disciplinary actions as a result of plagiarism

Analysis of the frequencies of the reported comments along with the weight of each problem, point out that institutions need to further invest in the content, material, instructional methods and assessment processes of the ELP to promote critical thinking and research skills. Institutions must also invest in the development of their teaching staff, providing systematically and frequently training opportunities. Training should not be focused, merely, on the technological aspects of DL; it must provide training on the pedagogical skills required for effective application of distance learning. Further, institutions must provide opportunities along with support and incentives for faculty members to be actively engaged in research and publications.

Methodology

EEC reports are based on EQF standards which are elaborated and defined by the CYQAA.

- Standard 1: Study programme and study programme's design and development.
- Standard 2: Teaching and learning
- Standard 3: Teaching staff
- Standard 4: Students
- Standard 5: Resources, student welfare services, administrative services, laboratories, library
- Standard 6: Additional for distance learning programmes

Experts evaluated the ELP using these standards through a structured reflection process. Thus, experts provided to the CYQAA informed comments pertaining to the strengths and to the weaknesses of the ELP, as well as recommendations for necessary improvements.

Inductive analysis (i.e. Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2019; Creswell et al., 2003; Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012, Robson, 2002²) was used by the CYQAA for the analysis. Comments from all EEC reports in the period under examination, were transcribed and examined to generate the initial thematic areas/categories reflecting trends and issues across the experts' remarks. The second step included a deeper examination of the initial themes for the identification and concentration of the cases that would define subcategories within themes. Color-coding was used to identify subcategories. Distinct comments within each subcategory were accumulated to indicate the frequency of occurrence of references. Comments under each subcategory were recorded and accounted as separate cases identifying strengths and weaknesses.

² Guest, G.; MacQueen, K., & Namey, E. (2012). *Applied thematic analysis*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2019). *Thematic analysis. Handbook of Research Methods in Health Social Sciences*. Hoboken, New Jersey: Springer: 843–860. doi:10.1007/978-981-10-5251-4_103. ISBN 978-981-10-5250-7.

Boyatzis, R. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W., Plano Clark, V. L., Gutmann, M. L., & Hanson, W. E. (2003). Advanced mixed methods research designs. *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research*, 209, 240.

Robson, C. (2002). *Real world research: A resource for social scientists and practitioner-researchers* (Vol. 2). Oxford: Blackwell.

Part 1: Trends and issues deriving from the experts' recommendations and from the institutions' responses

Standard 1: Study programme and study programme's design and development.

Thematic analysis on Master programmes' evaluation issued by CYQAA on June 2019 (Report No. 3) pointed the fact that institutions were adaptable to the proposed new conditions to transform and adjust conventional programs to the e-learning standards. Nevertheless, this was not an easy process as before the establishment of the CYQAA ELP used to be offered without concrete standards and guidelines. Discussion with experts and the Agency' reporting contributed to understanding the philosophy of the e-learning programmes' development. Thus, **the picture presented in the current thematic analysis included positive remarks about the overall quality of the program, the provision of electives, compliance with Bologna standards, the establishment of Quality Assurance system and the quality of assessment methods.**

Yet, the experts' reports indicated a number of **weaknesses** regarding the programs' **content and structure** (i.e. Sufficient practical orientation, Overlaps, Clarity of strategy and Vision, Provision of electives, Compliance with Bologna Process & ECTS, Quality of Objectives and Learning Outcomes, Clarity of student's expectations in syllabus & study guides), **assessment** (i.e. Final exam, Mid-term exam, Controlling for Fraud, Overall quality of assessment methods), **research orientation of the program** (i.e. Research Module & training, Ethical aspect of Research) **command of English language** and **Quality assurance mechanisms** (i.e. Overall Quality of Quality Assurance system, Frequency of QA reviews, Student representation in QA, QA focus in performance of delivery). Experts also pointed out the need to include a **compulsory dissertation requirement** as well as processes to safeguard the **quality of dissertations**.

Since the establishment of the CYQAA e-learning programmes (ELP) have undergone significant improvements. Thus, 81% of the applications for ELP in the current reporting period were approved by the Agency, since in most cases institutions adapted to the experts' recommendations and the Agency's reports.

Nevertheless, there is still significant room for improvement in the areas where weaknesses were identified, specifically regarding the research orientation of the program and how this is evident in the overall content and structure of the programmes. Constant monitoring of the programs by the Agency as well as the establishment of concrete standards and guidelines will further enhance quality in ELP, clearly distinguishing them from conventional programs.

There is a profound difficulty to understand the differences between using e-platforms for uploading the content of the face-to-face programs and designing interactive programs developed to be delivered as e-learning. Upskilling of the staff for mastering virtual teaching and developing of joint programs with institutions with expertise in the virtual environment are preconditions for quality assurance of e-teaching and learning.

Higher education institutions were not ready and the majority of them is still unprepared to offer e-learning programs that safeguard their quality and value the virtual reality.

Computer generated interactive simulations should characterize the e-learning programs and offer students rewarding experiences in a virtual environment similar to the real world.

Standard 2: Teaching and learning.

Experts' comments regarding the study programmes were focused on teaching and learning methods, assessment, the development of research skills as a component of the programme, the communication between faculty and students and the course outlines.

Strong points were identified in several cases across all thematic categories (44%) pointing out that programs, in a number of cases, were in line with contemporary DL methods making effective use of pedagogical methods and following student centered instruction. Experts also identified good practices regarding combinations of types, number and quality of assessments, transparency of criteria and methods of assessment and feedback mechanisms. Positive comments were also made regarding the quality and efficiency of faculty-students' communication and the appropriateness of faculty-student ratio.

Nevertheless, weaknesses appear to outweigh strengths (56%). Experts outlined the **necessity to use interactive instructional methods** instead of passive, "traditional" teaching methods and recommended **alternative to written exams types** of assessment including adaptive feedback mechanisms and establishment of internal marking policies. Serious **weaknesses were also identified in developing research skills to students.** EEC members commented that due to the fact that the **final thesis project is optional** many students will miss the opportunity to be actively involved in real-world research. In several cases **course outlines were of poor quality**, basically prescribing textbook reading while **objectives were not aligned to Bloom's, or other learning taxonomy.** Experts also identified cases where links between learning outcomes and assessment methods were not explicit and reading lists were not current nor prioritized enough.

Institutions, have been gradually improving their study programmes, following the expert's recommendations. Taking into consideration the strong points outlined in the EEC reports, the Agency allowed institutions who had an overall good picture, to improve their programs, providing a provisional, six months period accreditation. Constant monitoring by the Agency during the provisional accreditation period, allowed for significant improvements in ELP. CYQAA has prioritized interactivity and research orientation in ELP. Thus, institutions must carefully structure their programmes according to contemporary distance learning standards to secure accreditation.

Standard 3: Teaching staff

Comments made by the experts regarding Standard 3 were organized in terms of workload, gender mainstreaming, qualifications, evaluation processes and training.

Strong points consisted the 45% of the recorded comments. Experts made positive remarks regarding the balanced gender composition, the qualifications and expertise and the processes for training, assessment and evaluation of the faculty.

However, experts identified several weaknesses in the 55% of the recorded comments. **The teaching workload of faculty members was considered to be quite high, therefore not allowing faculty members to be actively involved in research and publications.** Minimum research and publication records was also attributed to the qualifications of the staff, which were considered either low or irrelevant to the courses they taught. **Further, experts identified that promotion of staff should not be based solely on publications; they therefore recommended that institutions should include in the parameters for staff evaluation, formal criteria on assessing teaching quality.** In addition, experts pointed out the need to establish **regular opportunities for the training of both permanent and part time staff in teaching methods, in addition to DL training,** and implement a process for **peer observation** to facilitate reflection on teaching and the sharing of good practice.

Following CYQAA directions, institutions have established maximum workload for both permanent and part time staff. Further, specific processes for the assessment and evaluation of teaching are established and considered in faculty evaluation. The practice of staff recruitment is also changing. However, institutions must improve the conditions that will enable staff to engage in research and publications. In addition, institutions must improve staff training on instructional methods.

Standard 4: Students

Admission procedures, induction processes, support and welfare, sponsoring students' activities and initiatives, student-teacher relations and fraud prevention were the themes that derived from the experts' comments regarding standard 4.

Positive remarks reflected 58% of the recorded comments. Experts noted that admission criteria were compliant with international standards and induction processes were in place. The also commented on the high level of pastoral support and the quality of other services available to students (i.e. events, exchange programmes, activities). Positive remarks were made regarding the accessibility and the interpersonal relations between students and faculty members. Feedback mechanisms enabling students to provide feedback were also recorded.

Still, experts pointed out that **admission criteria in certain cases were not sufficient to guarantee that admitted students will be able to cope up with the requirements of the program** and therefore reduce the likelihood of failure and preserve the quality of the learning experience for the cohort as a whole. It was also noted that **DL students have limited engagement in the life and activities of the broader community of the University.** Thus, despite the availability of services and opportunities provided to students, institutions must take into consideration the fact that students at the ELP are usually mature students with very little available time. **The mentoring system appeared problematic when there were not enough permanent faculty members.** Experts also identified weakness regarding the character of student teacher relations commenting that the **staff and the institutions "should not grant all request made by the students".** Regarding students' **fraudulent activities,** it was observed that, in certain cases, the **procedure and**

process for disciplinary actions as a result of plagiarism were not sufficiently explicit nor formal.

Institutions are updating their fraud prevention systems as this has been established as necessary requirement by the CYQAA. Further, measures are taken to ensure proper mentoring processes. Nevertheless, participation of DL students in the broader community of the university remains an issue.

Standard 5: Resources, student welfare services, administrative services, laboratories, library

The most important resources needed to achieve high quality ELP are the e-learning services. E-learning services not only must they include excellent infrastructure and cutting-edge technological features; they must also take into consideration both technical and pedagogical support that must be provided to instructors and students. To this end, the general picture of ELP was mostly positive. Experts pointed out that in most cases **the necessary resources are available, maintained, promoted and accessible to staff and students**. The DL environments were considered adequate to support learning as well as the design and implementation of teaching. In addition, **DL units were established** to provide guidance and support, on a regular basis, while induction materials were available to inform the students about the teaching and support services. Nevertheless, experts identified weaknesses regarding the adjustments of existing support services pointing out **weaknesses pertaining the quality of the online material** (i.e excessive duration of videos, no subtitles) and the **lack of intelligent tutor systems** to support immediate and automatic feedback to students.

In addition to e-learning services, the quality of ELP depends on the library services provided to faculty and students. Experts pointed out strong points regarding the libraries of the institutions including E-Library/subscriptions to data bases and journals, the capacities of the physical library the inter-Library collaborations-agreements the support services provided by librarians to students. **However, experts pointed out limitations regarding the available e-resources in the topics of the specialization of the programs.**

Resources and facilities to support ELP have significantly improved as a result of the CYQAA monitoring. Nevertheless, institutions must update their library resources to include updated and extended material in the areas of the specialization of the programmes. Further improvements are also required in the quality of the instructional material used for DL.

Standard 6: Additional for distance learning programmes

Experts' comments were focused on the quality of the digital environment, the pedagogical approach and the development of digital skills to the faculty. Comments reflected both strengths as well as points of improvement. The positive comments (59%) outweigh weaknesses.

On the plus side, experts pointed out that **institutions had in place sufficient infrastructure** to support e learning including advanced technological means, **DL**

support units and laboratories. The use of learning analytics was also noted as a positive point as in certain cases, as this was an essential tool to inform the teaching and learning process. Positive comments were made regarding the **well-established communication channels** between faculty and students, the good use of **weekly study guides, the student-teacher ratio and the clarity and coherency of examination procedures.** Experts also pointed out cases in which institutions provided to instructors the **opportunity to train in digital learning through guides, tutorials and short training sessions.**

Nevertheless, many problems were reported regarding both, the technical and the pedagogical aspects of the programs. In reference to the technical aspects, experts recorded **problems concerning the long duration and the quality of the material used in DL (video and audio).** Experts also pointed out cases in which the **DL units were mostly, if not exclusively, focused on technical issues rather than on the instructional support.** Regarding the pedagogical aspects of ELP, experts pointed out cases in which **courses were structured as a copy of conventional education without evidence of how critical thinking skills could be promoted.** Experts also noted the **absence of a systematic model for education that takes into account the specific needs and challenges adult/mature learners face.** Weaknesses were identified regarding the courses' structure, the lack of clarity pertaining the expected dedication time of the activities, the absence of intelligent tutoring systems to support immediate and automatic feedback to students and the provision of prerequisite knowledge. Problems were also identified regarding the validation of the student's identity in examination procedures (i.e. presentations, assignments) and the **limited use of learning analytics** to inform the teaching and learning processes.

Despite the significant improvements in terms of technical infrastructures and instructional approaches, institutions still need to establish processes to further enhance the quality of ELP taking into consideration the needs and challenges of adult/mature students. To this end, institutions could benefit from effective use of learning analytics, piloting of courses and mandatory training for the faculty (in technology and DL learning methods). DL units not only must provide technical support but pedagogical guidance as well.

Part 2: Experts' remarks and recommendations

Standard 1: Study programme and study programme's design and development.

Table 2: Frequencies of recorded EEC experts' comments regarding Standard 1: "Study programme and study programme's design and development" in the period 2/ 2019 – 2/2020.

Themes/ Categories	Subcategories	Universities Frequencies Strengths (N=16)	Universities Frequencies Improvement required (N=16)	Universities Frequencies Total (N=16)
Dissertation				9
	Compulsory dissertation requirement		3	3
	Processes and quality of dissertations		6	6
Research Orientation				6
	Research Module & training		5	5
	Ethical aspect of Research		1	1
Assessment				8
	Final exam		2	2
	Mid-term exam		1	1
	Controlling for Fraud		1	1
	Overall quality of assessment methods	1	3	4
Command of English language				2
	Appropriate command of English		2	2
Program's content and Structure				35
	Overall quality of the program	4	7	11
	Sufficient practical orientation	2	3	5
	Overlaps		3	3
	Clarity of strategy and Vision		2	2
	Provision of electives		2	2
	Compliance with Bologna Process & ECTS framework	3	2	5
	Quality of Objectives and Learning Outcomes		5	5
	Clarity of student's expectations in syllabus & study guides		2	2
Quality assurance mechanisms				9
	Overall Quality of Quality Assurance system	3	1	4
	Frequency of QA reviews		1	1
	Student representation in QA	2	1	3
	QA focus in performance of delivery		1	1

Dissertation

In three cases, experts pointed out the need to establish a compulsory dissertation requirement in ELP.

The EEC notes the decision not to have a compulsory dissertation requirement might affect the research orientation of the MA Programme.

It must be noted that the Cyprus Higher Education Institutions' master programs do not always include dissertation as a compulsory requirement. Higher Education institutions provide students with an option, either to complete a dissertation or complete the necessary credits by attending elective courses.

In cases where the program contained a thesis, experts, in 6 cases, pointed out, the necessity to establish processes and criteria to secure the quality of the outcome.

Recommendations made by the experts included the establishment of clear steps/tasks in the process, the provision of guidance to enable students take advantage of the state of the art research in the topic, research skills training and a more clear focus of the topic of the thesis.

In some cases External Evaluation Committees considered that some consideration could be given to practical research methods and the way that students can be equipped with the necessary research skills for their dissertation, including skills which allow students to collect primary data.

Research Orientation

Experts stressed, in 5 cases, the necessity to strengthen the research component of the programmes. This entails training the students on basic research methods, including core module on research methods, linking modules to research, updating content of offered research modules to include research design along with techniques and tools applied to research methods and promoting active participation of students in research activities either via thesis or as assistants in projects. Experts also suggested, in one case, consideration to the ethical aspect of research.

Overall, it seems that the research component of the programme should be strengthened, which the committee believes can be corrected in a short period of time with a view to making the programme more dynamic.

The programme should train the students on basic research methods. A core module on this should be offered in the programme.

Teaching within each module could be more explicitly linked to the research conducted by the teaching team.

The methodology course was primarily focused on research design as opposed to the techniques applied to research methods.

No consideration was given to the ethical aspect of research. The committee considered that ethical considerations are an important aspect of a degree programme that focuses on IR and security studies.

There are issues regarding the research method training. At this stage, the module is not entirely convincing. We suggest that the course should be redesigned to include 1) research design elements (including dissertation writing support, ethics, research question, theoretical consideration, hypotheses, data, methods, access to databases through various data archives, etc.), 2) introductions to key qualitative methods (interviews, qualitative text analysis, etc.) which many students may choose to use in their dissertations, 3) a basic introduction to quantitative data analysis such as descriptive and multivariate statistical analyses including lab sessions (either using SPSS or R). We suggest that this would be best conceived as a team-taught course with three specialists of each of the three areas in charge. Eventually, we suggest to rename the course to "Research Design and Empirical Methods in the Social Sciences"

Students should be actively involved in research activities either in the context of their thesis or via their participation to research projects as assistants.

Further institutionalising research activities in the University which will enhance the quality of teaching and ensure relevance

Assessment

Remarks on assessment included both strengths and necessary improvements. One EEC, portrait the overall quality of the assessment procedures of a program as being appropriate, transparent, objective and supportive of the development of the learner, having clear and transparent criteria and feedback processes.

Assessment is appropriate, transparent, objective and supports the development of the learner. The criteria for and 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 learning process.

Nevertheless, in 7 cases, EEC members identified several weaknesses in the ELP's in reference to final and mid-term exam processes, controlling for fraud as well as in the overall quality of the assessment processes. Experts pointed out the need to consider different alternative types of assessments, ensure diversity of assessment within and across courses and reconsider the weight between written-traditional type assessments and alternative type assessments.

The overall assessment could benefit from further integration of the digital and interdisciplinary aspects from the program.

(..)should consider changing the final assessment process. Currently, the assessment is made through written exams, which is not the most appropriate manner for a DL programme (it requires students to move to examination centres, etc.). According to the institution representatives, this is due to state legislation, but the EEC feels that it should be underlined as a strong recommendation to both (...) and CYQAA.

The organisers should ensure diversity of assessment within and across courses. At this stage, the nature of midterm assessment is not sufficiently clear and transparent to students so it should be agreed by the time students apply for the Masters.

Midterm assessment should never be a second written exam. It would be good to consider different alternative assessments (essays, literature critiques, article manuscript for the university's student journal, etc.) in different courses. The organisers should consider reducing the weight of final exams in the total grade as 70% seems higher than needed.

We suggest adopting the standards of online education, i.e. having two assignments per semester. 70% is too much load for the final exam according to the international standards.

Assignment forms need development, i.e. providing multiple ways and not only writing essays (but also e.g. posters, video clips).

In respect to controlling for fraud we recommend to look for improvements, taking into account recent technologies (pattern/handwriting/iris recognition).

Command of English language

Experts pointed out, in two cases, the necessity to put more emphasis on helping students gain a good command of the English language, to facilitate understanding of the available scientific literature. This was considered important, regardless of the language of the programme.

The MA Programme language is Greek, the audience is aimed to be students mainly from Greece and Cyprus, therefore the EEC assumes that students' command of language is appropriate, yet we recommend the MA Programme Academic Team to clarify to the applicants that a good command of English, given the literature is also required.

-It is Important that students are able to write dissertations and any research papers in English regardless of the language of the programme.

-We advise to provide more clarity on the teaching language (e.g. what are the prerequisites to attend the programme either in English or Greek and how are language issues covered in the course work and written assignments?)

Program's content and Structure

Comments made by the EEC members regarding the content and the structure of the program, depicted strengths as well as weaknesses. Areas commented by the experts included the clarity of the strategy and vision of the program, the provision of elective courses, the existence of overlaps among courses, the synchronization with Bologna process standards, the focus on practical aspects, the formulation of objectives and learning outcomes and the appropriateness of the programme content for a Masters level degree.

Experts identified strengths in the areas "Overall quality of the program" (4 cases) "Sufficient practical orientation" (2 comment), Compliance with Bologna Process & ECTS framework (3 cases).

The program is highly innovative and pioneering.(...) The interdisciplinary approach is consistent with the aims and objectives of the program.(...) Its focus (..) raises the students' potential employability in the current field of cultural production.

The programme is designed according to international standards of teaching and learning with respect to pedagogical methods, modes of delivery, and variety of learning outcomes. The programme presents a balanced mixture of practical and theoretical teaching hours.

The study programme is innovative and up-to-date.

The ECTS is applied and consistent with university-wide approach.

Regarding the areas of improvement experts stressed the importance to update content, syllabi and reading lists to reflect the latest developments in the respective fields, define a distinct character for the program and avoid overlaps between courses and different programs offered by the institution, improve learning goals and objectives in order to be realistic, specific and in sync with the courses' content. Comments were

also made regarding flexibility in the course choice and provision of electives, the synchronization with Bologna process standards and the lack of courses that give the students practical experience. Specifically experts identified weaknesses in the areas “Overall quality of the program” (7 cases), “Sufficient practical orientation” (3 cases), “Overlaps” (3 cases), “Provision of electives” (2 cases), “Compliance with Bologna Process & ECTS framework” (2 cases), “Quality of Objectives and Learning Outcomes” (5 cases), “Clarity of student’s expectations in syllabus & study guides” (2 cases).

However, the committee was less impressed by (...) the actual content of the programme, including the teaching material; the focus on practical aspects (...). (...)Moreover, the syllabi shared with the committee currently fail to reflect the latest research developments in the field, as they do not include a list of recent journal articles for each one of the fields covered in the programme. (...) The committee identified various overlaps among courses that call for a review that will streamline the content given to the students throughout the programme.

While the committee appreciates that the structured compulsory element of the programme provides a framework that may be of use for resourcing, we nonetheless considered that students could benefit from the provision of elective courses that would provide an opportunity for greater specialization. (...)The 1.5 years programme conforms with national standards in Cyprus. However, the programme is out of sync with Bologna process standards, and notably both the UK approach of a 1-year taught Masters and the US/European approach of a 2-year taught Masters. (...)There is, however, scope for additional clarification as to the distinctive ‘MSc’ element of this programme as opposed to another taught MA degree.(...)The committee considered that further consideration should be given to the structure of the degree programme with greater attention attached to providing students with some of the core understandings of (...) in the first semester. (...) The committee also thought that the taught content (...) needed a stronger resonance with the objectives of the degree programme.(...)The committee considered that the language of the programme content did not reflect the standards that are to be expected at Masters level. For example, more emphasis needs to be attached to the learning outcomes of the programme and the courses with regard to critical reflection, independent analysis etc. Consequently, further consideration should be given to clarifying the expected advanced level of learning at Masters level.

Reading lists are very book focused and need to be diverse, including articles(..). We suggest that reading lists should also be diverse in terms of nationality and gender of authors.(...) We advise to allow for some flexibility in the choice of course. It would be advisable that students could choose up to two courses from other master programmes.(...) we also suggest some flexibility in the ordering of courses to be taken(...) Hence, students could indifferently take courses in the first or second semester of the programme. This would help students starting the programme in the second term and reduce the teaching load for the programme

Bibliography should be updated, more international, and covering new trends in the discipline.

The courses cover relevant areas, but most of them only give a high- level theoretical/survey perspective, and there is a lack of courses that give the students a hands-on experience. (...)The courses describe the basic knowledge in the areas that they cover, and in general do not cover the most up-to-date research results.(...) The content of the courses does not reflect the state of the art in the corresponding field.(...) Some courses seem to cover too many topics

and this may result in poor learning outcomes.(...) Some courses present considerable overlap with others

The program contents do not apply for a Master of (...) according to international standards, particularly because of the absence of (...) prerequisites and because of the reduced timespan of the study track. (...)The Committee sees a need in narrowing down the scope of the learning outcomes due to the shortness of the time frame given to the program(...) Objectives and learning outcomes need to be properly formulated. The learning outcomes mostly refer to acquiring new knowledge – there is no reference to comprehension and application. This is not a matter of terminology only: The reflection on these components will encourage students to apply critical thinking during their learning process.

Drafting of a clear strategy and vision for the programme (...) harmonization and streamlining with the principles and purposes of the Council of Europe on higher education.

More broadly, there seems to be a mismatch between the learning goals set out in the overall programme design and the actual goals of each course that forms part of the programme. Such a misalignment clearly affects the expectations of students and would need to be addressed soon so that they know what they can expect during the three-semester programme and what type of skills they will be improving before enrolling in the programme.

As such, the course did not reflect the remit of the degree programme and was out of sync with the learning outcomes and the expected content that the programme seeks to deliver.

The current learning outcomes are quite general. We understand that this serves the interests of flexibility, but more precise learning outcomes might better serve the interests of intending and current students.

Quality assurance mechanisms

Positive remarks in the thematic area of Quality assurance mechanisms included references concerning the “Overall Quality of Quality Assurance system” (3 cases), “Frequency of QA reviews” (1 case), “Student representation in QA” (2 cases). In these cases experts commented the fact that an organized QA system was in place allowing the participation of students and teaching staff.

The University has its own system of quality assurance, which is well structured and organized.

Provision for student representation in quality assurance and programme enhancement is commendable(...)The University's quality assurance processes are robust, transparent and publicly available.

The Quality Assurance Department is in place to monitor the quality, such as program standard, performance of teaching and administration staff and student learning experience, etc. The members of QA Department include members from the university's top management supporting staff, teaching staff and students.(...) Internal accreditation process is clearly documented."

Regarding areas of improvement, experts commented on the “Overall Quality of Quality Assurance system” (1 case), “Student representation in QA (1 case), “Frequency of QA reviews” (1 case) and “QA focus in performance of delivery” (1 case). Experts pointed out the need to establish a well-organized, regular and standard review process with the participation of students and administrative staff. Comments were also made about the need to include in the QA system specific processes to monitor the performance of the delivery.

the committee would have liked to receive more information as to how the quality of the programme is guaranteed and whether a standard review process is regularly triggered with a view to ensuring that the programme complies with high academic standards in the field-The current lack of regular quality review seems to have an impact on the structure of the programme, negatively affecting the learning experience.

Documentation on Quality procedures should be organized and easily accessed. A Quality Manual should be put in place.

(...) students should be more involved in the process.

we are not aware of the extent to which administrative staff participate in the quality assurance process.

Strengthening of the role of QA in the monitoring of the performance of the delivery (subject/module level), where students' and lecturers' feedback is focused on the content, the delivery and the achievement of the didactic goals set.

Standard 2: Teaching and learning.

Table 3: Frequencies of recorded EEC experts' comments regarding Standard 2 "Study programme and study programme's design and development" in the period 2/ 2019 – 2/2020

Themes/ Categories	Subcategories	Universities Frequencies Strengths (N=16)	Universities Frequencies Improvement required (N=16)	Universities Frequencies Total (N=16)
Teaching and Learning methods				20
	In line with DL methods	3	1	4
	Effective use of pedagogical methods	5	3	8
	Informed by pedagogical research		2	2
	Student centered instruction/ student engagement in the learning process	2	4	6
Assessment				14
	Combinations of types, number and quality of assessments	1	4	5
	Transparency of criteria and methods	2	1	3
	Feedback mechanisms	2	2	4
	Coordination of Formative assessment between faculty members		2	2
Research Skills				9
	Sufficient research training		4	4
	Research in dissertations (optional)	1	4	5
Faculty-Students' communication				9
	Quality-efficiency of faculty-students' communication	5		5
	Appropriate faculty-student ratio	4		4
Course outlines				8
	Quality of Objectives		1	1
	Consistency between objectives, methods and assessment		3	3
	Reading lists		3	3
	Overall quality	1		1

Teaching and Learning methods

Experts' comments in the theme "Teaching and learning methods" included an equal number of references on strengths and weaknesses. Positive comments were recorded in the subcategories "In line with DL methods" (3 cases), "Effective use of pedagogical methods" (5 cases), "Student centered instruction/ student engagement in the learning process" (2 cases).

The teaching, learning and students' assessment procedures of the MA programme are fully in line with the distance learning methodology, applied. The distance learning methodology is applied in a very modern and sufficiently supported way.

The program is designed according to the international standards of teaching and learning regarding pedagogical methods, modes of delivery and variety of learning outcomes, while highlighting the innovative aspects of the digital technologies involved.

The programme is designed according to international standards of teaching and learning with respect to pedagogical methods, modes of delivery, and

variety of learning outcomes. The process of teaching and learning takes into consideration the specific students' needs. Teaching methods, tools and material used in teaching are modern, effective, and support the use of modern educational technologies. The programme presents a balanced mixture of practical and theoretical teaching hours.

A blended learning approach (using a variety of learning technologies) has been implemented that allows for flexible delivery and integrates the face to face and the online environment.

The process of teaching and learning is flexible, considers different modes of delivery, where appropriate, uses a variety of pedagogical methods and facilitates the achievement of planned learning outcomes.

Innovative teaching methods, learning environments and learning aids that support learning are diverse and used in educational activities

Teaching methods, tools and material used in teaching are modern, effective, support the use of modern educational technologies and are regularly updated.(...)Practical and theoretical studies are interconnected.--The inclusion of updated practical cases are ensured, theory and practice are interconnected in teaching and learning.

There is a student-centered approach that could potentially enhance self-regulated learning and the guidance and support from the tutor seems to be adequate

Students are encouraged to take an active role in creating the 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"(...)The process of teaching and learning supports students' individual and social development and respects their needs.

Weaknesses were identified in the areas "In line with DL methods (1 case), "Effective use of pedagogical methods" (3 cases), "Informed by pedagogical research" (2 cases) and "Student centered instruction/ student engagement in the learning process" (4 cases). Experts outlined the necessity to use interactive instructional methods that are informed by pedagogical research and transcend passive, "traditional" teaching methods. Recommendations included the use of case studies, smaller groups of students, activities that enhance critical thinking and facilitation of student active participation.

The use of case studies to enrich learning and teaching materials would ensure practical and theoretical studies are interconnected. There was no clear evidence from the materials and presentations to the Committee that there was strong connection between the two.

It is not clear that teaching and learning is informed by pedagogical research.

Integrate teaching methodologies and learning strategies(..)Include opportunities for students to take an active role in the learning process (...).Include hands-on experience where applicable(...)Strengthen teaching and practice interconnections(...) Enhance creative thinking---Teaching and learning have not been adequately enlightened by research

The EEC did not encounter any examples of project-based, collaborative or research- driven activities through Moodle or any e-learning in the sense of

dedicated interactive media designed by the faculty, that for instance support students to apply their knowledge in a simulated professional environment. Therefore, the interaction which is so highly stated as important is limited to consuming books and power points, listening to teachers, and some occasional application task. There are no real interactive e- learning programs where students experience content, are active and apply knowledge in authentic contexts.

We believe that the programme provides students with sufficient opportunities for active participation, but we would encourage the institution to come up with strategies to ensure adequate 'take-up' of those opportunities, e.g. by linking online discussion forums more closely to classroom discussion.

The committee notes that the (...) is already actively thinking about better opportunities for distance learning students to participate in face to face interaction. The committee recommends considering a face to face induction and more opportunities for online collaborative work.

It was not clear how students are encouraged to take an active role in creating the learning process.

Assessment

Experts commented on the combinations of assessment types, the number and quality of assessments, the transparency of criteria and methods, the feedback mechanisms and the Coordination of Formative assessment between faculty members. Strengths were identified in categories "Combinations of types, number and quality of assessments" (1 case), "Transparency of criteria and methods (2 cases) and "Feedback mechanisms" (2 cases).

The combination of assignments and written exams per module is a good practice in terms of student assessment.

Assessment is appropriate, transparent, objective and supports the development of the learner. The criteria for and 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 learning process.

There are already good feedback mechanisms in place.

Assessment is appropriate, transparent, objective and supports the development of the learner(...) The criteria for and method of assessment, as well as criteria for marking, are published in advance.(...)The assessment methods chosen include the 6 tele-conferencing meetings, discussion forum, self-evaluation activities, serve as a formative feedback for students, academic progress during their studies.(...)The advisory board is contributes to the assessment of learning outcomes together with the academic team".

EEC members identified weaknesses in relation to "Combinations of types, number and quality of assessments" (4 cases), "Transparency of criteria and methods" (1 case), "Feedback mechanisms" (2 cases) and "Coordination of Formative assessment between faculty members" (2 cases). Comments included recommendation to the staff to reconsider the number and the type of the assessments to provide sufficient variety to test students at Masters level, consider changing the final assessment

process as written exams is not the most appropriate assessment practice for a DL programme, use of more adaptive feedback mechanisms for students after they complete their assessments and consider establishing internal marking policy to ensure the dissemination of good practice regarding oversight.

We encourage the staff to reconsider the number and the type of the assessments. The nature of the program which draws heavily on digital approaches and interdisciplinarity is not adequately reflected in the examples of assessments presented. The EEC believes that a higher and more varied number of assessments would be more appropriate for a distance learning program such as this. In particular, we feel that the sit-down exams and the percentage of credits allocated to them should be reconsidered in order to do justice to both the level of commitment of the teachers and the learning outcomes of students.

(..) should consider changing the final assessment process. Currently, the assessment is made through written exams, which is not the most appropriate manner for a DL programme (it requires students to move to examination centres, etc.). According to the institution representatives, this is due to state legislation, but the EEC feels that it should be underlined as a strong recommendation to both UNIC and CYQAA.

As the course develops, the committee suggests the use of more adaptive feedback mechanisms for students after they complete their assessments(..) It is noted that assessments matrices are used, the committee recommends that these are also included in the student handbook.

"Further consideration could be given to how the process of student assessment provides sufficient variety to test students at Masters level and also to prepare them to undertake an extended piece of writing. (..)...is not clear how formative assessment is built into the degree programme. "(...)Further consideration should be given to how assessments are coordinated across the academic provision, particularly with regard to the 30% component that is determined by individual members of staff teaching the course. (...) Further consideration should be given to the internal marking policy to ensure the dissemination of good practice regarding oversight.

The assignments are not demanding enough, especially for the technical courses. They don't reflect the time load that is allocated to them and do not always meet the objective of the courses(...).The balance between the exam and the assignments allows students that receive illegitimate help from others to get credit for courses with minimal knowledge.(...) Where possible, assessment should be carried out by more than one examiner.

It is not clear to what extent students will receive formative feedback. We recommend that there should be a clear commitment to the provision of regular formative feedback in all courses and for all non-summative assignments. This might be accomplished by group feedback subject to the opportunity for individual students to request personal feedback (...)We recommend that assessment criteria should be published for all assignments. (...) We note that student participation in class is assessed, but it is not clear what forms of student participation are expected. We recommend that this should be clarified in the study guides.

Research Skills

Experts remarks on the development of student's research skills referred mostly to weaknesses. Strengths were identified in only one case regarding the requirement for students to conduct research for their theses.

Students are required to conduct research for their theses and have opportunities to publish outstanding assessments.

Comments on weaknesses referred to the insufficiency of research training in general (4 cases) as well as the unsatisfactory preparation for writing a dissertation (4 cases). Experts pointed out that since the final thesis project is optional means that the vast majority of students will miss the opportunity to be actively involved in a real-world research.

the EEC is not fully convinced that the MA Programme provides the students with the best opportunity to proceed in research activities, yet we are fully aware of the fact that the nature of the Programme is a taught MA Programme with an optional thesis.

The final thesis project is optional, which means that several (perhaps, the vast majority of) students will miss the opportunity to be actively involved in a real-world research task. (...) should seriously consider changing its status to compulsory.

There is no evidence that students are actively involved in research, before the dissertation module.

Further consideration should be given to developing the research level component of the programme of study through the critical engagement with or exposure to primary materials in the taught courses and/or case studies

" There is no evidence of student involvement in staff research. We would not expect administrative to be involved in research.(...)Training in research methods is currently offered as an optional extra. We recommend that all students should undertake some training in research methods as an element of preparation for writing the thesis.

Faculty-Students' communication

Communication between faculty and students appears to be a strong point of the institutions offering ELP. Strengths were identified by the EEC in the areas "Quality and efficiency of faculty-students' communication" (5 cases) and the "Appropriate faculty-student ratio"(4 cases). Experts commented on the effectiveness, openness and regularity of staff-student communication and the student-staff ratio.

Staff-student communication is outstanding with students explicitly expressing their appreciation of staff participation in extra-curricular activities, which seemed integral to their learning experience. The individual feedback provided in terms of quality and quantity is impressive.

The committee is very happy with the staff-student ratio, and has seen sufficient evidence to conclude that the communication between staff and students is both regular and effective

The individual needs of the students are met by having a commendable staff to student ratio (based on the projected figures that the course team used in their presentation).

The committee were impressed with the 1:25 student –staff ratio.

The committee is very happy with the staff-student ratio, and has seen sufficient evidence to conclude that the communication between staff and students is both regular and effective.

Good instructor-students' relationships

Course outlines

In one case experts made positive remarks regarding the “Overall Quality” of course outlines.

The institution seems to be very organized, the syllabi are very informative and includes all the required assessment parts.

Nevertheless, experts identified several weaknesses in terms of “Quality of Objectives” (1 case), “Consistency between objectives, methods and assessment (3 cases) and “Reading lists” (3 cases). Comments made by the EEC, pointed out that in certain cases course outlines were prescribing textbook reading, hardly referring to articles or book chapters. Weaknesses regarding course outlines included poorly formulated objectives (not aligned to Bloom’s, or other learning taxonomy), not explicit links between learning outcomes and assessment methods, reading lists not current nor prioritized enough and further reading not included.

The phrasing is not specific enough, they do not follow the Bloom taxonomy (differentiation between objectives and learning outcomes).

(...) Objectives and learning outcomes need to be properly formulated. Learning outcomes are too demanding. They mainly refer to knowledge skills without considering the process of comprehension, and application. The Committee encourages the application of critical thinking in this study program.

A more explicit link between the learning outcomes and the assessment methods (constructive alignment) would ensure that learning outcomes are directly linked to the assessment methods used in the programme. The formative assessment methods that were presented to the Committee should play an important role in this. Good practice dictates that learning outcomes are explicitly mentioned ahead of every activity, assessment task. E.g. ‘Next activity will help you to achieve learning outcome X.

the course outlines did not make clear which learning outcomes are pursued by each teaching or assessment method, or other activity. The institution could meet that concern easily with appropriate sign-posting (e.g. to identify points that go towards developing critical thinking as ‘critical reflection’ points, etc) (...)we would emphasise the importance of keeping the bibliography in the course outlines updated, which wasn’t always the case.(...) Our main concern was that the course outlines are basically prescribing textbook reading, and refer to hardly any articles or book chapters. This is a serious shortcoming, because it fails to expose students to cutting-edge research and to familiarise them with the most recent debates and questions. We

strongly recommend that the institution revisit the course outlines with that in mind.

As we state in section 1, we believe that this increase in student workload would actually enhance the value of the course for students, and justify the 7.5 ECTS credit weighting.(...)Our concern is that the course outlines do not include any further reading, which limits the opportunities students have to determine the depth of their own study. We would recommend the addition of further reading in each week of the semester (except perhaps week 1 or 2).

The materials we reviewed did not fully indicate what teaching methodologies would be employed. We recommend that the study guide should give more detailed guidance on this. (...) recommend that the extensive reading lists provided should clearly indicate priorities to assist students in using their study time effectively.

That the School should review the course Study Guides with a view to providing a richer range of multi-media resources to supplement the range of conventional texts.

Incorporate current research in course material

Standard 3: Teaching staff

Table 4: Frequencies of recorded EEC experts' comments regarding Standard 3: "Teaching Staff" in the period 2/ 2019 – 2/2020

Themes/ Categories	Subcategories	Universities Frequencies Strengths (N=16)	Universities Frequencies Improvement required (N=16)	Universities Frequencies Total (N=16)
Workload				9
	Balanced teaching workload		9	9
Gender mainstreaming				4
	Balanced faculty gender composition of faculty	2	2	4
Qualifications				34
	PhD holders	4	2	
	Relevant Experience	3	8	
	Teaching relevant to qualifications	1	2	
	Program's coordinator qualifications	1	2	
	Processes for recruitment qualified staff	3	3	
	Qualitative and relevant publications		6	
Faculty assessment/evaluation				14
	Considering students' assessments	4		
	Multilevel evaluation system	4	1	
	Process for assessing teaching	4	1	
Development/ training				9
	DL training	3		
	Pedagogical training	3	3	

Workload

Experts, in nine case, pointed out that the teaching workload of faculty members was quite high, consequently not allowing faculty members to be actively involved in research and publications. Recommendations indicated the necessity to hire additional teaching staff (on a permanent or part time basis) and establish a roof on the maximum teaching hours per faculty member.

The Programme will be benefited from additional teaching staff, both full and part-time (permanent and tutors) to cover any aspect of the teaching programme

One problem might be that the workload of the faculty seems to be very high. The workload- model/work-role model needs for adjustments to secure both a high teaching standard and a high research standard.

If the new programme is accepted, and given the current workload of the teachers, they should get rid of part of their existing teaching load, so as to have a reasonable amount of teaching hours and available time for research.

The Committee noted that the normal workload of staff provides only a relatively limited amount of time to support research activities. It is to their credit that staff have been able to continue to publish work with this workload.

The teaching load is 62.5% placed on PT staff, who presumably comprise a mix of visiting professors and special teaching staff.

The number of 12 teaching hours per week per each member of the teaching staff is rather high. This may result in poor results in conducting equally important tasks including scientific research and the writing/participation of/in research projects. In the latter cases, a member of the teaching staff may be allowed to teach 3 to 6 hours less, but the way the missing hours are compensated by the department and the university in general is not defined--
-The department should consider ways of reducing the teaching workload of the teaching staff and focus on strengthening and easing the research activities of the teaching personnel, e.g., by granting awards and additional funding for doing research of high quality.

We also recommend the provision of teaching assistants for the lab component of the course.

There should not be more than two professors per course unit and there should be clear identification of what each will teach.

Gender mainstreaming

Comments regarding gender mainstreaming were equally positive and negative (2 cases each). Thus, experts' comments included identification of good gender mainstreaming practices along with cases that institutions should comply with the legislative framework on discrimination and gender equality.

The teaching team has a diverse profile, including all genders and junior and senior faculty.

The teaching team is nicely built: both genders, both young and senior faculty at different ranks. Professors are well-qualified.

The EEC makes a specific recommendation to the University to comply with the existing legislative framework on discrimination and gender equality, through a set of explicit policy statements.

Perhaps the most significant drawback from the teaching staff is its demographic composition. The absence of women is staggering and could have implications on students' academic as well as pastoral experience and provisions

Staff Qualifications

Experts comments regarding staff qualifications were focused on the academic degrees, experience in the field, publications and the relevance between the instructors' qualifications and the courses they teach. Experts also commented on the qualifications of the program coordinator and the processes for staff recruitment.

Positive comments were made in the categories "PhD holders" (4 cases), "Relevant Experience" (3 cases), "Teaching relevant to qualifications" (1 case), "Program's coordinator qualifications" (1 case), and "Processes for recruitment qualified staff" (3 cases).

The quality of the academic team in charge of the MA Programme is high, since they are all highly-skilled and qualified in the key areas of the MA Programme. Even the tutors to be recruited after an open call are expected to be PhD holders, given the regulations and the practice applied by the (..).

The EEC was impressed by the expertise and the level of commitment of all staff involved. -The research profile of all staff involved is impressive on a national and international level.(...)The composition of the team seemed well thought out, drawing on their distinct qualifications in order to create the overall interdisciplinary approach.

The heads of the programme as well as all faculty members gained significant international experience and a very solid academic background. The team seems to be highly motivated. The interaction within the programme is managed by a renowned senior academic and the coordinator of the Programme is the President of the (..) School. Students are very positive about the feedback-structure. There seems to be a very good team spirit

"The teaching staff includes experienced scientists (..), showing a fair and clear method regarding the recruiting process. (...)The qualifications of the staff clearly meet the objectives of the programme and its planned learning outcomes. The teaching staff has established collaborations with both industry and academia within Cyprus and worldwide."

The committee is impressed by the quality of the staff. (...)There are now several staff members with a PhD or working on its completion, which the committee welcomes.

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.(...).All members of the teaching team are PhD holders. (...).Recognized visiting teaching staff participates in teaching the study programme

There is a mix of staff across ranks and between FT and PT. Rank is on the whole consistent with qualifications. Members of staff largely teach on areas closely connected with their research. "

All eight members of staff hold a PhD on a relevant area of study. The allocation of courses to the teaching staff tends to follow closely their expertise

"The number of permanent academic staff and the subject area of the staff sufficiently support the program of study. Most of the teaching staff are permanent members of the University (..) with a Ph.D."

They described fair, transparent and clear processes for the recruitment and development of the teaching staff.(...) New posts are openly advertised on the University website and in other for fora."

We note that all full-time staff are required to present a demo lecture prior to appointment and this is reviewed by students. This is commendable good practice. (...) We also note that full-time staff are subject to extensive review of their teaching during the first year of appointment and that permanent appointment is conditional on satisfactory teaching performance. Good practice.

Teaching experience with distance learning is a criterion for selection among the occasional teaching applicants.

Nevertheless, experts identified several problems in certain programmes in the aforementioned areas. Weaknesses were pointed out regarding "PhD holders" (2 cases), "Relevant Experience"(8 cases), "Teaching relevant to qualifications" (2 cases), "Program's coordinator qualifications" (2 cases), "Processes for recruitment qualified staff" (3 cases) and "Qualitative and relevant publications" (6 cases). Experts pointed out the weak research profile of the staff, limited publications, the fact that the faculty consisted mostly of not permanent or low rank professors and irrelevant to expertise teaching. Recommendations included recruiting additional staff, inviting recognized visiting professors, revisit the staff composition in terms of permanent-part time basis and high-ranking academics, ensuring that the program director has extended expertise in the field and promote a research culture within faculty members including relevant publications in renowned journals. Experts, in one case, commented on the fact that although there seems to be a tendency to incorporate people outside the institutions, these are typically non-academics. Thus, recommendations were made to align recruitment to the needs of the program to secure that instructors have solid academic backgrounds and credentials in the areas they teach.

What seems to be missing is a more systematic attempt to attract recognized visiting staff in the study program. Thus far, there is only one visiting fellow, who will be providing teaching on a part-time basis. It would be ideal to see more visiting fellows, who could offer lectures by discussing about their research on the topic. In general, although there seems to be a tendency to incorporate people outside the university, these are typically non-academics (e.g. politicians, members of military forces etc.). It might be useful to incorporate academics from other universities, who could enrich the faculty with their research and teaching.

The University has also recognized the need to recruit additional staff with a specific expertise in (..) and is in the process of recruiting one additional member of staff. This is a critically important position as, with the core staff undertake research and publish in the allied fields of (...) not within the field of information systems research or digital innovation. We would have expected to see staff, for example who published in the (...) Systems Senior Scholars' Basket of Journals or associated conferences or on topics which could be published in these outlets.

The committee notes the use of some specialists in the program but would welcome involving more professionals from the field as the course progresses.

To increase the visibility and internationalization of the programme, recognized visiting professors can be invited for giving lectures of specialized topics.

The faculty should also take into consideration to add more practitioners.

"The teachers seem to be dedicated to their jobs and good teachers (even if they are not the best experts in their fields).""Five out of seven members of the teaching staff are special scientists (1) or special teaching personnel (4). So, in total, 5 of 7 do not hold a permanent position in the hosting institution. (...)The coordinator of the proposed program is at the Lecture rank with rather limited experience in the field. It is expected that such a position is allocated to permanent experienced personnel who is at the rank of full professor or associate professor. (...) With reference to their CVs, most of the teaching staff

is not very much (...) oriented. They mostly publish in journals/conferences that lie outside the field of (...). Also, the research profile of the teaching staff is rather weak, i.e., only two of them have more than 250 citations (264) as reported by Google scholar, and almost all of them do not present a strong research record, namely publishing frequently in prestigious international journals and/or conference proceedings(...) The department should recruit permanent high-ranked personnel, i.e., at least one more associate professor and 2 assistant professors who have a solid academic background and are actively working on the area of (...)."(...)there is no evidence or reference of inviting recognized visiting professors in the field of (...)to deliver lectures, seminars, etc (...)should be if possible, at least of national standard but preferably of international standard, in terms of publication record, scientific impact and teaching record.

There should be program director/course coordinator with expertise closer to (...) to oversee the process and guide actions. The persons should be given power to act on decisions (...) Staff should be recruited which have expertise in the areas of each course unit.

Visiting teaching staff could be sourced from a wider variety of countries as well as from other HEIs in Cyprus (...)Staff could draw more on their research for teaching, by integrating their work into reading lists. While their teaching connects closely with their research interests, there is a downside to this close correlation, in the sense that major aspects of (...) are not adequately addressed (...), possibly because they lie outside the comfort zone of teaching staff. Future recruitment drives might focus on the provision of more substantial teaching on these areas.

The allocation of courses to the teaching staff tends to follow closely their expertise. The only exception is the course on research methodology, on which we have made several suggestions, as discussed in more detail above.

The Committee encourages the teaching personnel to publish in international peer reviewed journals with high impact factor

(...) encouraged to publish their research more widely and in international journals.

"The research output for majority of the academic staff that teach in the program are not published in international journal"

Faculty assessment/evaluation

In most cases, experts' comments regarding the processes for the assessment/evaluation of the faculty were positive. Positive comments were recorded regarding the subcategories "Considering students' assessments in staff evaluation" (4 cases), "Multilevel evaluation system" (4 cases) and "Process for assessing teaching" (4 cases).

The internal evaluation system is a fine example of good practice. Teaching draws on the research of the scholars involved and teaching performance is evaluated each semester by a successful system of assessment in which students, tutors and coordinators may express their opinion.

Student evaluations are conducted and taken into account. "

There exist regular development discussions for assessing the teaching and research quality of the teaching and research quality. The teaching performance is assessed via feedback questionnaires completed by the students of the programme. Teaching performance, as well as research performance, affect teachers' evaluation

"The Quality Assurance coordinator has oversight of the module and teaching evaluation forms.- There are clear procedures in place for the evaluation of teaching and module delivery"- Assessment of the teaching staff takes into account the quality of their teaching, their research activity, the development of their teaching skills and their mobility."

Teaching quality checks are also in place. According to the staff that was present in our meeting, students' teaching evaluations constitute an important component of the staff's overall evaluation. In general, teaching seems to be well-integrated in the overall assessment of the personnel.

The results of student evaluation are taken into account
There is robust system of teaching evaluations in place.

In one case, experts pointed out teaching results and teaching skills appear to be solely assessed through student evaluations, therefore recommended to include teaching observation in staff evaluation practices. Further, experts identified in one case that promotion, and the ranking of incoming staff, was based solely on publications. Thus, they recommended that formal criteria on assessing teaching quality could be included in the parameters for staff evaluation.

There was no indication of teaching observation taking place among staff. Teaching results and teaching skills appear to be solely assessed through student evaluations. Teaching observation could be instituted.

Staff promotion, and the ranking of incoming staff, and therefore remuneration, appears to be based chiefly on publications. Formal criteria on assessing teaching quality could be instituted and included in the parameters for staff evaluation

Development/training of staff

Positive comments referred to the training of staff in DL methods (3 cases) and general pedagogical training (3 cases).

"Members of the teaching staff are given initial training on the use of the technology involved in distance learning and have IT support throughout their teaching. They also benefit from an initial course carried out in collaboration with the Greek Open University on specific aspects of distance learning.

The teaching staff is engaged in professional and teaching-skills training, especially on how to use the distance learning tools. Specialized seminars are organized for improving professors' teaching skills. The University provides a conventional professional skills programme for staff and has developed online resources to train staff in the use of particular tools to support teaching and learning.

Members of teaching staff are provided with online manuals to support their use of Moodle and the IT team has provided verbal and online evidence of assistance to members of staff experiencing issues with the Digital Learning Environment

The teaching staff is regularly engaged in professional and teaching-skills training and development.

Weaknesses were identified in 3 cases. Experts pointed out the need to establish regular opportunities for the training of both permanent and part time staff in teaching methods and implements a process for peer observation to facilitate reflection on teaching and the sharing of good practice.

It would be great if some effort is made to help the staff develop teaching skills whenever student evaluations appear to be low. Importantly, this is the case for the conventional program. The distance-learning programme seems more focused on developing teaching skills and could serve as a model for the rest of the course.

We recommend that the University considers further post-qualification training for staff and implements a process for peer observation to facilitate reflection on teaching and the sharing of good practice. (...)Full-time staff are required to undertake induction training during the first year of appointment. There is provision for further training thereafter but this is less formal. (...)We have concerns about the training of part-time staff. It is not clear to what extent teaching proficiency is tested at appointment and it is also not clear that part-time staff are required to undertake further training or professional development.

Training opportunities in teaching methods, such as case studies, simulation. data driven assignment, active learning, etc., should be provided to teaching staffs, regularly."

Standard 4: Students

Table 5: Frequencies of recorded EEC experts' comments regarding Standard 4: "Students" in the period 2/ 2019 – 2/202

Themes/ Categories	Subcategories	Universities Frequencies Strengths (N=16)	Universities Frequencies Improvement required (N=16)	Universities Frequencies Total (N=16)
<i>Admission procedures</i>				6
	Established/ clear admission criteria	2	4	6
<i>Induction processes</i>				3
	Induction processes in place & Courses on prerequisite knowledge	1	2	3
<i>Support& welfare</i>				13
	Provision of Pastoral care	6	1	7
	Considering student's needs		2	2
	Provisions for students with disabilities/ special needs	3	1	4
<i>Sponsoring students' activities and initiatives</i>				7
	Sponsoring-facilitating students' participation in extracurricular events, activities, associations	1	3	5
	Students' participation in exchange programs	1	1	2
<i>Student-teacher relations</i>				12
	Accessible teaching staff/ Good interpersonal relations	3	1	4
	Frequent communication	3	1	4
	Mechanism enabling students to provide feedback	1	2	3
	Taking into consideration students' requests/comments		1	1
<i>Fraud prevention</i>				2
	Fraud prevention processes		2	2

Admission procedures

Experts commented positive on student's admission procedures pointing out that admission criteria were compliant with international standards (two cases).

The admission procedures as well as all the other procedures related to students are in line with the relevant procedures followed by the (...). That was clear in both the application and the onsite visit.

The general criteria for admission are compliant with international standards for study at master level.

Weaknesses were identified in 4 cases. Experts identified the need to establish specific admission criteria in cases where programmes were of a specialized nature, therefore requiring as a prerequisite specific knowledge and skills (i.e artistic skills, psychology, ITC). Further experts identified the need to establish clearer and sufficiently regulated admission criteria including acceptance thresholds. These, according to the comments will reduce the likelihood of failure and preserve the quality of the learning experience for the cohort as a whole.

To provide clearer admission criteria including acceptance thresholds

Unclear and not sufficiently regulated admission process.

The (..) School exercises judgment in reviewing applications to ensure suitability. We recommend that the School might consider developing criteria relating to degree transcripts and recommendation letters to guide the selection process. In particular, we note that it is important to be selective in terms of the capabilities of applicants to reduce the likelihood of failure and to preserve the quality of the learning experience for the cohort as a whole.

The criteria and means for selecting students for admission should be made clearer and more explicit.

The EEC believes that programming background is necessary to participate in this program. Therefore, the admissions requirements should either discourage students with no programming background to apply for this program or provide extra courses to get the required programmed skills

Induction processes

Positive comments regarding induction processes were made in one case. Experts identified that there were induction processes in place and there were courses to help students on the prerequisite knowledge regarding the use of DL platform required for class participation.

In our visit we were informed that there is an induction week, in which students are informed about ways to obtain welfare provision. This information is also available in printed booklets as well as online in the university's webpage. (...)There are also courses to facilitate access to moodle and to familiarize students with its use.

Experts identified weaknesses in 2 cases pointing out that there were no lessons to compensate for students lack prerequisite knowledge

The committee is concerned about whether the students with no legal background can understand and meet the requirements of an LLM and the relevant terminology and legal thinking without an introductory course about the fundamentals of the legal system and thinking.

The EEC believes that programming background is necessary to participate in this program. Therefore, the admissions requirements should either discourage students with no programming background to apply for this program or provide extra courses to get the required programmed skills

Student Support and Welfare

Under the thematic category "Student Support and Welfare", experts made positive comments regarding the "Provision of Pastoral care"(6 cases), the "Provisions for students with disabilities/ special needs" (3 cases).

The University provides high level of support and services to students and student welfare. The University also has structures in place to support people with special needs or disabilities.

There are adequate welfare mechanisms to support the students (...).The adequate support is provided to students with special needs or disabilities.

The students noted that pastoral support was provide as needed and they felt able to access this support.

Student welfare is adequately provided.

Welfare provisions seem to be in place via three main channels. First, students are assigned to personal tutors who are required to see them three times per term. Student welfare is adequately provided(...). The psychology faculty holds a group of counsellors offering their service for free. there is the special needs and disability support service, a more specialized unit focusing on issues of welfare support.

(...) has excellent facilities for embedded pastoral care from point of application onwards. We were very impressed with the holistic support for students, including dedicated support for distance learning students, throughout their period of study.

Points of improvement were noted regarding the facilitation of student's needs, taking into consideration the fact that students at the ELP are usually mature students, who may have difficulty in balancing full time work and a full time course (1 case). Also recommendations were made regarding the accommodation of the needs of a diverse student populations and people with special needs (1 case). Finally exerts recommended strengthening student entitlement to pastoral provision and establishing a systematic and transparent communication between students and pastoral services (1 case).

Students indicated a difficulty in balancing full time work and a full time course. The Committee were unsure about the extent to which this issue was one experienced by only these students or more generally across the potential cohort. We would recommend that, following market research, the University considers more flexible approaches to delivery to support students that work full-time

There is a good support system in place for students which maybe have to be adapted more towards the needs of a diverse student populations and people with special needs.

More work needs to be done as a way of strengthening student entitlement to pastoral provision and systematic and transparent communication. (...) It has been unclear how closely this rule is followed in practice and we would encourage the school to take steps in monitoring compliance with this regulation

Sponsoring students' activities and initiatives

Positive points in ELP were identified regarding "Sponsoring-facilitating students' participation in extracurricular events, activities, associations" (1 case) and "Students' participation in exchange programs" (1 case).

(..) seems to be also organizing other events and activities that seem to be particularly useful for students.

(..) Students are entitled to exchange programmes and they seem to be aware of these opportunities. There is also a trip organized every year to Brussels which seems to be very nicely matched with the scope and learning outcomes of the program.

Weaknesses were also recorded in the aforementioned categories: Sponsoring-facilitating students' participation in extracurricular events, activities, associations" (3 case) and "Students' participation in exchange programs" (1 case). Recommendations made by the experts included providing resources to finance some of the students' association activities, communicate and promote available opportunities for extracurricular activities or exchange programs to students and consider how distance learning students could be engaged in the broader community of the University.

The EEC encourages the (...) to examine the possibility of providing resources- financing partially some of the students' association activities and initiatives.

Regarding the exchange programs is not a common practice in LLM level. Students mentioned that no one student from the other LLM programme of this university used this opportunity. In any case, the opportunities are available (...).They seemed to be willing to attend the LLM, which the committee was quite satisfied about

The mechanism exists but when it comes to the application, it seems that some inquiries of the students regarding extracurricular activities and / or welfare cannot be met.

Consideration should be given to how distance learning students are engaged in the broader research and teaching community of the University.(...)Further clarification should be given to how distance learning students are represented in terms of the formal structures for student representation within the University.

Student-teacher relations

Experts provided positive comments regarding the "Accessibility of teaching staff/ Good interpersonal relations" (3 cases), the "frequency of communication" (3 cases) and the "existence of mechanisms enabling students to provide feedback" (1 case).

The ways to activate students, the existing productive and fruitful relationship between the academic staff and the students, the constant contact as well as the fact that the MA Programme addresses a wide range of potential audiences are among the strengths.

The committee recognizes the effort of the academics and their willingness to help students and provide them with any information they need. It is quite impressive that they respond immediately to their emails and / or by person communication. The admiration and the trust that students show for their professors is also remarkable.

The teaching staff is easily accessible by the students.

It was noted that students have the ability to have a one-to-one meeting with academic staff 1-2 times per week

The students have the opportunity to provide feedback to the university and to participate in the internal evaluation procedures.

Points of improvement were also recorded. One case referred to the category “Accessible teaching staff/ Good interpersonal relations”, one to “Frequent communication”, two regarding “Mechanism enabling students to provide feedback” and one about “Taking into consideration students’ requests/comments”. Experts identified weakness regarding the character of student teacher relations commenting that staff should not grant all request made by the students. Recommendations were made to strengthen the teaching and mentoring system, making special provisions in cases where there are not enough permanent faculty members to take on mentoring roles. Experts also recommended to enhance students’ participation to the provision of feedback to the University and the internal evaluation procedures.

Relationship between teaching staff and students should have more of a challenging character.

The teaching and mentoring system needs to be strengthened given that only one full time member is engaged in the institution. Everybody else works part time only. This makes the whole program vulnerable. Further- more, the Committee is not certain about the efficiency of the coordination due to the high workload of the personnel elsewhere.

Higher the requirements, do not consider all students requests about courses

It would be recommendable that the students have the opportunity to provide feedback to the University and to participate in the internal evaluation procedures.

Fraud prevention

In two cases experts identified points of improvement about preventing student fraud. It was recommended that institutions should make the procedure and process for disciplinary actions as a result of plagiarism more explicit and formal.

The use of the tool Turnitin is good tool for detecting plagiarism, however, the procedure and process for disciplinary actions as a result of plagiarism should be made more explicit and formal.

The committee recommends the College to pay particular attention to fraud prevention and plagiarism prevention and to ensure this is articulated to the students in their handbooks and in the course information.

Standard 5: Resources, student welfare services, administrative services, laboratories, library

Table 6: Frequencies of recorded EEC experts' comments regarding Standard 5: "Resources, student welfare services, administrative services, laboratories, library" in the period 2/ 2019 – 2/2020.

Themes/ Categories	Subcategories	Universities Frequencies Strengths (N=16)	Universities Frequencies Improvement required (N=16)	Universities Frequencies Total (N=16)
E learning Support				23
	E-learning Unit –(pedagogical)	3	4	7
	Infrastructure/ IT division & support	10	3	13
	Guides-Informative-Training material for students & instructors	3		3
Library				20
	E-Library/subscriptions to data bases and journals	3	1	4
	Physical library capacities	3	3	6
	Library collaborations - agreements	1	1	2
	Adequacy of relevant study material		6	6
	Support by library Staff		2	2

E-learning support

Experts' comments regarding the e-learning support provided both to faculty and students were mostly positive. Strengths were identified regarding the "E-learning Unit providing pedagogical support for DL" (3 cases), the "Infrastructure and the establishment of an IT division" providing technical support (10 cases), and the provision of "Guides-Informative-Training material for students & instructors" (3 cases). Experts pointed out that in most cases the necessary resources are available, maintained, promoted and accessible to staff and students and the environments were adequate to support learning and the design and implementation of teaching. Further, experts noted cases of DL units considered as good practice, due to their structure, resources, infrastructures and services. Positive remarks were also recorded regarding the provision of study packs with information relating to the course delivery.

All the necessary resources are available, maintained, promoted and accessible to staff and students

The EEC generally believes that the environments provided by the University are adequate to support learning and to support the design and implementation of teaching. The virtual classrooms are well dimensioned and sized, the technological infrastructure is good, the Library Information System provides a reasonable amount of resources, and also have appropriate tools that support teaching and learning, including eClass, Blackboard Collaborate, Laya, etc. (...) In addition, the Laboratory of Educational Material and Methodology provides pedagogical support for designing and implementing learning materials for digital environments. The lab also provides support in the interpretation of learning analytics.

Moodle is a widely-used and stable platform that is appropriate for the distance learning requirements that the university envisions

The ePSU unit is considered a best practice, due to its structure, its resources, its infrastructures and its services. We believe that they can be a powerful support

for guaranteeing and maintaining the quality of the provided teaching.(...)The Distance Learning Faculty Handbook provided for the ePSU is a useful resource that establishes the main characteristics a distance learning course should have. It is a good reference document that guarantees the quality and homogeneity of the distance learning course.(...)The weekly guides used in the courses to determine the work to be done every week for the students is also considered a best practice. (...) As a distance learning program, the learning resources are continuously available to students.

The Committee were impressed with the technical capability within the University available to adapt and customize the on-line learning environment.

"During the onsite visit the committee was impressed by the infrastructure and facilities. There are specific facilities available for staff to create their distance learning materials.

"Established and accessible IT division is at the students and staff disposal. Data is backed up in a way that assures full protection and quick retrieval.

- The use of WizIQ and BBB put the University at the forefront of distance learning capabilities."(...)The online infrastructure is of sufficiently high quality and adequate for this programme. Positive feedback from teaching staff in relation to the available online platforms for adoption.

The existence of a distance learning unit to support the delivery of provision.(...)

-Detailed study packs with information relating to the course delivery and the student

activities to be undertaken on a weekly basis. "

The University has provided a strong IT infrastructure which supports the needs of learners and enables administrators to monitor the progress of students. The VLE system, delivered through the Moodle platform, is robust and well-designed to support an engaging and interactive student experience.(...)Useful induction materials (mainly online) inform the students about the teaching and support services available to them.

The moodle (ELS) is in good condition and backup server is available.

Nevertheless, in other cases experts identified weaknesses regarding the E-learning Unit (pedagogical)(4 cases) and the "Infrastructure/ IT division & support" (3 cases). Comments included taking better advantage of the existing resources and providing evidence of how existing student support services have been adjusted for distance learning provision. Experts identified weaknesses regarding the quality of the online material (i.e excessive duration of videos, no subtitles) and the lack of intelligent tutor systems to support immediate and automatic feedback to students and a testing environment to test their progress.

The program could take better advantage of existing resources such as the support of the Laboratory of Educational Material and Methodology.

The learning materials shown during the meeting are a fine example of good practice. However, the systematic use of subtitles in the videos is recommended.

Improvement on resources relevant to qualitative methods could be possible, by extending, for example, the available software with the addition of tools such as nVivo.

Even though the materials provide a good variety (videos, papers, e-books, etc.) which is good for distance learning, we believe that some considerations should

be taken into account to the video materials to be more usable and accessible for students: make them shorter (usually videos in this context should not exceed 7 minutes), include the teacher in the video to provide the non-verbal communication, to add subtitles for accessibility questions.

Another improvement that would greatly benefit students would be the addition of intelligent tutor systems to support immediate and automatic feedback to students and a testing environment to test their advances.

Further clarification on the exact operating arrangements for distance learning students in terms of the wider provision of campus-based University services. There was a lack of specific detail as to how existing student support services have been adjusted for distance learning provision

Library

Several comments made by the experts pointed out strong points regarding the libraries of the institutions. These included 3 cases regarding “E-Library/subscriptions to data bases and journals”, 3 cases in relation to “Physical library capacities” and 1 case regarding “Library collaborations-agreements” and the support services provided by librarians to students (2 cases).

The library includes all major publishers and there are plans for expanding. This will ensure that the students will have all the necessary literature they need for their studies. The university has signed exchange/loan agreements with other libraries in both Cyprus and Greece, ensuring that resources that are not currently available can still be reached by students in an efficient manner.

The online library offers almost unlimited access to methodological, theoretical and practical sources. These are accessible online for the benefit of international distance learning students.

"A strong library provision with an extensive range of e-books, e-journals and resources that support students learning at a distance. (..)Dedicated out-of-hours support services for the library and information technology.

We note that the Librarian indicates that the University would purchase all books mentioned on the course reading lists, as far as possible. It will be important that this is done. We also note that the Library has good access to subscriptions to electronic journals and databases which will cover most needs of masters level students."

laboratory facilities, library and learning materials are provided at satisfactory level.(...)A good range of textbooks and journal articles are readily accessible to students and staff."

Points of improvement were outlined in reference to “E-Library/subscriptions to data bases and journals” (1 case), “Physical library capacities” (3 cases), “Library collaborations -agreements” (1 case) and “Adequacy of relevant study material” (6 cases). Experts pointed out several limitations regarding the “physical” Libraries as well as limitations in the available e-resources in the topics of the specialization of the programs and therefore recommended expansion and update of the available material, possibly by collaborations with bigger university libraries.

The EEC recognizes that the (...) “physical” Library may not provide all the resources necessary to support the programme. (...) Given the quality and accessibility of the libraries in Cyprus and Greece we are wondering whether there is a need for the very limited library of the (...) itself. It could be advisable to search collaboration with a bigger university library to make the required online and physical journals, books and other resources available through them.

Additional books and updated editions of existing titles should be available to the students. So, EEC is urging the university to expand its library to better support the LLM programs.

We noted that whilst relevant materials are available for teaching the ones that students are directed towards in the study guides were not mainstream information (...). We recommend, therefore, that students are signposted to a wider range of up- to-date books and other materials in the field of (....)

The physical library is still somewhat limited. For DL students’ access to online material will be more important, including online Journals and e-books (although the committee acknowledges their limited availability in the Greek language). We recommend that resources are invested in their provision as well as into making sure that students are aware of open sources in the relevant field of (...). The committee understood that links to online material are provided in the courses and welcomes this.

It would be important for students that appropriate (and free) open-access European databases are made available to students to enable to engage in secondary analysis. (...) The University library ought to be enhanced with international and update (...) bibliography.(...)

Relevant databases are recommended to be considered for improving student learning experience in specific area (...)

Standard 6: Additional for distance learning programmes

Table 7: Frequencies of recorded EEC experts' comments regarding Standard 6: "Additional for distance learning programmes" in the period 2/ 2019 – 2/2020

Themes/ Categories	Subcategories	Universities Frequencies Strengths (N=16)	Universities Frequencies Improvement required (N=16)	Universities Frequencies Total (N=16)
<i>Digital Environment</i>				22
	Infrastructure	7	1	8
	Unit-laboratory for e-learning	6	2	8
	Learning analytics	1	4	5
	Piloting of courses		1	1
<i>Pedagogical approach of E learning</i>				33
	Appropriate teaching methods for e learning	5	8	13
	Course structure-weekly guides-organization of learning	4	4	8
	Faculty-student communication /interaction	5	1	6
	Social interactions (student-student/ faculty-student)	2	1	3
	Examination/Assessments	1	2	3
<i>Instructors' digital skills</i>				7
	Provision of training in eLearning	6	1	7

Digital Environment

Experts, in 14 cases pointed out that institutions had sufficient provisions regarding the "Digital Environment. Positive comments were recorded concerning the "Infrastructure" (7 cases), the organization of a "Unit-laboratory for e-learning" (6 cases) and the use of "Learning analytics" (1 case).

The university uses a single, well maintained digital learning environment that is used for all its online education" (...) The university is working on innovative solutions to enrich the digital learning environment through its recently established (...)Educational Methodology & Educational Material Lab.(...).

The Laboratory of Educational Material and Methodology is considered good practice.(...)The University has exhibited considerable progress in the use of learning analytics. (..)

Since there are distance learning courses given, all the necessary technical infrastructure is already there(...)Library recourses are accessible electronically through the Internet, and there is a special unit to support teachers and students.

The learning platform (Moodle and its modules) can offer high quality online learning. It is also commendable that the university is able to design and produce its own Moodle modules that can better address its needs.(...)-Contracting an external company to support further the Moodle administration and operation is also a strength.

The (..) unit is considered a best practice, due to its structure, its resources, its infrastructures and its services. The EEC believes that it can be a powerful support for guaranteeing and maintaining the quality of the provided teaching (...)

The Distance Learning unit at (..) addresses the requirements for study materials, interactive activities and formative assessment in accordance to international standards (...)

Robust and fit- for-purpose.

"We were impressed by the Distance Education Unit and its capacity to support students and teachers engaged in distance education (...) The highly structured approach to delivering on-line learning through the Blackboard system and the high-quality tele-conferencing facilities."

The committee is pleased with the pedagogical unit and the online infrastructure.

Experts identified weaknesses regarding the "Infrastructure" (1 case), "Unit-laboratory for e-learning" (2 cases), "Learning analytics" (4 cases) and "Piloting of courses" (1 case). Problems were reported about the poor quality (video and audio) and long duration of the videos used in the learning platform as well as the duration of the training sessions per se. Further experts pointed out that in certain cases the DL units were focused mostly on technical infrastructure rather than on the pedagogical challenges. Limited use of learning analytics was also pointed out as a problem. Recommendations included the development of test procedures for courses and programs that are newly developed or revised before they go online, training of tutors on how to use DL tools in optimal quality, reform of the DL units in order to contain more substantial and more dedicated expertise for instructional methods and interactive e-learning and finally establishing procedures to take advantage of learning analytics to facilitate teaching activities.

During the presentations we have seen videos in Blackboard Collaborate that were of poor video and audio quality and with a length of 4 hours (...). Besides the training of tutors how to use these tools in optimal quality, this should also be controlled better, in advance, to prevent a waist of student and tutor time(...). As discussed later with the administrative staff, they told us that presentations should not be made through blackboard collaborate but through the video platform to prevent these issues. They know this, but are not able to intervene because the tutors are 'free' to make these choices themselves. It would be advised to find a solution for this governance issue. . The duration of the online session is too long. Better would be to restrict sessions to 1 hour preferably and a maximum of 1.5 hour.(...)We would strongly advise to create test procedures for courses and programs that are newly developed or revised before they go online for students and tutors. Online courses are increasingly complex in nature, not only technically (are all videos, tables, photos, etc. accessible on all computers and mobiles?), but also logically (can people find their way through the resources: where to begin? Where am I? How can I find..., etc.). Such a test should therefore be a team effort with different kinds of expertise involved.

To address the concerns we have on the DL to support the desired competences, the DLU should contain more substantial and more dedicated expertise for instructional methods and interactive e-learning, in order to design and develop a more active and experiential program, needed to achieve some of the higher order competences in HE.

The focus of Distance Learning Unit and the courses and support it provides seems to be more focused on technical infrastructure issues and on course procedures in distance learning rather on the pedagogical challenges of this kind of education.

As there have been further developments in this field (of learning analytics), the EEC suggests that the University, at an institutional level, takes advantage of these in order to facilitate teaching activities.

Student performance is monitored and there are mechanisms to detect and address students with lower grades or with undelivered activities. The monitorization could be greatly improved by using some learning analytics techniques.

Pedagogical approach of E learning

Strong points were identified regarding the “Appropriate teaching methods for e learning”(5 cases), the “Course structure-weekly guides-organization of learning”(4 cases), the “Faculty-student communication /interaction”(5 cases), the “Social interactions(student-student/faculty-student)” (2 cases) and “Examinations/ Assessments” (1 case). Experts commented positively regarding the effective use of resources to facilitate learning, the well-established communication channels between faculty and students, the good use of weekly study guides, the student-teacher ratio and the clarity and coherency of examination procedures.

The teaching methodology and digital environments use support and encourage student-centered learning (...) Interaction between students and teaching staff is exemplary. The communication channels are reciprocal, and students feel confident when approaching staff. From the conversations taken place, staff commitment to students sometimes goes beyond the classroom and extends to educational and cultural activities that relate to the course. Interactions between students, study guides and material are facilitated by the eClass virtual learning environment. (...) The policies regarding communication between teachers and students and the time limit before responding are an example of good practice.

The weekly study guides used in the courses are a fine practice in the context of distance learning.(...)The courses in this program (and across all programs of OUC) are offered individually. This could be considered good practice that promotes lifelong learning.

A certain strength is the ratio between teaching staff and online students. The university has a limit of 30 students per teaching staff (i.e., course responsible and associated teaching staff). This is an excellent practice since it allows students to receive timely feedback and support from teaching staff throughout the semester.(...)Courses include bi-weekly activities that could engage students in learning activities. This can be related to continuous assessment, even though it seems that most (if not all) of these activities are optional.(...)Students' examination procedures are clear and coherent and the university follows standards that are applied in established open universities (e.g., Hellenic Open University, Cyprus Open University).

The policies they have regarding the way the teachers should communicate to students and the time limit (48 hours) before responding. In addition, the provision of nine hours of synchrony between teacher and students for each subject is a good practice that can improve grades and avoid dropout when used efficiently(...)Weekly guides are a great resource and very valuable for students.

The nature of the programme is compatible with distance learning delivery (...) The Distance Learning unit (...) addresses the requirements for study materials,

interactive activities and formative assessment in accordance to international standards.

Quality assurance is ensured. There are exams and regular online activities so that tutors can monitor how students develop

A study guide is provided for each course, defining learning outcomes, and the weekly set of activities which are well-organised and offer appropriate support for a distance student's learning journeys.

Students are very positive about the social interaction that is organized, partly by themselves. In this way they do not feel isolated, like in some other distance teaching institutions. Also the teaching staff is very approachable to help them on requirement might affect the research orientation of the MA Programme.

A strength is that this innovative distance learning program is well-connected to the existing face to face program and well embedded in the organisational context. The organization has developed appropriate tools and procedures for the successful delivery of distance learning.

We were impressed that the University has been proactive in implementing a process for appointing named advisors to distance learning students upon enrolment.

Nevertheless, a considerable number of comments were made by the experts observing points of improvement regarding "Appropriate teaching methods for e learning" (9 cases), the "Course structure-weekly guides-organization of learning"(4 cases), the "Faculty-student communication /interaction"(1 case), the "Social interactions (student-student/ faculty-student)"(1 case), and "Examinations/ assessments"(3 cases). Experts pointed out cases where there was not yet in place a systematic model for education which considers the specific needs pertaining to everyday challenges adult learners face. They also noted cases where the proposed course is structured as a copy of conventional education without evidence of how critical thinking skills could be promoted. Experts observed cases where the expected dedication time of the activities, mainly in the graded ones, was not clear. Further comments were made about the structure of the course, the resources and the activities in the e- platform which did not reflect the progress of the course. Problems were also identified regarding the lack of mechanisms to ensure provision of prerequisite knowledge. Experts also commented regarding the exam procedures pointing out the limitations of written exams along with the validation of the student's identity in examination procedures and the risk of being secretly supported during presentations.

Recommendations included developing and applying an education model for adult learners that is grounded in educational research and evaluations to secure its effectiveness. To this end experts recommended the establishment of communities of interest to promote learning among students in distance learning environments. Experts also pointed out the need to improve the clarity and adequacy of information about the expected dedication time of all the activities (mainly in the graded ones). Recommendations were made for the development of intelligent tutoring systems to support immediate and automatic feedback to students. It was highly stressed that institutions should focus on improving e-learning and developing interactive materials to promote critical thinking rather than repackaging content of physical programme on the e learning platform. To this end experts proposed the use special tools to help students cover prerequisite knowledge along with exploiting gamification techniques,

the improvement of the structure, resources and activities in the e learning platform on a weekly basis. Experts also suggested the introduction of peer interaction as a part of the course design and assessment.

Many OU's around the world provide flexible education that serves the needs of lifelong, adult learners with their specific needs, and as a consequence they struggle with the same issue, like student retention, costs and quality of the (rapidly changing) digital learning environment and the complexity of course development, student support and assessment. One of these issues is also the pedagogical model that the university applies for all its education to secure effective online learning. During the visit we discussed this, and the staff recognized its importance, however there is not yet a systematic written model that is applied throughout its educational offering. We recommend developing and applying such a model that is grounded in educational research and evaluations to secure its effectiveness.

Weekly guides are a great resource and very valuable for students. However, it makes difficult to visualize the dedication time of the assessment activities. it would be great to have more information about the expected dedication time of all the activities, mainly in the graded ones.(...)Another improvement would be the inclusion of intelligent tutoring systems for some activities. That would support immediate and automatic feedback to students and provide a testing environment where they can test their advances.(...) The communities of interest are good resources to promote learning among students in distance learning environments, since they provide a place to share knowledge that goes beyond subjects. The EEC believes the promotion of these communities may be a good lever to promote communication and knowledge sharing among students in the context of the current program. The EEC believes that the necessity of making a final written exam to evaluate some subjects may be very limitative in a distance learning environment, in which subjects are geographically dispersed.

One of the concerns about the master is how the university would support new students that are not very proficient in math or programming. In that sense, some tools, like Datacamp, may help the students to improve their programming skills without taking so much workload to faculty.(...)The use of gamification techniques would be very useful to promote the use of formative assessment activities.(...)The proposed course is structured as a copy of conventional education. By following this strategy things that are working well in conventional education are supposed to work well in distance learning as well. For example, classroom lectures are replaced by teleconferencing. However, possible advantages with distance learning, like direct cooperation between students through peer-reviewing of individual projects or dissertations, have not been considered.

The EEC recommends the improvement of the structure of the course, resource and activities in the Moodle platform on a weekly basis in order to reflect on the progress of the course.

Study Guides should be reviewed to enable greater clarity about length, purpose and time to be spent on tasks. This will enable the distance learners to orientate themselves to the teaching material and evaluate how to use their time most effectively, especially as distance students are likely to need to organise their work and expectations in advance.

The philosophy of the proposed distance learning course on (...) is of a more traditional kind based on the cooperation mainly between individual student and teacher and not between students, except in the cases of group-work. A stronger cooperation model would imply the introduction of peer-reviewing of individual assignments and thesis.

We recommend that the University develops clear policies and protocols to cater for the specific needs of distance learning students

In the application we did not encounter any e-learning in the sense of dedicated interactive media designed by the faculty, that for instance support students to apply their knowledge in a simulated professional environment. The interaction which is so highly stated as important is therefore limited to consuming books and Powerpoints, listening to teachers, and some occasional application tasks. (...) committee's impression that the first two semesters will be mainly knowledge-driven. We doubted if this is sufficient level for achieving the higher competence levels, such as, Dublin, Bloom, or any categorization.(...)It is important to offer e-learning, interactive materials, rather than repacking content of physical programme on the Moodle platform

The nature of the program requires joint learning activities. The EEC recommends the appropriate use of digital tools and methodologies to foster collaborative activities relevant to the themes and approaches of the course.

Efficient/effective peer interaction and collaboration is a crucial skill that students need to develop in every higher education programme. As such, this is also explicitly mentioned in the list of intended learning objectives of the programme. However, little is evident within the course descriptions and the assignments on how these two skills (interaction and collaboration) are going to be supported in the programme. (...) Peer interaction should be part of the course design and assessment. This means that the students should be guided on how to collaborate and give each other feedback, for example. Critical thinking and deeper reflection is mentioned in the programme, but a better alignment between learning objectives, teaching activities, and learning assessment should exist in the programme. For example, it is not clear where and how critical thinking is going to be supported (e.g., which courses and during which activities). In that regard, some of the practice exercises could include open-ended and more challenging topics for the students.

The final thesis is mandatory, which is excellent, but the student does not have to be physically present for the oral presentation. This may cause a problem regarding the validation of the student's identity and the risk of being secretly supported during the presentation.

Development of digital skills to instructors

Six cases of positive comments were recorded regarding the provision of training for tutors in eLearning. Experts pointed out that institutions provide to instructors the opportunity to train in digital learning through guides, tutorials, and short training sessions.

As mentioned, the University provides teachers with the opportunity to train in digital learning in the same environment they will use for teaching (eClass). Therefore, the teachers may learn the theory as well as practice in a digital environment.

Distance learning requires digital literacy from both students and teachers. The university offers guides, tutorial, and short training sessions, while the academic staff is also supported, if needed, via an established service in the university. Also, the university is preparing to further enhance teacher training by offering formal education to teaching personnel.

The Distance Learning Faculty Handbook provided by the ePSU is a useful resource that establishes the main characteristics a distance learning course should have. It is a good reference document that guarantees the quality and homogeneity of the distance learning course.

Teacher training programmes focusing on interaction and the specificities of distance learning are offered (...) There are in place policies to establish the job description of an academic personal advisor for Distance Learning students and training is offered which is focused on interaction and requirements for teaching a distance learning cohort.

Teachers have to participate in a specially-designed course for distance learning education so they can acquire the special pedagogical skills, but it would be good if versions of this course could be given to the distance learning teachers, new and old ones, regularly

Training for teaching staff and students is embedded in the VLE and offers good quality, accessible opportunities to ensure the learning experience is a sound one.

Experts recommended that teacher-training in DL could become a part of the mandatory professional development for all teaching personnel. They also recommended that DL experience could be a formal (but not mandatory) criterion for evaluation during teacher recruitment. Candidates without prior experience or knowledge in distance learning should then be required to attend teacher- training for distance learning upon hiring.

The suggestion of the EEC is to indeed move forward with this and make teacher-training part of the mandatory professional development for all teaching personnel involved in distance learning programs--The university mentioned that experience in distance learning is mentioned during teacher recruitment. The EEC's suggestion is to make this mention a formal criterion for evaluation (but not necessarily a mandatory requirement). Candidates without prior experience or knowledge in distance learning should then be required to attend teacher- training for distance learning upon hiring.