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Date: 11 April, 2022

# External Evaluation Report (E-learning programme of study)

- **Higher Education Institution: Neapolis University Pafos**
- **Town: Pafos**
- **School/Faculty (if applicable): School of Architecture, Engineering, Land and Environmental Sciences**
- **Department/ Sector: Architecture, Land and Environmental Sciences**
- **Programme of study- Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)**

**In Greek:**

**Μεταπτυχιακό Πρόγραμμα Χώρος και Εταιρική Ταυτότητα - E-Learning (1.5 έτη, 90 ECTS, 3 εξάμηνα)**

**In English:**

**Msc in Space and Branded Identity E-Learning (1.5 years, 90 ECTS, 3 semesters)**

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



- **Concentrations (if any):**

**In Greek:** Concentrations

**In English:** Concentrations

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

## A. Introduction

*This part includes basic information regarding the onsite visit.*

The visit was conducted remotely via Zoom, on Monday 4th of April 2022. The online meeting started at 10:00 a.m (EET) and it ended at 19:00 (EET). The agenda was as follows:

- A brief introduction of the members of the External Evaluation Committee.
- A meeting with the Rector - Head of the Institution and the Vice Rector of Academic Affairs – short presentation of the Institution.
- A meeting with the members of the Internal Evaluation Committee.
- A meeting with the Head of the relevant department.
- Short presentation of the School's / Department's structure
- Discussion regarding the MSc Urban Planning programme.
- Discussion regarding the MSc Space and Branded Identity programme.
- Discussion regarding the MSc Space and Branded Identity distance learning programme.
- A meeting with members of the teaching staff on each course for all the years of study
- A meeting with members of the administrative staff.
- A meeting with students (current students from other Departments)
- Discussion on the virtual visit of the premises of the institution (i.e. library, computer labs, teaching rooms, research facilities).
- Closing meeting with the Head of the relevant department and the program's Coordinator - exit discussion (questions, clarifications).

## B. External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>University</i>
Professor Ioannis Chorianopoulos	Chair	University of the Aegean, Greece
Associate Professor Edward Shepherd	Member	Cardiff University, UK
Associate Professor Seraphim Alvanides	Member	Northumbria University, UK
Professor Stylianos Hatzipanagos	Member (E-Learning Expert)	University of London, UK
Mrs Elena Rousou	Student Member	University of Cyprus, Cyprus

## C. Guidelines on content and structure of the report

- *The external evaluation report follows the structure of assessment areas.*
- *At the beginning of each assessment area there is a box presenting:*
  - (a) sub-areas*
  - (b) standards which are relevant to the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)*
  - (c) some questions that EEC may find useful.*
- *The questions aim at facilitating the understanding of each assessment area and at illustrating the range of topics covered by the standards.*
- *Under each assessment area, it is important to provide information regarding the compliance with the requirements of each sub-area. In particular, the following must be included:*

### **Findings**

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

### **Strengths**

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

### **Areas of improvement and recommendations**

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

- *The EEC should state the compliance for each sub-area (Non-compliant, Partially compliant, Compliant), which must be in agreement with everything stated in the report. It is pointed out that, in the case of standards that cannot be applied due to the status of the HEI and/or of the programme of study, N/A (= Not Applicable) should be noted.*
- *The EEC should state the conclusions and final remarks regarding the programme of study as a whole.*
- **The report may also address other issues which the EEC finds relevant.**

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

### Sub-areas

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

### 1.1 Policy for quality assurance

#### Standards

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

### 1.2 Design, approval, on-going monitoring and review

#### Standards

- *The programme of study:*
  - *is designed with overall programme objectives that are in line with the institutional strategy and have explicit intended learning outcomes*
  - *is designed by involving students and other stakeholders*
  - *benefits from external expertise*
  - *reflects the four purposes of higher education of the Council of Europe (preparation for sustainable employment, personal development, preparation*

*for life as active citizens in democratic societies, the development and maintenance, through teaching, learning and research, of a broad, advanced knowledge base)*

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

### 1.3 Public information

#### Standards

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

### 1.4 Information management

#### Standards

- *Information for the effective management of the programme of study is collected, monitored and analysed:*
  - *key performance indicators*
  - *profile of the student population*

- *student progression, success and drop-out rates*
  - *students' satisfaction with their programmes*
  - *learning resources and student support available*
  - *career paths of graduates*
- 
- *Students and staff are involved in providing and analysing information and planning follow-up activities.*

*You may also consider the following questions:*

- *What is the procedure for quality assurance of the programme and who is involved?*
- *Who is involved in the study programme's design and development (launching, changing, internal evaluation) and what is taken into account (strategies, the needs of society, etc.)?*
- *How/to what extent are students themselves involved in the development of the content of their studies?*
- *Please evaluate a) whether the study programme remains current and consistent with developments in society (labour market, digital technologies, etc.), and b) whether the content and objectives of the study programme are in accordance with each other?*
- *Do the content and the delivery of the programme correspond to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)?*
- *How is coherence of the study programme ensured, i.e., logical sequence and coherence of courses? How are substantial overlaps between courses avoided? How is it ensured that the teaching staff is aware of the content and outputs of their colleagues' work within the same study programme?*
- *How does the study programme support development of the learners' general competencies (including digital literacy, foreign language skills, entrepreneurship, communication and teamwork skills)?*
- *What are the scope and objectives of the foundation courses in the study programme (where appropriate)? What are the pass rates?*
- *How long does it take a student on average to graduate? Is the graduation rate for the study programme analogous to other European programmes with similar content? What is the pass rate per course/semester?*
- ***How is it ensured that the actual student workload is in accordance with the workload expressed by ECTS?***



- *What are the opportunities for international students to participate in the study programme (courses/modules taught in a foreign language)?*
- *Is information related to the programme of study publicly available?*
- *How is the HEI evaluating the success of its graduates in the labor market? What is the feedback from graduates of the study programme on their employment and/or continuation of studies?*
- *Have the results of student feedback been analysed and taken into account, and how (e.g., when planning in-service training for the teaching staff)?*
- *What are the reasons for dropping out (voluntary withdrawal)? What has been done to reduce the number of such students?*

### Findings

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

The **MSc Space and Branded identity (E – Learning)** has a coherent structure, with no substantial overlaps between the courses offered. Core courses follow a logical sequence and **Learning Outcomes** are clearly stated.

However, the **MSc Space and Branded identity (E – Learning)** has not been launched yet. Therefore, key performance indicators pertinent to this section were not available to the EEC during the site visit. Examples include, among others, the profile of the student population, the student progression, drop-out and pass rates, the student placement record and graduate employment information, as well as the student evaluation of the offered courses. Similarly, the role of stakeholders in the design of the programme was not easily decipherable, as the respective engagement processes are not yet in place. Through our visit, however, we had the opportunity to examine the respective structures that are already in place at the University and Departmental levels, the adequacy of which was noted.

### Strengths

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

The proposed **MSc Space and Branded identity (E – Learning)** is expected to rest on university committees, centres and infrastructure to meet the expected requirements in key areas of concern.

The NUP Quality Assurance Policies and Procedures were evaluated in 2020 by an external agency and they were awarded with the **SUREPLUS Label LEVEL A Certification** for the years 2020-2024.

**The Committee for Quality Assurance and Internal Evaluation** is a member of the PROSE system. Quality management is based on questionnaires that are compatible with the standards of excellence of the

European Foundation for Quality Management. Moreover, the University framework for internal evaluation is organised in a way that findings inform all related parties in a recursive manner.

Similarly, regarding the means with which student academic integrity will be safeguarded, the proposed MSc will use the **Turnitin tool**, already in place in the Department. This particular software will be applicable to all student assignments, while follow up actions in cases of plagiarism (ranging from re-examination to penalties), suggest the prevalence of the pedagogic approach to Turnitin, oriented primarily towards educational purposes. The University's **Disciplinary Committee** appear to be an institution of last resort, acknowledging recurring plagiarism cases by the same student.

The University's **Liaison Office with the Business World** organises student placements and internships in a centralised fashion, and is expected to play a key role in the placement requirements of the respective MSc E-Learning programme.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

The role of state and private sector stakeholders in the design of the MSc and in placement opportunities for students should become clearer, based on solid engagement structures. At the moment, placement impediments related to the E-Learning traits of the programme and the variety of places where students can follow the course from, have not been adequately considered.

#### **Recommendations:**

- placement impediments related to the E-Learning traits of the programme have to be addressed and the respective information should be available to prospective students before the start day of the MSc.
- Stakeholders from the private and public sector should be consulted in all future revisions of the Programme.

The Department has not specified the upper number of students that the course can accommodate. On the contrary, as the E-learning aspect of the course opens up opportunities for hiring adjunct lecturers that can work from a distance, there are plans for an indefinite expansion of student numbers. Defining the upper limit of students that the course can accommodate, however, is vital in addressing the educational issues of cohesion, monitoring, quality and consistency.

#### **Recommendation:**

- The Department has to define the maximum number of the students who will be admitted for attending the Programme. It is noted that in the context of this evaluation it was considered that the

expected number of the students in the Programme will be 15, with a foreseen increase up to 20. In case the number of the student increases further, then a re-evaluation of the Programme is considered necessary.

ECTS credits should appear in a more detailed way in each module.

**Requirement:**

- A breakdown of the credits into hours of student work, and the correspondence of these hours to particular tasks (lectures, home study, essays etc.) would make student workload transparent, preparing students for the course. This represents established good practice in distance learning environments.

At the moment, students are able to choose only one out of two elective courses on offer from the MSc. More elective courses, therefore, should be available to students, centring on themes that would further strengthen the socio-spatial and the urban policy (city branding) perspectives of the MSc.

**Recommendation:**

- Given the fact that this Programme will initially accommodate a small number of students, the scenario of adding more elective courses seems to be nonviable. This recommendation, however, should be reconsidered in future revisions of the Programme, and in the case that there is an increase in student and teaching staff numbers.

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

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

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

### Sub-areas

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

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

#### Standards

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

### 2.2 Practical training

#### Standards

- *Practical and theoretical studies are interconnected.*

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

## 2.3 Student assessment

### Standards

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

## 2.4 Study guides structure, content and interactive activities

### Standards

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

○ *Synopsis*

- *Study guides, material and activities are appropriate for the level of the programme according to the EQF.*

*You may also consider the following questions:*

- *Is the nature of the programme compatible with e-learning delivery?*
- *How do the programme, the material, the facilities, and the guidelines safeguard the interaction between students, students and teaching staff, students and the material?*
- *How many students upload their work and discuss it in the platform during the semester?*
- *How is it monitored that the teaching staff base their teaching and assessment methods on objectives and intended learning outcomes? Provide samples of examination papers (if available).*
- *How are students' different abilities, learning needs and learning opportunities taken into consideration when conducting educational activities?*
- *How is the development of students' general competencies (including digital skills) supported in educational activities?*
- *How is it ensured that innovative teaching methods, learning environments and learning aids that support learning are diverse and used in educational activities?*
- *Is the teaching staff using new technology in order to make the teaching process more effective?*
- *How is it ensured that theory and practice are interconnected in teaching and learning?*
- *How is practical training organised (finding practical training positions, guidelines for practical training, supervision, reporting, feedback, etc.)? What role does practical training have in achieving the objectives of the study programme? What is student feedback on the content and arrangement of practical training?*
- ***Are students actively involved in research? How is student involvement in research set up?***
- *How is supervision of student research papers (seminar papers, projects, theses, etc.) organised?*
- ***Do students' assessments correspond to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)?***
- *How are the assessment methods chosen and to what extent do students get supportive feedback on their academic progress during their studies?*
- *How is the objectivity and relevance of student assessment ensured (assessment of the degree of achievement of the intended learning outcomes)?*

**Findings**

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

The MSc in Space and Branded Identity (E-learning) is well structured in terms of workload and assignments, and upholds the principle of student-centred learning, with the students being active participants in the teaching and learning process. The programme is subject to internal quality assurance processes and it is very well supported in terms of institutional resources, ranging from student welfare to facilities such as an online library, physical spaces, studios, IT equipment and specialised software available to both conventional and e-learning modes of delivery students. The evidence from the documents and from the evaluation day presentations and discussions with teaching staff and students suggests that intended learning outcomes (PLOs) for teaching/training, assessment, feedback correspond to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), while course/programme evaluation procedures meet national/international standards.

### Strengths

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

- Comprehensive intended learning outcomes (PLOs) at the programme and at the course level.
- Strong evidence of balance between theoretical studies and practical training/application.
- Good range of core and elective courses covering processes, methodologies, approaches and techniques, building towards expertise in this field.
- Strong evidence of methods/assessments towards enhancing students' analytical and critical thinking.
- Pedagogically sound learning design and strategies that employ learning technologies to support distance learners.
- The obligatory individual (not group work) Dissertation corresponding to 30 ECTS offers strong evidence towards student-centred and independent learning and was positively commented upon by students, in terms of supervision, scheduled meetings, feedback and assessment.
- Students commented positively on complementarity of courses (e.g. in Architecture) building towards expertise, while avoiding overlaps and duplication. This is also evidenced in the proposed MSc programme.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

**There are 2 areas that require attention and potentially improvement.**

#### **1. Student workload and flexible study**

Although the various courses describe in clear terms the expected workloads (e.g. in terms of ECTS), and the students are supported with welcome/orientation and a personal tutor, there was a feeling that they did not fully comprehend the actual workload requirements of MSc level programmes. For example, students casually mentioned holding a job/career (not clear if part or full time), alongside being registered for full

time studies. The various programmes are offered on full-time basis only, but allow the duration of studies to be extended by up to 50%. The staff argued that the procedure for extending the studies (and fee payment implications for) are communicated clearly to the students, but the students were ambivalent.

**Requirement:**

- As per the above recommendation (see section 1), the programme and course documentation should indicate more clearly the expected workload per course and for the programme overall and explain the procedure and conditions for extending the duration of the studies. Such student-facing documentation should be discussed with student representatives to ensure clarity and comprehension from the side of the student body. This is particularly important for E-learning programmes where the students may have the impression that the workload is less intensive, compared to conventional programmes.

**2. Grading of assignments and dissertations**

It is not entirely clear if all or some assignments are graded by a single member of staff or if they are double graded. The grading criteria are clear, but it should also be made explicit in the course and programme documentation if the various assignments are marked by one or two staff members.

**Recommendation:**

- Single grading is acceptable for most courses, but there needs to be a procedure of double- checking and potentially moderating course grades (e.g. confirming failed or exceptional work).

**Requirement:**

- We should not underestimate the importance of the obligatory Dissertation both in terms of corresponding to 30 ECTS (i.e. one third of the total 90) and also in terms of evidence of independent student work (e.g. future employment or pursuit of PhD studies). Such a significant piece of work should be double-graded independently by 2 staff members. In addition, there should be a transparent mechanism for addressing potential disagreement in the two grades (e.g. if more than 9% difference or if one of the grades leads to a fail), through 3rd marking and/or moderation.

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

Sub-area		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
2.1	Process of teaching and learning and student-centred teaching methodology	<i>Compliant</i>





2.2	Practical training	<b>Compliant</b>
2.3	Student assessment	<b>Compliant</b>
2.4	Study guides structure, content and interactive activities	<b>Partly Compliant</b>

### 3. Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

#### Sub-areas

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

#### 3.1 Teaching staff recruitment and development

##### Standards

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

#### 3.2 Teaching staff number and status

##### Standards

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

#### 3.3 Synergies of teaching and research

##### Standards

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

*You may also consider the following questions:*

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

### Findings

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

The Department of Architecture, Land and Environmental Sciences has a small but dedicated team of academic colleagues involved in teaching and research who appear to be well-supported by professional colleagues. There appear to be detailed processes for the recruitment of staff and their promotion, and there are some provisions in place to support their development in terms of teaching. The teaching staff hold higher degrees and appear well-qualified to be working within an institution of Higher Education. Student perception of teaching quality (via student evaluations) appears to be taken into account in promotion decisions. This also demonstrates a recognition of the importance of teaching quality. Discussions with students informally and anecdotally supported the view that the standard of teaching is good. There are existing distance learning programmes, and there are plans to expand this via the MSc Space and Branded Identity programme. This demonstrates some degree of commitment to innovation in teaching methods and the use of new technologies. There is training, guidance and support provided to teaching staff focused on the interaction and specificities of e-learning, via the Distance Planning Unit. There will be visiting teaching

staff on all three of the programmes we have been asked to review. These do not outnumber permanent staff. It is the ambition of the institution to maintain a large majority of permanent academic staff. The staff/student ratio is generally very favourable and conducive to close supervision of studies. Even with the planned expansion of the programmes offered by the Department, the expectation is that the ratio will remain favourable (although this will, in part, depend on to what degree the distance learning programme is successful). There is evidence of collaboration with industry and other stakeholders in the Department and there are plans to do more of this on the planned new programmes. There is evidence of scholarly activity to strengthen the link between education and research – via some of the research outputs and the planned teaching. There is an institutional limit of 312 hours per year for teaching, thereby in theory protecting research time for the staff.

### Strengths

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

It was good to hear positive feedback from the students we met regarding the commitment and dedication of the teaching staff. Students generally felt that the teaching they experienced was well-planned and delivered and they felt supported.

The committee was impressed by the training and support provided by the Distance Planning Unit. This provides an innovative programme which colleagues informally confirmed has been very helpful.

We were encouraged to hear of the existence of research seminars, in which colleagues share research ideas and the potential for collaboration is explored.

The favourable student-staff ratio is a particular strength, as this supports close supervision of study and student progress.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

#### **Support for staff development**

Although we heard that there was some training made available to staff via the Distance Learning Unit, there does not appear to be any way to systematically track and record staff development and access to training courses. It would help if the institution could introduce this, and use the system to monitor what courses staff are accessing, and for this to be linked to annual performance reviews and promotion discussions.

We therefore recommend that:

- The institution provides a more formal programme of training for conventional (not just for distance learning) to support staff in developing and delivering innovative teaching.
- The institution provides a means for staff to log what training they have completed so as to support annual performance review and promotions processes.

#### **Community of practice for teaching innovation**

We did not get the impression via our visit that there is a strong culture of community of practice in order to share innovative approaches to teaching. This is also connected to the above point regarding training and support for colleagues, especially new lecturers.

We therefore recommend that:

- The institution introduces more formal structures for developing a community of practice for teaching innovation.
- The institution develops a programme of training for new lecturers, to support their adoption of innovative teaching practices.

### Support for research outputs

Although the committee was assured by the institution that there were measures in place to protect research time, there does seem to be low productivity in terms of research outputs among the staff allocated to teach on this programme. This suggests that the research time is not, in fact, adequately protected, or staff are not suitably incentivised to produce research outputs, or a combination of both of these factors. This is a common issue in higher education institutions.

We therefore recommend that:

- The Department conducts a review of research activity and puts clear provisions in place to better support and incentivise staff to collaborate more on producing good quality research outputs that are aligned to the objectives of the programme.

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

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

#### 4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification (ESG 1.4)

##### Sub-areas

- 3.1. **Student admission, processes and criteria**
- 3.2. **Student progression**
- 3.3. **Student recognition**
- 3.4. **Student certification**

##### **4.1 Student admission, processes and criteria**

###### Standards

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

##### **4.2 Student progression**

###### Standards

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

##### **4.3 Student recognition**

###### Standards

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

##### **4.4 Student certification**

### Standards

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

*You may also consider the following questions:*

- *Are the admission requirements for the study programme appropriate? How is the students' prior preparation/education assessed (including the level of international students, for example)?*
- *How is the procedure of recognition for prior learning and work experience ensured, including recognition of study results acquired at foreign higher education institutions?*
- *Is the certification of the HEI accompanied by a diploma supplement, which is in line with European and international standards?*

### Findings

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

The **MSc Space and Branded identity** (E-Learning) has specific regulations regarding admissions. The formal process is stated in the departmental documents and includes, among other data and certificates, two reference letters and a personal statement of up to 500 words. Applicants that have not been accepted as students have the right to appeal within 10 working days from the notification of the decision.

Additionally, as the proposed course will be taught in Greek and English, the minimum English language requirements are stated explicitly, while students' assessment procedures for each course are laid out in detail in the supplementary materials.

As the programme is not yet running, it was not possible to evaluate the consistency and the transparency of the respective processes. Similarly, regarding the actual period of study, the EEC could not evaluate the tools that monitor and act on information on student progression, though such tools seem to be in place (see also section 1).

A **Diploma Supplement** providing a description on the nature, level, content, and status of studies is to be provided by the University upon studies completion.

### Strengths

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

The process via which a newly registered student in the Postgraduate programme requests the **Accreditation of Prior Learning** appears to be well structured and coordinated. However this applies to prospective

students that want to have previous academic credits recognised by the university and not students that have professional non academic experience.

The encouragement of **Peer assessment** in all courses, whereby students grade the assignments of other students with specific assessment criteria, is a noteworthy educational exercise.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

As the MSc is expected to attract students with degrees from overseas, it is vital to ensure that their higher education qualifications have been obtained by recognized institutions of higher education or by evaluated-accredited study programmes by the competent authorities of the country they operate or offered in.

We therefore **recommend** that:

- The list of documents provided by foreign students who apply for the programme should include The Recognition of their higher education Title of Studies by The Cyprus Council of Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications

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

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



## 5. Learning resources and student support (ESG 1.6)

### Sub-areas

- 3.1. **Teaching and Learning resources**
- 3.2. **Physical resources**
- 3.3. **Human support resources**
- 3.4. **Student support**

### 5.1 Teaching and Learning resources

#### Standards

- *Weekly interactive activities per each course are set.*
- *The e-learning material and activities take advantage of the capabilities offered by the virtual and audio-visual environment and the following are applied:*
  - *Simulations in virtual environments*
  - *Problem solving scenarios*
  - *Interactive learning and formative assessment games*
  - *Interactive weekly activities with image, sound and unlimited possibilities for reality reconstruction and further processing based on hypotheses*
  - *They have the ability to transfer students to real-life situations, make decisions, and study the consequences of their decisions*
  - *They help in building skills both in experiences and attitudes like in real life and also in experiencing - not just memorizing knowledge*
- *A pedagogical planning unit for e-learning, which is responsible for the support of the e-learning unit and addresses the requirements for study materials, interactive activities and formative assessment in accordance to international standards, is established.*
- *Adequacy of resources is ensured for changing circumstances (change in student numbers, etc.).*
- *All resources are fit for purpose.*
- *Student-centred learning and flexible modes of e-learning and teaching, are taken into account when allocating, planning and providing the learning resources.*

### 5.2 Physical resources

#### Standards

- *Physical resources, i.e. premises, libraries, study facilities, IT infrastructure, are adequate to support the study programme.*

- *Adequacy of resources is ensured for changing circumstances (change in student numbers, etc.).*
- *All resources are fit for purpose and students are informed about the services available to them.*

### 5.3 Human support resources

#### Standards

- *Human support resources, i.e. tutors/mentors, counsellors, other advisers, qualified administrative staff, are adequate to support the study programme.*
- *Adequacy of resources is ensured for changing circumstances (change in student numbers, etc.).*
- *All resources are fit for purpose and students are informed about the services available to them.*

### 5.4 Student support

#### Standards

- *Student support is provided covering the needs of a diverse student population, such as mature, part-time, employed and international students and students with special needs.*
- *Students are informed about the services available to them.*
- *Student-centred learning and flexible modes of learning and teaching, are taken into account when allocating, planning and providing student support.*
- *Students' mobility within and across higher education systems is encouraged and supported.*

*You may also consider the following questions:*

- *Evaluate the supply of teaching materials and equipment (including teaching labs, expendable materials, etc.), the condition of classrooms, adequacy of financial resources to conduct the study programme and achieve its objectives. What needs to be supplemented/ improved?*
- *What is the feedback from the teaching staff on the availability of teaching materials, classrooms, etc.?*
- *Are the resources in accordance with actual (changing) needs and contemporary requirements? How is the effectiveness of using resources ensured?*
- *What are the resource-related trends and future risks (risks arising from changing numbers of students, obsolescence of teaching equipment, etc.)? How are these trends taken into account and how are the risks mitigated?*

- *Evaluate student feedback on support services. Based on student feedback, which support services (including information flow, counselling) need further development?*
- *How is student learning within the standard period of study supported (student counselling, flexibility of the study programme, etc.)?*
- *How students' special needs are considered (different capabilities, different levels of academic preparation, special needs due to physical disabilities, etc.)?*
- *How is student mobility being supported?*

### Findings

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

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and travel restrictions, the EEC did not have the opportunity to visit the premises of NUP, but we were able to watch a video tour/presentation of the NUP campus, useful but of limited relevance to the experience of the e-learning/DL students. The views of the committee in relation to facilities and administrative support resources is primarily based on application documentation and the discussions with academic and administrative staff and the senior management of the university.

Overall, NUP offers satisfactory resources and services to both students and teaching staff (e.g., access to library resources, e-learning/DL programme learning design support, IT staff and student support and student administrative support).

### Strengths

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

We had the opportunity to discuss/review the following resources and technologies that support student learning:

1. A benchmarking tool (in the form of an EXCEL spreadsheet) which supports consistency in learning design by addressing (1) the inclusion of basic benchmarks such as key information on each course and (2) an assessment of the inclusion of activities to enhance students' critical thinking, awareness and research skills etc in the learning design of each course. The spreadsheet also included itemised and average scores to show how each course fared on a scale of 1 to 5 (all courses scored between 4 and 5). This was linked to the observation of teaching carried out in the online environments, an activity of high relevance to the DL/e-learning programme.
2. CESIM, an online serious game which employs a marketing simulation engine to support marketing decision processes. The EEC reviewed CESIM supporting documentation and induction resources, including guides, an induction tutorial and a recording of an online session where CESIM was used with students. The session's learning design included a peer review exercise from which students could certainly benefit. Some course guides also included computer based, non simulation software activities, which were well designed and can help students to learn from role playing and peer learning.

3. An online app ΚΑΗΟΟΤ which is used in an online or face to face setup to monitor student understanding during teaching sessions.
4. PROSE a staff oriented online tool to support Quality Assurance initiatives at the University.
5. An example of journal keeping from another programme as a learning activity, demonstrating how an activity of this type is structured to guide the students through to completion. The approach of providing feedback both in the body of the journal entry and as generic feedback identifying strengths and areas to improve is pedagogically sound.

There are provisions for inter-library loans and access to libraries in Cyprus and to a number of library consortia.

There are provisions for staff professional development in distance and e-learning and support from an established DL unit. Completion of the programme leads to an award of certificate of attendance.

Student support from the administrative and technical teams appeared to be adequate.

We had a useful discussion with the programme team about placements and how these are supported in the e-learning program so that DL/e-learning students are not disadvantaged. Useful ideas brought forward by the programme team and university management, including international liaison officers and Erasmus exchange and placements in online environments. This could be the way forward.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

1. Library access to books and resources (particularly hard copies) needs to be supported further for distance learning students located outside Cyprus through interlibrary loans and partnership agreements. Participation of the university in international partnerships such as the international EMERGE network mentioned by the senior management (currently at application stage) could enhance access to both soft and hard copies of resources.
2. The NUP benchmarking tool could be enhanced to support learning design in distance mode delivery, by clearly differentiating between three significant categories: 1. Minimum requirements for all courses, 2. Good practice for e-learning (applicable to both conventional and DL/e-learning programmes) and 3. Additional requirements for fully online courses (this would apply to this programme).
3. The use of serious games and simulations represent great examples of employing learning technologies to support students in an online environment. We recommend that the university employs both serious games and computer based simulations (it would be useful not to confound serious games and simulations in programme literature as they have different affordances) to cover more disciplinary areas in the programme. The programme team should look at other learning technologies that can support the distance learner.
4. Induction activities for new students should be mandatory, as induction can have a positive impact on long term support.

5. We recommend that a system is set up to support DL students located abroad in their search for placements or internships, so that they are not disadvantaged in relation to students of the conventional program. This can have a positive impact on employability and on the international reputation of the programme.
6. We recommend a further alignment between the programmes (the conventional and the e-learning) in terms of design and delivery. This will benefit both cohorts. Approaches that could achieve this would be adopting a flexible approach in terms of student workloads with clear signposting about workloads at the start of the course and allowing the students to move from the conventional to the e-learning programme and vice versa.

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

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

## D. Conclusions and final remarks

*Please provide constructive conclusions and final remarks which may form the basis upon which improvements of the quality of the programme of study under review may be achieved, with emphasis on the correspondence with the EQF.*

The Committee has the following requirements and recommendations:

### Policy for Quality Assurance

#### **Recommendation**

- The Department has to define the maximum number of the students who will be admitted for attending the Programme. It is noted that in the context of this evaluation it was considered that the expected number of the students in the Programme will be 15, with a foreseen increase up to 20. In case the number of the student increases further, then a re-evaluation of the Programme is considered necessary.

### Design, approval, on-going monitoring and review of the Programme

#### **Requirement**

- A breakdown of the credits into hours of student work, and the correspondence of these hours to particular tasks (lectures, home study, essays etc.) would make student workload transparent, preparing students for the course. The various course description documents would be good places to include this detail.

#### **Recommendations**

- Stakeholders from the private and public sector should be consulted in all future revisions of the Programme.
- Given the fact that this Programme will initially accommodate a small number of students, the scenario of adding more elective courses seems to be nonviable. This recommendation, however, should be reconsidered in future revisions of the Programme, and in the case that there is an increase in student and teaching staff numbers.
- We recommend that a system is set up to support DL students located abroad in their search for placements or internships, so that they are not disadvantaged in relation to students of the conventional programme. This can have a positive impact on employability and on the international reputation of the programme.

### Student Support and Flexible modes of Learning

#### **Recommendations**

- The Department should consider offering students a part-time version of the MSc, a step that would widen the applications' spectrum. In this case, the MSc's duration should be expanded accordingly.
- Induction activities for new students should be mandatory, as induction can have a positive impact on long term support.

### **Access to Physical Resources by DL Students**

- Library access to books and resources (particularly hard copies) needs to be supported further for distance learning students located outside Cyprus through interlibrary loans and partnership agreements. Participation of the university in international partnerships such as the international EMERGE network mentioned by the senior management (currently at application stage) could enhance access to both soft and hard copies of resources

### **Student recognition of higher education qualifications**

#### ***Recommendation***

- The list of documents provided by foreign students who apply for the programme should include The Recognition of their higher education Title of Studies by The Cyprus Council of Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications

### **Student-centred learning learning, teaching and assessment**

#### ***Requirements***

- The programme and course documentation should indicate more clearly the expected workload per course and for the programme overall and explain the procedure and conditions for extending the duration of the studies. Such student-facing documentation should be discussed with student representatives to ensure clarity and comprehension from the side of the student body.
- Dissertations (corresponding to 30 ECTS i.e. one third of the total 90) should be double-graded independently by 2 staff members. In addition, there should be a transparent mechanism for addressing potential disagreement in the two grades (e.g. if more than 9% difference or if one of the grades leads to a fail), through 3rd marking and/or moderation.

#### ***Recommendation***

- Single grading is acceptable for most courses, but there needs to be a procedure of double-checking and potentially moderating course grades (e.g. confirming failed or exceptional work).

## **Support for staff development**

### ***Recommendations***

- The institution should ideally provide a more formal programme of training for conventional (not just for distance learning) to support staff in developing and delivering innovative teaching.
- The institution should ideally provide a means for staff to log what training they have completed so as to support annual performance review and promotions processes.

## **Community of practice for teaching innovation**

### ***Recommendations***

- The institution should ideally introduce more formal structures for developing a community of practice for teaching innovation.
- The institution should ideally develop a programme of training for new lecturers, to support their adoption of innovative teaching practices.

## **Support for research outputs**

### ***Recommendation***

- The Department should ideally conduct a review of research activity and put clear provisions in place to better support and incentivise staff to collaborate more on producing good quality research outputs that are aligned to the objectives of the programme.

## **Learning design and learning technologies**

- The NUP benchmarking tool could be enhanced by clearly differentiating between three significant categories: 1. Minimum requirements for all courses, 2. Good practice for e-learning (applicable to both conventional and DL/e-learning programmes and 3. Additional requirements for fully online courses (this would apply to this programme).
- The use of serious games and simulations represent great examples of employing learning technologies to support students in an online environment. We recommend that the university employs both serious games and computer based simulations (it would be useful not to confound serious games and simulations in programme literature as they have different affordances) to cover more disciplinary areas in the programme. The programme team should look at other learning technologies that can support the distance learner.





### **Alignment between the conventional and the DL/e-learning programme**

- We recommend a further alignment between the programmes (the conventional and the e-learning) in terms of design and delivery. This will benefit both cohorts. Approaches that could achieve this would be adopting a flexible approach in terms of student workloads with clear signposting about workloads at the start of the course and allowing the students to move from the conventional to the e-learning programme and vice versa.



## E. Signatures of the EEC

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Professor Ioannis Chorianopoulos	
Associate Professor Edward Shepherd	
Associate Professor Seraphim Alvanides	
Professor Stylianos Hatzipanagos	
Mrs Elena Rousou	

**Date:** 11 April, 2022