Doc. 300.1.1

Date: Date.

External Evaluation Report (Programmatic)

- **Higher Education Institution: Open University of Cyprus**

- **Town: Nicosia**

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

- **Department/ Sector: Adult education**

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

  In Greek:

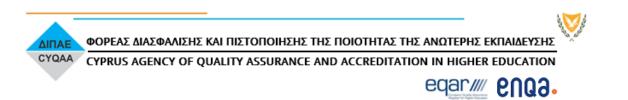 Μεταπτυχιακό Πρόγραμμα Σπουδών επιπέδου Μάστερ στη «Συνεχιζόμενη Εκπαίδευση και Διά Βίου Μάθηση»

  In English:

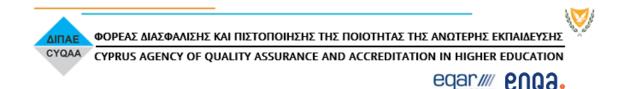 Master's Degree (MA) in Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning

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

- **Programme's status**
  New programme: No
  Currently operating: Yes

ΚΥΠΡΙΑΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ
REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS

A. Introduction

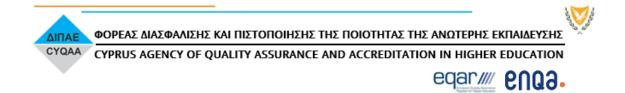*This part includes basic information regarding the onsite visit.*

The Open University of Cyprus is a public university established in 2002, and is Cyprus's only university 'dedicated to open and distance education'. It offers degree programmes up to doctoral level, as well as short courses, across three schools: Humanities & Social Sciences; Economics & Management; and Pure & Applied Sciences. It is committed to opening up education to all, and to providing an 'outstanding, challenging and transformative teaching and learning experience', with high academic standards, and strong links with business and society. It also aims to establish itself as a leading distance education university internationally, with a particular focus on south-eastern Europe and the Mediterranean.

The University has a budget of €13.5m, of which 56% is provided by the state. In 2020/21 it offers 27 programmes of study, of which four are undergraduate degrees. Five of its Masters degrees are offered in English. In 2019/20 it had 3,322 students: 56% of these were enrolled on postgraduate courses, overwhelmingly at Masters level; 44% on undergraduate degrees.

Teaching is provided by 27 full-time academic staff, supported by approximately 230 adjunct (part-time) faculty, all of whom hold PhDs. There are 80 administrative staff. The Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences offers one undergraduate, and ten Masters, programmes, of which the MA in Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning is one.
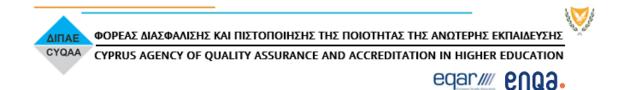
In the light of the Covid-19 pandemic, the panel was unable to visit the University; the evaluation was conducted 'virtually'. Documentation was provided electronically in advance. However, the panel meetings, and its meetings with University representatives, had to take place using Zoom. While this was made possible by an emergency variation in the applicable regulations, and was essential in the circumstances, it was less than entirely satisfactory. Although the University's staff made every effort to make the meetings as positive as possible, it was not possible to observe teaching, or students in classroom settings, and video recordings of online classes were a poor substitute. Online meetings and interviews with staff proved a strain for all involved, with opportunity for discussion inevitably restricted. The 'space' available for formal and informal interaction amongst panel members was also much more limited than would have been possible had the visit taken place in the normal way in Cyprus. If Covid-19 or similar problems are to affect matters in the longer run, this experience should be evaluated and mechanisms improved.

In the evaluation of programmes which have extensive learning materials in Greek, we suggest that the CYQAA give consideration to the relative roles of Greek-speaking and non-Greek-speaking evaluators.

B. External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

Name	Position	University
John Holford	Robert Peers Professor of Adult Education	University of Nottingham
Emilio Lucio-Villegas Ramos	Professor on Adult Education	University of Sevilla
Triin Roosalu	Associate Professor	Tallinn University
Stylianos Hatzipanagos	Professor	University of West London
Rafaela Ioannou	Student	University of Cyprus

ΔΙΠΑΕ CYQAA
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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*

- o *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*
- o *is regularly monitored in the light of the latest research in the given discipline, thus ensuring that the programme is up-to-date*
- o *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*
- o *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:*
  - o *selection criteria*
  - o *intended learning outcomes*
  - o *qualification awarded*
  - o *teaching, learning and assessment procedures*
  - o *pass rates*
  - o *learning opportunities available to the students*
  - o *graduate employment information*

1.4 Information management

Standards

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

- *Students and staff are involved in providing and analysing information and planning follow-up activities.*

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 Masters Course 'Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning' is a distance learning course offered by the School of Humanities and Social Sciences of the Open University of Cyprus. The course is currently organised in 120 ECTS.

The University now proposes to reduce it to 90 ECTS to make it more accessible to students who are in employment, be in line with OUC practice, and to try to maintain competitiveness with two similar degrees at private universities.

The programme is closely related to the International Masters in 'Adult Education and Social Change' supported by the EU's 'Erasmus +' programme; the OUC is a partner in the IMAESC consortium. This provides potential for internalisation of the course (see also Section 3 below). Two modules, 'Research Methodology in Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning' and 'Critical Reflection in Adult Learning and Education', are also offered (though in English) within the international Masters course. Modules of the international Masters can be taken by students in this MA degree.

The programme of study includes the main areas related to adult and continuing education (on the one hand 'general adult education' and on the other 'Vocational Education and Training') and presents current developments in the field.

Regarding quality assurance, the course has a structure and regulations that enable both staff and students to have a clear view of the procedures concerning assessment, academic fraud, plagiarism, etc.

The course objectives refer, *inter alia*, to providing students with skills to enable them to understand the fields of general adult education and VET, to provide specialised knowledge, and to conduct scientific research. All of these are clearly defined, and coherent with both the learning outcomes and the European Qualification Framework.

The public website of the programme offers a concise description of the structure of the programme and information on its thematic units, relevant staff and contacts. (At least one url link in the public website did not work.) In terms of assessment, there is an appropriate emphasis on the Master's dissertation and its centrality in the programme; this emphasis is somewhat at variance, however, from the programme team's report that few students undertake a dissertation.

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

The decision to incorporate a strong coverage of general adult education, rather than focussing predominantly on Vocational Education and Training, ensures a good and critical coverage of both major trends in adult education in Europe. The programme has, in general, a coherent sequence, and is consistent with the current development of the field in Europe.
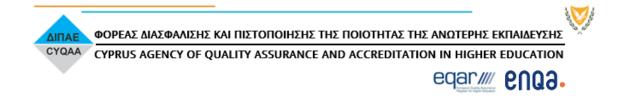
The programme's connection with the International Masters Degree allows both staff and students to connect with partners and colleagues across Europe, and to link with other similar courses in diverse countries. The offer of two modules in the International Masters also provides an additional level of quality assurance.

With many of the online sessions held on Saturdays or Sundays, and the possibility of taking up to six years to complete the degree, it offers good opportunities to students in employment. Some students have professional experience in adult education, and are working in the field: this is very positive and offers possibilities for teaching to draw on the accumulated experience of the learners.

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 is an important gap between theory and practice. Although students make presentations to other students on how to conduct lessons, there is no substantial practical training element in the programme. It might be expected
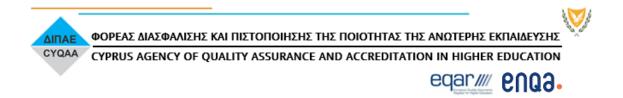
that students who have a close contact with adult education schools, community centres, or other institutions or associations related to adult and continuing education (as most if not all of the students do) should be encouraged to reflect about their own experience. We **recommend** introducing a reflective element, making use of the accumulated experience of the learners, to create an environment as near as possible to practical training. This would also enable students to develop and use specific methodologies appropriate to adult learners. We also **recommend** that consideration be given to requiring students to have relevant current professional engagement (employment or unpaid equivalent); this would enable a closer integration of the course with students' professional contexts and activities.

Only a small proportion of the students undertake a dissertation; this is inconsistent with one of the main stated aims of the course ("To conduct scientific research ... and generate new knowledge"). The time and effort required to study two theoretical taught modules is not equivalent to that required to undertake a Master's dissertation. We **recommend** that consideration be given to making the dissertation a requirement.

Although the modules cover the main issues regarding the current state of the art in adult and continuing education, their structure presents contradictions. First, there is no effective choice in the programme of study, apart from that between taking a dissertation and taking two modules. (For those who choose to take six modules, no choice between modules is possible.) Second, only in the module 'Critical reflection in adult learning and education' is there an in-depth investigation of the state of the art on adult education and learning and a clear discussion related to authors and approaches. We therefore make two **recommendations** for consideration: first, to enlarge the number of modules to guarantee that the student has effective choice; second to offer an introductory module at the outset of the programme that would develop knowledge of, reflect on, and discuss, key authors and approaches in adult education and learning from a wider perspective, before differentiating between 'general adult education' and 'vocational education and training'.

While we welcome the inclusion of established and classic readings, we **recommend** that the bibliographies also make more reference to recent work, and include references to significant current websites.

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

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

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

> **Sub-areas**
>
> **2.1 Process of teaching and learning and student-centred teaching methodology**
> **2.2 Practical training**
> **2.3 Student assessment**

2.1 Process of teaching and learning

Standards

- *The process of teaching and learning supports students' individual and social development.*
- *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.*
- *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.*
- *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.*
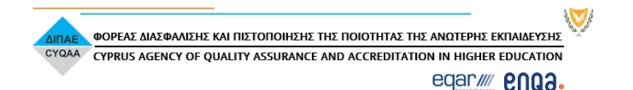
2.2 Practical training

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

- *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.*
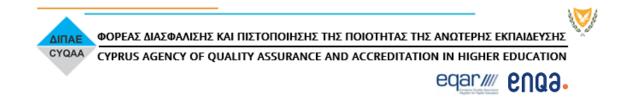
- *The criteria for and method of assessment, as well as criteria for marking, are published in advance.*
- *Assessment allows students to demonstrate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved. Students are given feedback, which, if necessary, is linked to advice on the learning process.*
- *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.*

You may also consider the following questions:

- *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.

Teaching and learning processes are organised to support students' individual and social development. There is a mix of modes of delivery and, within the constraints of distance learning, a variety of pedagogical methods is used. These appear to facilitate the achievement of planned learning outcomes. While there is no formal practical training element to the course, most students are engaged professionally (at least on a part-time basis) in education or training of adults, and are encouraged to draw connections between this and the course content.

There is an over-emphasis on formal examination for an adult education programme; however, the course academic staff provide formative assessment in weekly activities, assignments and teleconferences.

Criteria of assessment are clearly specified and made public. OUC procedures enable students to appeal against marks and request reassessment. There are clear procedures for dealing with students' complaints on teaching and learning.

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

The faculty (both full-time and adjunct) are strongly committed to the course, and to the students. They devote care, attention, and effort to their students, taking into account the variation of abilities and learning needs within the student group.

Students we met were strongly supportive of the personal support they received from tutors, comparing this very favourably with their experience at other universities. One said she had "never felt alone", and had found the academic staff "very friendly, polite and professional". There seemed to be a strong degree of mutual respect between students and teachers.

The opportunity to complete the programme over six years helps students to integrate their studies with busy working and personal lives.

Students commented positively on the administrative support provided.

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.

We **recommend** that the University reviews its procedures to ensure that effective and reliable systems for second blind marking and moderation of assessed work are in place.

Assessment approaches in the distance learning mode include formative tasks that complement student support aspects of the programme. The heavy weighting given to formal (face-to-face) examinations in assessment (50%) results from wider Open University of Cyprus policies; while it is understandable as a mechanism against plagiarism, impersonation, etc., in the context of a course in adult education, particularly at Masters level, it is to be regretted. Combined with the low number of Masters students who choose to take the dissertation, it weakens the assessment strategy. We **recommend t**hat the University review whether this requirement can be amended to allow more flexible and adult approaches to assessment in this programme, and that the programme team explores, and where possible and appropriate introduces, alternative assessment methods and formats. (This is particularly pertinent with the transition to online assessment due to coronavirus.)

In our view, there is a tension between the CYQAA requirement to deliver specific and planned learning outcomes (cf "The process of teaching and learning … facilitates the achievement of planned learning outcomes; … Assessment

allows students to demonstrate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved") and its aim of developing student autonomy and student involvement in course design (cf "The process of teaching and learning is flexible …; 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."). This tension is regrettable in the context of a Masters course on the education of adults, in which the role of students as adults, able to shape their own learning, should be at a premium. We **recommend** that the University should be flexible in the use and application of intended learning outcomes in this course.

The gap between theory and practice, and specifically the absence of a significant practical training element (noted in section 1 above) is also relevant here. We repeat the **recommendation** made above to introduce a reflective element, making use of the accumulated experience of the learners, to create an environment as near as possible to practical training.

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

Sub-area		Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant
2.1	Process of teaching and learning and student-centred teaching methodology	Compliant
2.2	Practical training	Not applicable
2.3	Student assessment	Partially compliant

3. Teaching staff *(ESG 1.5)*

Sub-areas

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

3.1 Teaching staff recruitment and development

Standards

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

3.2 Teaching staff number and status

Standards

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

3.3 Synergies of teaching and research

Standards

- *The teaching staff collaborate in the fields of teaching and research within the HEI and with partners outside (practitioners in their fields, employers, and staff members at other HEIs in Cyprus or abroad).*
- *Scholarly activity to strengthen the link between education and research is encouraged.*
- *The teaching staff publications are within the discipline.*

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> - *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:*
>
> - *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.

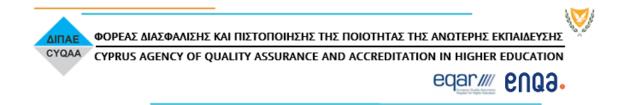**Teaching staff recruitment and development**

The University employs adjunct staff on annual (or shorter) contracts, through annual competitions, rather than straightforward renewal of contracts (even where service has been excellent). The pool of potential Greek-speaking candidates with relevant expertise is not extensive, and the University has managed to find and retain a cadre of professional and experienced staff.

For adjunct staff, the University offers good pay, and a working environment that invests in and relies on them. In return they invest in the programme. A number of helpful informal practices support networking between adjunct and permanent faculty. Despite the need to renew contracts annually, staff members have remained connected with the programme for a number years (some since its inception).

Although some standard training in distance learning methodologies is provided, there seem to be few, if any, other arrangements in place for teaching staff development; especially for adjuncts, this seems to be treated as an individual responsibility. Procedures do not allow for promotion for adjunct teaching staff.

Teaching staff number and status

The number of academic staff working on the programme (one permanent with several adjuncts) is relatively small; loss of the member of permanent staff in particular would be a matter of concern. Funding, along with functional flexibility, were presented as the main reasons for not increasing the number of permanent staff. The University sees

this business model as common to open universities internationally. Nevertheless, robust student numbers suggest the programme could well support additional permanent staff. Visiting staff are not used.

Teaching staff status and expertise are appropriate; a PhD degree is one of the requirements, and all staff have expertise in adult education. Teaching staff qualifications are fully adequate to achieve the objectives and learning outcomes, and to ensure quality and sustainability of teaching and learning. In addition to the main language (Greek), they are fluent in English and support students' development of language skills by including English-language publications in course materials. Staff workload is quite extensive, including formative assessments via weekly activities, assignments and teleconferences.

Synergies of teaching and research

Although adjunct faculty are required to have PhD degrees, OUC does not support them by providing research facilities or time. In employment and re-employment decisions, teaching is at a premium. The OUC is not where adjunct staff conduct their research; in effect it relies on other universities (where the adjunct staff are employed full-time) to provide this. Nevertheless, adjunct and permanent faculty have collaborated on research projects, and appear to draw on this in their teaching.

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

Programme faculty have appropriate backgrounds and impressive publication records, managing to combine teaching with research; adjunct staff bring research experience and publications from their other employers that enhance the link between teaching and research.

The distance learning delivery of the programme permits hiring of faculty from abroad (in this case, due to the language of instruction, largely from Greece); this diversifies the labour pool and supports quality in teaching. The potential to create and sustain informal networks and research collaboration with adjunct faculty adds value to the programme.

Academic staff are highly motivated. Students value their energy and commitment. Staff members establish supportive, mutually respectful informal and formal relationships with students; this has benefits for adult students' study on (and enjoyment of) the programme. Tutors' academic professionalism and understanding approach were highlighted by students.
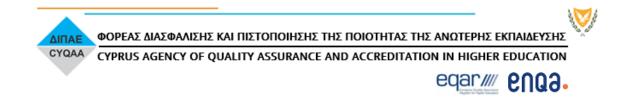
Operating in parallel with IMAESC programme provides academic staff (and, potentially, the students) with the possibility of experiencing more international learning contexts (two courses are *also* available in English).

The business model of relying on adjunct rather than permanent staff creates flexibility so the programme can be viable financially even if student numbers fluctuate.

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

The quality of the programme is highly dependent on a small number of adjunct staff on short-term contracts, whose principal employment is elsewhere. The risk this presents has been managed well to date, but we **recommend** that the University reflect on the long-run benefits and costs of this arrangement, and consider ways of strengthening its permanent academic staffing in this field.
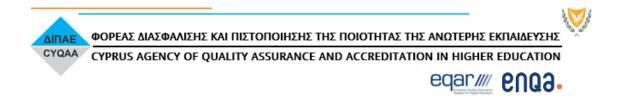
It is apparent that students are not being convinced of the case for doing an independent research project (i.e., the MA thesis), although those who have made this choice are pleased to have done so and been and inspired by their supervisors. While no doubt in part a consequence of market conditions and student needs, we believe limitations in the University's culture and systems of research support also contribute. We **recommend** strengthened support for permanent and adjunct faculty, e.g. by providing adjunct academic staff with research time and facilities, designing opportunities for them to involve students in their own research projects, and inviting students to shadow a process of preparing a publication.

While partnership in the International MAESC programme provides opportunities for strengthening the international character of this MA, we believe these could be more fully exploited. We **recommend** exploring how this could be achieved, and other international experiences made available, e.g. through drawing on international faculty and visiting lecturers.

In any field, the quality of an MA programme is in part dependent on the strength of the related national scholarly infrastructure. It being their 'core business', open universities play a key part in developing knowledge and expertise in the education of adults. OUC is Cyprus's only public open university, and we believe it should aim to develop a leading national role in this field. This is hardly possible if the cadre of academic expertise comprises a single full-time scholar. We therefore **recommend** that the University take active steps to strengthen its research capacity in the education of adults, e.g. through appointing more permanent and full-time academic staff in the field, and strengthening support for, and linking, existing staff with relevant expertise or the desire and potential to develop it.

While teacher training focused on interaction and the specificities of distance learning is offered, and this is important given that a significant proportion of the teaching staff is not permanent, we **recommend** that wider opportunities for continuous professional staff development be made available to adjunct as well as permanent staff.

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

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

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

Sub-areas

    4.1 Student admission, processes and criteria
    4.2 Student progression
    4.3 Student recognition
    4.4 Student certification

4.1 Student admission

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*

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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.

Admission requirements are published on the University website. The University admits no more than 30 students in any student cohort. Students are admitted from all disciplinary backgrounds, using criteria applicable across the University.

Module Study Guides for each Thematic Unit enable students to be aware in advance of the content and learning outcomes of each module, and of the expected workload. Regulations for student progression are clear and published.

Certification is clear and in line with European and international standards.
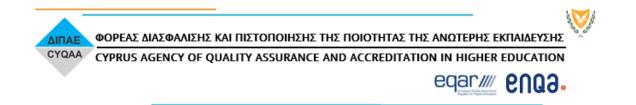
Strengths
A list of strengths, e.g. examples of good practices, achievements, innovative solutions etc.

We were impressed by the willingness of the University, and of the programme staff, to admit students from a diversity of academic backgrounds; this seemed to us to accord well with the aims of an "open university" to provide a "second chance", and to represent an appropriate application of this aim in the context of a postgraduate course.

The rule which allows study on the programme to last for up to six years provides valuable flexibility for part-time students facing changes and challenges in their professional and personal lives.

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.

While there appear to be satisfactory mechanisms for recognising qualifications from other institutions and jurisdictions, we **recommend** consideration be given to developing mechanisms and procedures to allow recognition of prior experiential (informal) learning.

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

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

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

> **Sub-areas**
>
> **5.1 Teaching and Learning resources**
> **5.2 Physical resources**
> **5.3 Human support resources**
> **5.4 Student support**

5.1 Teaching and Learning resources

Standards

- *Adequate and readily accessible teaching and learning resources (teaching and learning environments, materials, aids and equipment) are provided to students and support the achievement of objectives in the study programme.*
- *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 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.*
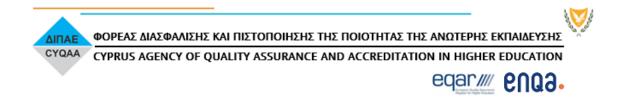
You may also consider the following questions:

- *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.

Sufficient support is provided for the students' needs, and for the smooth running of the programme. Study materials support the requirements of each element of the programme; these include books, magazines, teaching notes, journals, articles, etc. The teaching and learning environment supports the achievement of goals and learning outcomes. Equipment used in teaching and learning sufficient.

Subject to qualifications mentioned elsewhere, management and allocation of financial resources allow for development of the programme and academic/teaching staff.

Flexible approaches to teaching and learning, accompanied by proper planning, make use of different types of methodology in the completion of each course, as well as an electronic platform. The e-class platform, used for each course, is based on Moodle. The structure of this platform is suitable for distance education.

Because we were not able to visit the University, we could not assess the full extent of teaching materials (books, textbooks, scientific journals, databases, etc.) available to support the curriculum, but we were assured these were adequate. Students are informed about the services available to them. Information services provide support to students, as well as training on the use of e-class.

We have noted the effects of the limited use of full-time academic staff and the reliance on adjuncts, and the risks associated with the current approach. Without detracting from those comments and associated recommendations, human resources support (teachers, mentors, counsellors, and administrative staff) appear adequate for delivery of the curriculum. Structures for student care, and corresponding administrative mechanisms of student support and supervision, are in place. A Student Welfare Service supports students in their academic and personal problems and difficulties. Adequate and modern sources of information of students (electronic library, platform) are available.

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

The Educational Technology Lab supports the programme and its desired learning outcomes.

The library provides access to millions of electronic books and journals: as we were told, the library "goes to students' screens" – rather than students having to go to the library.

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.
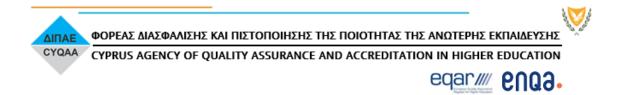
The internal evaluation report makes a very superficial reference to how people with disabilities are treated, although we were told orally that help is offered to students with disabilities in learning to use the online platform and in carrying out their other academic obligations. The University has a policy on how to deal with such situations, but we **recommend** that students be made more fully aware of internal regulations and procedures for supporting students with disabilities.

Students' access to the programme is dependent on their own internet communication systems; those with poor internet connections are therefore at a disadvantage. We **recommend** that applicants (and students) be made clearly aware of the detailed implications of this, to what extent the University can provide support to overcome this, and it potential effect on their progress, from the outset.

Internet-based communications have limitations in respect of students' and teachers' dialogical and interactive experience; this is an issue in particular for a course on adult education. Some oral explanations were provided (e.g. the e-class team focuses on the problem, and the programme team offers meets students if they miss a lesson and want to discuss it), but these were highly dependent on personal staff commitment. We **recommend** that attention be given to strengthening mechanisms that enable dialogic and interactive adult education at a distance.

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

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

6. Additional for distance learning programmes *(ALL ESG)*

> **Sub-areas**
>
> **6.1 Distance learning philosophy and methodology**
> **6.2 Distance learning material at the appropriate level according to EQF**
> **6.3 Interaction plan and Interactive weekly activities**
> **6.4 Study guides**

6.1 Distance learning philosophy and methodology

Standards

- *The distance learning methodology is appropriate for the particular programme of study.*
- *Feedback processes for students in relation to written assignments are set.*
- *A complete assessment framework is designed, focusing on distance learning methodology, including clearly defined evaluation criteria for student assignments and the final examination.*
- *Expected teleconferences for presentations, discussion and question-answer sessions, and guidance are set.*

6.2 Distance learning material at the appropriate level according to EQF

Standards

- *Twelve weekly interactive activities per each course are set.*
- *The distance 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 distance learning, which is responsible for the support of the distance learning unit and addresses the requirements for study materials, interactive activities and formative assessment in accordance to international standards, is established.*

6.3 Interaction plan and Interactive weekly activities

Standards

- *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 and teaching staff focusing on interaction and the specificities of distance learning.*

6.4 Study guides

Standards

- *A study guide for each course, fully aligned with distance 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 outline of set activities and exercises and 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 distance 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?*
- *Are the academics qualified to teach in the distance learning programme?*

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.

As noted above, current technologies of distance, online, delivery limit how far adult education can be fully dialogic and interactive. With that qualification the programme is compatible with distance learning delivery: established mechanisms and technologies are in place to support interaction between students and staff and amongst students. The OUC has a distance learning strategy that guides distance learning practice. The online environment consists of a virtual learning environment (VLE) and communication technologies to support student learning. A blended learning approach with emphasis on online learning is its pedagogical approach. Technologies support academic integrity by monitoring work submitted for assessment to address risks of plagiarism. Regulations safeguard the rights of students with special needs and support learning opportunities for them.

Strengths

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

The team is committed to using the VLE to develop innovative opportunities for interaction, including the use of technologies such as virtual reality and simulation/games.

The quality assurance team carries out the functions of a pedagogical planning unit for distance learning (although there is no unit explicitly so named), ensuring that pedagogical considerations on distance learning are taken into account.

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.

While policies are in place to support students with special needs, the panel did not see implementation and application of these policies to teaching practice and design of learning materials. We **recommend** that institutional policies for students with special needs be applied to practical aspects of the programme, e.g. learning design of educational materials to increase accessibility.

We believe the potential of the VLE could be more fully explored and exploited. For instance, innovative learning technologies and related pedagogies (e.g. the gamification project that the team mentioned in discussion with the panel) could improve interactivity for student engagement. We **recommend** that the University support the course team in the exploration, development, and evaluation of possibilities in this area.

While the use of formative assessment is commendable in the distance learning delivery, we **recommend** the development of a clear rationale for formative and summative assessments to ensure that distance intended learning outcomes are achieved.

On the web, there were interesting video extracts of a presentation on the programme and views of Masters recipients. We **recommend** the creation of a dedicated "video channel" for the course to showcase student achievements and provide relevant publicity information.

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

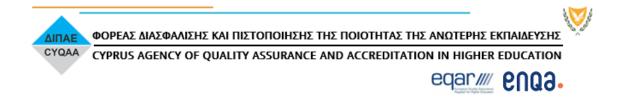| Sub-area	*Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant*

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6.1	Distance learning philosophy and methodology	Compliant
6.2	Distance learning material at the appropriate level according to EQF	Partially compliant
6.3	Interaction plan and Interactive weekly activities	Compliant
6.4	Study guides	Compliant

7. Additional for doctoral programmes *(ALL ESG)*

> **Sub-areas**
>
> **7.1 Selection criteria and requirements**
> **7.2 Proposal and dissertation**
> **7.3 Supervision and committees**

7.1 Selection criteria and requirements

Standards

- *Specific criteria that the potential students need to meet for admission in the programme, as well as how the selection procedures are made, are defined.*
- *The following requirements of the doctoral degree programme are analysed and published:*
  - *the stages of completion*
  - *the minimum and maximum time of completing the programme*
  - *the examinations*
  - *the procedures for supporting and accepting the student's proposal*
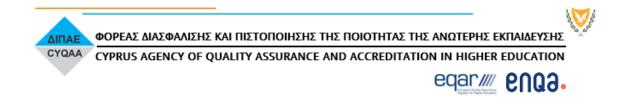 - *the criteria for obtaining the Ph.D. degree*

7.2 Proposal and dissertation

Standards

- *Specific and clear guidelines for the writing of the proposal and the dissertation are set regarding:*
  - *the chapters that are contained*
  - *the system used for the presentation of each chapter, sub-chapters and bibliography*
  - *the minimum word limit*
  - *the binding, the cover page and the prologue pages, including the pages supporting the authenticity, originality and importance of the dissertation, as well as the reference to the committee for the final evaluation*
- *There is a plagiarism check system. Information is provided on the detection of plagiarism and the consequences in case of such misconduct.*
- *The process of submitting the dissertation to the university library is set.*

7.3 Supervision and committees

Standards

- *The composition, the procedure and the criteria for the formation of the advisory committee (to whom the doctoral student submits the research proposal) are determined.*
- *The composition, the procedure and the criteria for the formation of the examining committee (to whom the doctoral student defends his/her dissertation), are determined.*
- *The duties of the supervisor-chairperson and the other members of the advisory committee towards the student are determined and include:*
  - *regular meetings*
  - *reports per semester and feedback from supervisors*

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> o *support for writing research papers*
> o *participation in conferences*
> - *The number of doctoral students that each chairperson supervises at the same time are determined.*
>
>
> *You may also consider the following questions:*
>
> - *How is the scientific quality of the PhD thesis ensured?*
> - *Is there a link between the doctoral programmes of study and the society? What is the value of the obtained degree outside academia and in the labour market?*
> - *Can you please provide us with some dissertation samples?*

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.

Click or tap here to enter text.

Strengths

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

Click or tap here to enter text.

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.

Click or tap here to enter text.

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

Sub-area		*Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant*
7.1	Selection criteria and requirements	Not applicable
7.2	Proposal and dissertation	Not applicable
7.3	Supervision and committees	Not applicable

8. Additional for joint programmes *(ALL ESG)*

> **Sub-areas**
>
> **8.1 Legal framework and cooperation agreement**
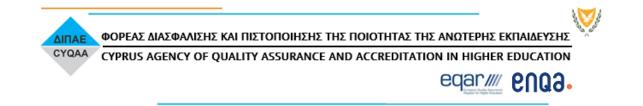> **8.2 The joint programme**

8.1 Legal framework and cooperation agreement

Standards

- *The joint programme is offered in accordance with legal frameworks of the relevant national higher education systems.*
- *The terms and conditions of the joint programme are laid down in a cooperation agreement. The agreement in particular covers the following issues:*
  - *Denomination of the degree(s) awarded in the programme*
  - *Coordination and responsibilities of the partners involved regarding management and financial organisation, including funding, sharing of costs and income, resources for mobility of staff and students*
  - *Admission and selection procedures for students*
  - *Mobility of students and teaching staff*
  - *Examination regulations, student assessment methods, recognition of credits and degree awarding procedures*
  - *Handling of different semester periods, if existent*

8.2 The joint programme

Standards

- *The partner universities apply joint internal quality assurance processes.*
- *The joint programme is offered jointly, involving all cooperating universities in the design, delivery and further development of the programme.*
- *Aims and learning outcomes are clearly stated, including a joint syllabus, language policy, as well as an account of the intended added value of the programme.*
- *Study counselling and mobility plans are efficient and take into account the needs of different kinds of students.*

You may also consider the following questions:

- *Does the joint study programme conform to the requirements of a study programme offered at the specific level?*
- *Is there a system that assures the quality of joint provision and guarantees that the aims of the programme are met?*
- *Do the mechanisms for ensuring the quality of the joint study programme take into consideration the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)? Are they adopted by all the universities involved?*
- *Is the division of responsibilities in ensuring quality clearly defined among the partner universities?*
- *Is relevant information about the programme, e.g. admission requirements and procedures, course catalogue, examination and assessment procedures, well documented and published by taking into account the specific needs of students?*
- *What is the added value of the programme of study?*
- *Is there a sustainable funding strategy among the partner universities? Explain.*

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.

Click or tap here to enter text.

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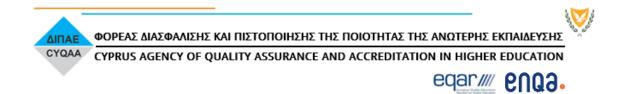*A list of strengths, e.g. examples of good practices, achievements, innovative solutions etc.*

Click or tap here to enter text.

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.

Click or tap here to enter text.

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

Sub-area		*Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant*
8.1	Legal framework and cooperation agreement	Not applicable
8.2	The joint programme	Not applicable

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D. Conclusions and final remarks

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

This is a valuable and well-designed programme, well-led, and supported by a strong and committed academic team. We believe the University has the potential to strengthen its role as the leading location of academic and research expertise in adult education in Cyprus, and that this course provides a solid basis for such developments; and we call for further investment – of both financial and human resources – in this specialist area. We consider that the sustained provision of a high-quality Masters degree should have a firmer foundation.

We argue for closing what we describe as a gap between theory and practice, making more use of students' professional expertise, and a more encouragement for students to undertake a research-based dissertation. In order to encourage student creativity, knowledge creation and dialogue, we argue against a rigid application of, or adherence to, planned learning outcomes in this adult education programme.
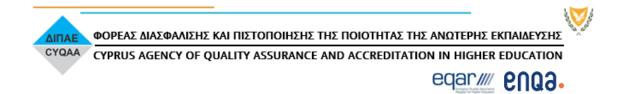
We suggest that the University's policy of requiring 50 per cent of assessment to be in formal, end-of-course, examinations is inappropriate in a Masters course in adult education. We consider that procedures for recognising and accrediting prior informal or experiential learning should be introduced.

Although the course team makes every effort to help students with disabilities and special needs, we feel that the University may need to review and strengthen its policies and support systems in this respect.

We make a number of suggestions to further strengthen the academic team, including enlarging the full-time staff, more staff development opportunities, and research facilities for adjunct staff. We also suggest that more be made of the programme's international links.

In a Master's course in the area of adult education, dialogic pedagogies and active student involvement in course design and learning approaches should be a priority. It is evident that the course team currently does all it can to ensure such approaches are used, but we believe they are in some respects constrained by over-rigid institutional policies and procedures. We suggest a number of ways in which these might be improved; one of these should be a more active exploration and exploitation of how the University's virtual learning environment could encourage more dialogic, active, discussion-based and creative learning.

Overall, we congratulate the OUC and the course team for offering a valuable programme, which is highly valued by its students.

E. Signatures of the EEC

Name	Signature
John Holford	
Emilio Lucio-Villegas Ramos	
Triin Roosalu	
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Date: 5th October 2020