Doc. 300.1.2

Higher Education Institution's Response

Date: 22/01/2021

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

- **Town: Nicosia**

- **Type of Evaluation: Programmatic**

- **Accredited on CYQAA Council's Summit Number:** Enter number

- **Date of Accreditation:** Click or tap to enter a date

If applicable:
- **School/Faculty:** Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

- **Department:** Not applicable
- **Programme of Study Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)**

  **Programme Master
  In Greek:**

  ΣΔΜ: Συνεχιζόμενη Εκπαίδευση και Δια Βίου Μάθηση 90 ECTS, Μεταπτυχιακό Πρόγραμμα Σπουδών

  In English:
  ΣΔΜ: Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning, 90 ECTS, Masters degree

- **Programme's type: Distance Learning**

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

A. Guidelines on content and structure of the report

- *The Higher Education Institution (HEI) based on the External Evaluation Committee's (EEC's) evaluation report (Doc.300.1.1) must justify whether actions have been taken in improving the quality of the programme of study in each assessment area.*

- *In particular, under each assessment area, the HEI must respond on, <u>without changing the format of the report</u>:*

  - *the findings, strengths, areas of improvement and recommendations of the EEC*
  - *the deficiencies noted under the quality indicators (criteria)*
  - *the conclusions and final remarks noted by the EEC*

- *The HEI's response must follow below the EEC's comments, which must be copied from the external evaluation report (Doc. 300.1.1).*

- *In case of annexes, those should be attached and sent on a separate document.*

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

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 focusing 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.

Recommendation:

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.

Response:

Thank you for the above point which we consider as being very important. The MA students, who choose to do so, can have professional engagement with the field of adult education through practical training in organizations in Cyprus facilitated by the Liaison Office of the Open University of Cyprus (OUC). This is operating since 2016 in the context of the project "University Liaison Offices with the Business World" and it is co-funded by the European Social Fund. It is engaged in promoting the systematic communication and cooperation of the scientific/research and student community with all sectors of the economy, to take advantage of the research and to decode entrepreneurship. In order to achieve this goal, the Liaison Office assists in the process of placement of students in businesses and organisations, with the aim of acquiring a first contact with the professional world or furthering their experience and improving their working skills. Thus, students of the MA in Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning can take advantage of these opportunities and undertake internships in organizations in Cyprus. Students have the opportunity to participate in two placement cycles in different institutions. Each student who successfully completes his/her placement receives three credits which –however- are not taken into account in his/her degree requirement courses. Moreover, students have the opportunity to apply for an Erasmus+ funding in the context of the Erasmus+ Mobility Programme and undertake an internship in organizations abroad. Students, with the end of their practical training, submit a reflective piece of work about their internship experiences to the MA Programme.

Moreover, for the majority of the students who do not choose to undertake practical training, as they are working adults, this opportunity is given to them throughout the Thematic Units/Courses offered, in which theory and practice are interlinked. In the Study Guides of all the Thematic Units and also on the University's eLearning Platform there are a number of examples and case studies, which are expected to be further enriched by the experiences of the students and the individual and group work that they will undertake. Most of the activities (which vary in terms of form-case studies, design and development of courses, analysis of texts, recording of personal experiences and reflection, etc. – and in terms of their implementation) are of a more practical and applied nature in which students are encouraged to use

their own experiences, as adult educators or learners, and link them to the theoretical knowledge they gain in the different modules. Furthermore, during the weekly discussions in the fora the students have many opportunities to share their experiences and reflect on them as a group. All courses have a reflective dimension (for example, see ANNEX 3, Teaching Adult Education On-line Study Guide, p. 9-10 compulsory assignments). Nonetheless, in the light of the EEC recommendation to introduce a reflective element in the course, making use of the accumulated experience of the learners, it was decided to introduce at the end of the programmme, as part of the ΣΔΜ 621 "Critical Reflection in Adult Learning and Education" module a 2.000 words reflective text for every student in which he/she would reflect of his/her learning in the course of the MA programme, in relation to his/her professional experiences and changes that might have occurred, as a result of attending the programme.

Recommendation:

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.

Response:

A significant proportion of the students attending this master's degree are practitioners in the field of adult and continuing education. Thus, it is not their immediate priority to follow an academic/theoretical/research path in their studies. Hence, the Programme offers to the students the option to complete their studies with or without a thesis. Those who are interested in continuing their studies at the doctoral level, or are more interested in research in the two areas addressed by the MA Programme are, of course, encouraged to choose the option with the Master Thesis. Furthermore, all the modules of the Programme incorporate activities that touch on aspects of cultivating certain research skills, such as literature review (small scale)-how to access academic resources, critically assess them, and appropriately use them for argumentation in the assignments; construction of data collection tools (e.g. curriculum evaluation tools). Additionally, the mandatory Thematic Unit ΣΔΜ612 "Research Methodology in Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning" provides the opportunity to students to go through all the stages of a research project -from the literature review to research tools development, data collection and data analysis and to carry out a small-scale research, as part of their final assessment in the unit. The above is also adopted in the respective two other programmes in the area of adult education, which are offered by two other private universities in Cyprus.

Recommendation:

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'.

Response:

Following the above recommendations of the EEC as well as the recommendation to offer modules of the International Masters in 'Adult Education for Social Change' to students of the MA Programme in 'Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning' (see above p. 5, paragraph 3), the Academic Team of the Programme has decided to enlarge the number of elective modules offered to students, in order to guarantee that they have effective choices.

In particular, the module "Teaching Adult Education On-line" (ΣΔΜ 516) from the IMAESC Programme has been added to the Greek MA Programme, as an elective module. Please, refer to the description of the ΣΔΜ 516, attached in ANNEX 2, and also to the Study Guide of the ΣΔΜ 516 attached to ANNEX 3. This Thematic Unit will be taught in Greek though.

Moreover, a second Thematic Unit has been added to the 90 ECTS Greek MA Programme, as an elective module. It is the "Access and Participation of Adults in Education" (ΣΔΜ 622), module that has been offered in the 120 ECTS MA in 'Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning' since 2014. When we had worked towards restructuring the 120 ECTS MA Programme to reduce it to 90 ECTS, to make it more accessible to students and maintain its competitiveness, we did not think that we could still keep all its thematic units and offer them as electives in the new programme. Hence we are grateful that the EEC made this recommendation to us to offer more elective units, because we can draw upon on all the thematic units we have designed and offered so far. For the description of the ΣΔΜ 622, please, refer to ANNEX 2 of the application form.

Regarding the second recommendation made by the EEC 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, the Academic Team has worked towards radically restructuring the compulsory thematic unit ΣΔΜ 511. The restructured unit has been named "Introduction to Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning" and it will provide an outline of some of the most basic concepts connected with the vast field of adult and continuing education, as gleaned from the existing international literature on the subject. By the end of the course, participants will have a sound knowledge of some basic principles of adult learning and the different dimensions of the field, identify debates in the field and situate their own experiences within the broad framework of adult and continuing education. Please, refer to the new description of the ΣΔΜ 511, in ANNEX 2 of the application form.

As a result of the above changes, as part of the 90 ECTS MA programme 3 compulsory thematic units and 7 elective units (including the Master's Thesis I & II) will be offered. The structure of the programme will be formulated as described in the tables below (See also ANNEX 1):

TABLE 1: LIST OF COMPULSORY COURSES AND ELECTIVE COURSES

Code	Title	Year	Semester
Compulsory Thematic Units			
ΣΔΜ511	Introduction to Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning	1st	Winter
ΣΔΜΙΙ521	Planning, Organization and Evaluation of Continuing Education, Lifelong Learning and Vocational Education & Training programs	1st	Spring
ΣΔΜ612	Research Methodology in Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning	1st	Spring
Electives			
ΣΔΜ611	International Trends in Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning – Comparing Systems and Practices	1st	Winter
ΣΔΜ512	Theoretical Foundations of Vocational Education and Training	1st	Winter
ΣΔΜ621	Critical Reflection in Adult Learning and Education	2nd	Winter
ΣΔΜ 622	**Access and Participation of Adults in Education**	**2nd**	**Winter**
ΣΔΜ 516	**Teaching Adult Education On-line**	**2nd**	**Winter**
ΣΔΜΙΙ701Α/701Β	Master's Thesis I//II	2nd	Winter

TABLE 2: COURSE DISTRIBUTION PER SEMESTER

A/A	Course Type	Course Name	Course Code	Periods per week	Period duration	Number of weeks/ Academic semester	Total periods/ Academic semester	Number of ECTS
A' Semester								
1	Compulsory	**Introduction to Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning**	ΣΔΜ511	1	3 hours of teaching + office hours	15	15 weeks x 3 hours of teaching	15
2	Elective	International Trends in Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning – Comparing Systems and Practices	**ΣΔΜ611**	1	3 hours of teaching + office hours	15	15 weeks x 3 hours of teaching	15
3	Elective	Theoretical Foundations of Vocational Education and Training	**ΣΔΜ512**	1	3 hours of teaching + office hours	15	15 weeks x 3 hours of teaching	15
B' Semester								
1	Compulsory	Planning, Organization and Evaluation of Continuing Education, Lifelong Learning and Vocational Education & Training programs	ΣΔΜII521	1	3 hours of teaching + office hours	15	15 weeks x 3 hours of teaching	15

2	Compulsory	Research Methodology in Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning	ΣΔΜ612	1	3 hours of teaching + office hours	15	15 weeks x 3 hours of teaching	15
C' Semester								
1	Elective	Critical reflection in adult learning and education	ΣΔΜ621	1	3 hours of teaching + office hours	15	15 weeks x 3 hours of teaching	15
2	**Elective**	**Teaching Adult Education On-line**	**ΣΔΜ 516**	1	3 hours of teaching + office hours	15	15 weeks x 3 hours of teaching	15
3	**Elective**	**Access and Participation of Adults in Education**	**ΣΔΜ 622**	1	3 hours of teaching + office hours	15	15 weeks x 3 hours of teaching	15
4	Elective	Master's Thesis I	ΣΔΜΙΙ701Α	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	15
5	Elective	Master's Thesis II	ΣΔΜΙΙ701Β	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	15

Programme of Study Layout							
Modules		*Semester*	*Required / Elective*	*Pre-requisite Modules*	*Co-requisite Modules*	*Workload*	
						Hours	*ECTS*
Common for all Specializations							
ΣΔΜ511	Introduction to Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning	1	Compulsory			375-450	15
ΣΔΜ512	Theoretical Foundations of Vocational Education and Training	1	Elective		ΣΔΜ 511	375-450	15
ΣΔΜ611	International Trends in Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning – Comparing Systems and Practices	1	Elective		ΣΔΜ 511	375-450	15
ΣΔΜΙΙ521	Planning, Organization and Evaluation of Continuing Education, Lifelong Learning and Vocational Education & Training programs	2	Compulsory		ΣΔΜ 511	375-450	15
ΣΔΜ612	Research Methodology in Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning	2	Compulsory		ΣΔΜ 511	375-450	15
ΣΔΜ621	Critical Reflection in Adult Learning and Education	3	Elective		ΣΔΜ 511	375-450	15
ΣΔΜ516	**Teaching Adult Education On-line**	**3**	**Elective**		**ΣΔΜ 511**	**375-450**	**15**
ΣΔΜ622	**Access and Participation of Adults in Education**	**3**	**Elective**		**ΣΔΜ 511**	**375-450**	**15**
ΣΔΜ701A	Master's Thesis I	3	Elective	ΣΔΜ 612	ΣΔΜ 511	375-450	15
ΣΔΜ701B	Master's Thesis II	3	Elective	ΣΔΜ 612, ΣΔΜ701A	ΣΔΜ 511	375-450	15
						2250-2700	**90**

Recommendation:

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.

Response:

Following the above recommendation, the Thematic Units' reading lists have been updated and more recent references, as well as references to significant current websites (for example: ESREA's website) have been added. Please, refer to the updated descriptions of all modules submitted as ANNEX 2 of the programme's application form.

2. Teaching, learning and student assessment *(ESG 1.3)*

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.

Recommendation:

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.

Response:

All students' assignments submitted on the University's eLearning Platform are checked for plagiarism and are marked by the Tutor of the particular Student Cohort. This is common practice in all Universities, and we do not consider that a procedure for a second blind marking of all assignments needs to be introduced. As mentioned by the Committee, the University already has in place a procedure for appeals against marks and request for reassessment (included in the University's Internal Regulations for Studies). Reassessment is done by two external reviewers appointed by the Rector of the relevant Faculty, who are not teaching the particular Student Cohort. Moreover, students have the right to appeal to their Tutor, then to the Module Coordinator and then to the Academic Coordinator of the Programme (3 levels). The work conducted by Tutors is evaluated by the Programme's Academic Coordinator, who has the right to check the assessed work and feedback provided to students by their Tutors. We thus trust that these procedures in place safeguards students' rights and proper moderation of the assessed work.

Recommendation:

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** that 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.)

Response:

The Open University of Cyprus is implementing Internal Regulations for Studies, which govern assessment methods and weighting averages. Based on these Regulations, the final written examination cannot weight less than the 50% of the overall grade. According to the same article, the maximum weight of the final examination is 70% of the overall grade. Moreover, given the recent instructions provided by CyQAA, in addition to the final examination and the graded assignments, all Modules need to incorporate at least 12 weekly interactive educational activities, which should be marked and count towards the overall degree. Taking all these into consideration, for the MA Programme in Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning, the weekly assignments have a weight of 10%, the two assignments count for 40% of the overall grade, and the final examination is the remaining 50% of the overall grade. We do consider that these assessment methods and weights are suitable for the Programme. Moreover, we should take into consideration the accreditation of the Programme in other countries, for instance in Greece, the Hellenic National Recognition and Information Center has certain rules for the final written examinations that we need to respect to ensure that the degree title awarded will be accredited. Overall, the University's policies regarding the examinations are in line with the wider academic culture in Greece/Cyprus and the European South in general, where the reliability of educational institutions is linked to written exams. We should also note that due to the coronavirus pandemic, the final examinations of the spring semester

2019-2020 and the final examinations of the fall semester 2020-2021 were conducted entirely online, using the University's eLearning Platform, with secure invigilation, and not face-to-face.

Recommendation:

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.

Response:

We absolutely understand and agree with the above point. However, we need to follow CyQAA's recommendations to have well-defined Learning Outcomes at programme and module levels, and we do consider in the context of our instructional design processes that it is a basic principle of distance education to have set the aims and structure of a programme clear, before its delivery. Of course, course updating is done at the end of each academic year, and thus intended learning outcomes can be adapted to meet current scientific trends and students' needs. In designing a course / programme, we do take into consideration our students' needs and expectations, and the course team tries to involve adult learners (e.g. through the feedback provided by our students at the end of each academic semester through the anonymized evaluation questionnaire survey, or through focus groups), and to be flexible and open to adopt ideas and their suggestions.

Recommendation:

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.

Response:

This point is addressed above (see pp. 6-7).

3. Teaching staff *(ESG 1.5)*

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.

Recommendation:

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.

Response:

We do share the EEC's opinion that all Programmes of Study should have an adequate number of permanent academic staff, and not rely so heavenly on adjunct tutors on short-term contracts. This is however the case for the OUC that is a public University and all permanent academic staff positions (Lecturers, Assistant Professors, Associate Professors and Professors) need to be approved by the competent Ministries of Education and Finance. Thus, the University is highly depending on Adjunct Tutors for teaching in the majority of student cohorts. This is the case in other Open Universities as far as we know. Since approximately 90% of the Programme's teaching personnel are Adjunct Tutors, the MA Programme, the relevant Faculty and the University overall, are meticulous in ascertaining that, by way of a fair point system that balances experience and motivation, Adjunct Faculty of the highest caliber are hired every year, and depending on their evaluation, their contracts are renewed.

Candidates for Adjunct Faculty are assessed according to the following criteria:

- Relevance of their research and teaching experience to the Thematic Unit (module) they apply to.

- Overall academic teaching experience in the last five years.
- Distance learning teaching experience in the last five years and ability to use state-of-the-art technology.
- Availability of the candidate, as evidenced by a signed declaration of commitments to employers other than OUC.
- The candidate's evaluations as Tutor at the Open University of Cyprus (if applicable) over the last five years.
- Research and published work over the last five years.

The University aspires to ensure that for each of the Programmes of Study offered (existing or new) there is at least one permanent academic staff, and is constantly pushing the relevant Ministries for more academic positions.

Recommendation:

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.

Response:

The adjunct faculty is involved in research through supervising Masters' Thesis, at the end of which students are encouraged/trained to work with their supervisor towards preparing a publication. Adjust Lecturers are also invited to apply for research grants in externally funded projects with the affiliation of the Open University of Cyprus, and are also involved in research projects lead by Faculty members with internal or external funding. Permanent faculty members are involved in research, and based on the University's common practice, approximately 30% of their time is allocated to research activities. Faculty members can apply on an annual basis (competitive) for internal funds to undertake internally-funded research projects, and have a budget allocation for their research activities, e.g. conference participations, etc. All Faculty, permanent and adjunct, are keen to involve students in their own research projects.

Recommendation:

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.

Response:

Through the years, the programme has used many opportunities to host visiting lecturers, mainly through Erasmus+ mobilities (hosting faculty of partner universities for teaching assignments at the MA Programme) or research projects in which the staff was involved. As a result, a number of seminars and public lectures have been delivered for students and the wider audience as part of the MA programme from Professors coming from different countries, such as: Germany, France, Romania, Spain, Greece, Malta, Belgium, etc. We'll intensify these efforts for research synergies and staff exchange with other universities over the following years.

Recommendation:

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.

Response:

We do appreciate the comment made by the EEC that since the Open University of Cyprus is the country's only university dedicated to distance education, it should have a leading national role in this field. Over the years, we have collaborated with other Cypriot universities in offering joint programmes using our eLearning Platform and methodology, and we discussed with the competent Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth for the OUC to have a coordinating role in distance tertiary education in Cyprus. Presently, OUC is represented in a committee established by the Ministry of Education aiming to promote eLearning in all levels of education in Cyprus. Moreover, our University is involved in projects implemented by the Ministry of Education and the Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus, which aim to design multi-format educational material suitable for online teaching and learning. Despite the fact that there is only one permanent faculty member in the MA Programme in 'Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning', we do consider that all our faculty members can be considered experts in distance education and are offering their expertise and know-how in various committees nationally and internationally in addition to their core scientific expertise. The Open University of Cyprus is also operating a dedicated Laboratory on Educational Material and Methodology (LEMM). LEMM envisions to contributing in enhancing the distance learning student experience. Using cutting-edge technology tools and following the principles of modern and result-driven educational methodologies, it promotes and ensures the high quality of educational material and the achievement of academic excellence. The Laboratory's mission focuses on the continuous monitoring, development, assessment and update of the educational material and the educational methodology of the Open University of Cyprus, in alignment with the University's vision. In collaboration with other OUC units and services, LEMM's mission is to contribute to the University's work by providing high quality material according to the needs of the modern student.

Recommendation:

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.

Response:

We should take into consideration that the Open University of Cyprus is a public university and relies heavily on public grant. In any case, the OUC is offering various opportunities for the continuous professional development of its staff, although this can be further enhanced once dedicated funds can be secured by the State. For instance, permanent faculty members can use internal funds for research activities and participation in conferences, workshops, training, etc. Moreover, they can apply on an annual basis for internally-funded research projects. Training programmes on eLearning tools, instructional design, etc. are offered to all adjunct and permanent teaching staff by the University's competent Units, i.e. ICT and LEMM. All adjunct and permanent staff can also apply in the annual calls of the University's Mobility Office to secure funding for teaching or training purposes in the context of the Erasmus+ Mobility Programme. Permanent faculty members also have sabbatical leaves, which provide faculty members with the opportunity for further professional growth and development.

4. Students *(ESG 1.4, 1.6, 1.7)*

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.

Recommendation:

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.

Response:

Indeed, as indicated by the EEC, the Open University of Cyprus has in place mechanisms to ensure recognition of prior formal education and qualifications from other institutions. All relevant procedures are mentioned in the University's Internal Regulations for Studies, which are available to all prospective and current students. Currently, there is no mechanism in place that will allow recognition of prior experiential (informal) learning at Universities in Cyprus. However, it is something towards which the Ministry of Education and Culture is currently working on. Once this is officially established and approved by the competent Ministry of Education and CyQAA, it will be certainly implemented by the Open University of Cyprus and the MA Programme in 'Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning'.

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

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5. Resources *(ESG 1.6)*

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.

Recommendation:

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.

Response:

The Open University of Cyprus handles students with disabilities with care, and has implemented particular Internal Regulations (please refer to: Εσωτερικοί Κανονισμοί Ατόμων με Αναπηρίες (ΑμεΑ)), which are available in English as well, and are uploaded on eClass so that students have easy access. The tutors will inform the students about these regulations and their rights during the initial meetings of each Thematic Unit. Requests made by students with disabilities, e.g. in relation to the final examinations, extra conveniences for students with dyslexia, etc., are handled by the Students and Programmes of Study Support Unit. As far as compulsory bibliography is concerned, the University's Library and eClass Support Unit provide assistance to students with vision impairments, as course materials are multi-formatted, and students can increase font size. Moreover, some of the Library's electronic resources are "talking books" or have text-to-speech functions and have in compatible electronic reading tools. Still, there is room for improvement; for instance, the University can introduce tools on its website for deaf people, etc. It should also be noted that students with disabilities have extra funding for Erasmus+ mobility for studies or internships abroad.

Recommendation:

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.

Response:

Prospective students are well aware that all Programmes of Study are offered online and that they need to use a personal computer/tablet/mobile phone with internet access to use the University's eLearning Platform. Support cannot be offered to students with no personal equipment or internet access, but we do make sure that the eClass Platform is accessible by all devices (including a mobile phone) if students do not own a PC or laptop.

Recommendation:

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.

Response:

The main education tool is the integrated e-learning environment of OUC, the eClass eLearning Platform. All students and teaching personnel of the University have access to the eLearning Platform. Among others, the Platform provides interactive tools and the possibility for both synchronous and asynchronous methods of communication and collaboration among the University, the students and the teaching personnel. Thus, students and tutors make use of synchronous (chat, videochats, telephone, office hours) and asynchronous (forums, emails) means for their continuous and effective interaction. The forums offered by the OUC eLearning Platform are used for the asynchronous communication between students and tutors. All lectures are conducted via eClass and are recorded so that students can access them wherever and whenever they want. These web lectures also allow dialogue and discussions between tutors and students. Interaction between students – educational material – tutors is also safeguarded by the weekly interactive activities that are included in all modules. In essence, Tutors need to maintain an active community with their student cohorts and the Programme in general on eClass like any other university.

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

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.

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.

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.

Recommendation:

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.

Response:

As far as compulsory bibliography is concerned, the University's Library and eClass Support Unit provide assistance to students with vision impairments, as course materials are multi-formatted, and students can increase font size. Moreover, some of the Library's electronic resources are "talking books" or have text-to-speech functions and have in compatible electronic reading tools. Still, there is room for

improvement; for instance, the University can introduce tools on its website and eLearning Platform for deaf people, etc. To be able to do more for students with special needs, however, the University needs to secure funding and additional staff.

Recommendation:

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.

Response:

The Open University of Cyprus is investing heavily in funds and human resources to continuously enhance instructional design, course offerings and eLearning tools that will improve interactivity of students, fellow students and tutors. Interactive educational activities are provided to students of the MA Programme in 'Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning' on a weekly basis. Moreover, self-assessment exercises are available on eClass. We should take into consideration that the Laboratory for Educational Material and Methodology is staffed by three (3) university officers, and time

Recommendation:

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.

Response:

The formative assessment of the students is applied through many tools. At first, the students receive feedback from the tutors for their weekly interactive educational activities. All the activities are designed to help students achieve the targeted learning outcomes of each module. In many cases and to enhance interaction and group discussions, the students submit their weekly activities in the modules' fora/group discussions where they receive feedback and comments from their fellow students. In the restructured programme, the weekly assignments are marked by Tutors and count for 10% of the total grade, as a way to motive students to participate in the weekly activities and to strengthen the interaction among the group.

Moreover, the students receive tutors' feedback for the two compulsory assignments, which are also clearly linked to the learning outcomes of each module. The provided feedback is of two forms:

    b. A general grade and a grade analysis for each of the four criteria used [(a) the structure and presentation of the text; b) text management, the formulation of ideas and the relevance of the arguments presented; c) the good use of primary and secondary bibliographic sources; and d) the quality of ideas].

    c. A written descriptive account of the strengths and weaknesses of their assignments based on the four abovementioned criteria.

A detailed guide analysing the criteria for assignments' evaluation is also available to the students.

Regarding the summative assessment, the students take the final examination.

The rationale of the assessment, as presented here, is clearly explained in the introduction of each module guide.

Recommendation:

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.

Response:

Students achievements are showcased on eClass, and the Programme's Facebook Group page. Tutors and students can also use Panopto and the University's video platform in case they wish to prepare videos and share their achievements and experiences in the programme. As far as the Programme's invited public talks and lectures are concerned, these are recorded (if conducted through the University's eLearning Tools), and given proper consents by the speakers, are made available on the University's YouTube channel.

7. Additional for doctoral programmes
(ALL ESG)

Not applicable

8. Additional for joint programmes
(ALL ESG)

Not applicable

B. Conclusions and final remarks

by the External Evaluation Committee

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.

by the Open University of Cyprus

First and foremost, we would kindly like to express our gratitude to the External Evaluation Committee (EEC), both for the constructive comments during our online meetings and interviews, and for the detailed written feedback, as part of the evaluation report. The EEC's insights on the programme adds credit to it, given the substantial reputation and expertise of its members in the fields of adult education and distance education.

We greatly appreciate the EEC's positive feedback, expressed throughout the evaluation report, and highlighted particularly at the concluding part, in which the programme is characterized as "...a valuable and well-designed programme, well-led, and supported by a strong and committed academic team", through which the OUC "has the potential to strengthen its role as the leading location of academic and

research expertise in adult education in Cyprus". We also value tremendously the recommendations made by the EEC the purpose being to improve aspects of the programme.

The academic and administrative team of the Open University, after looking thoroughly at the constructive feedback of the EEC, have jointly worked to address the points raised by the Committee aiming at further improving the MA Programme in "Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning", which is offered in Greek (90 ECTS). Our response is structured as follows: under the separate headings identified in the external evaluation report, the EEC's comments (findings, strengths, areas of improvement and recommendations) are reported; these are followed by our responses to all the points identified.

In closing, the Open University of Cyprus and the Academic Team of the M.A. Programme in "Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning", would like to thank the external evaluation committee (EEC) for the very positive reception of the restructured programme. The remarks, suggestions and recommendations of the EEC were very constructive and thoughtful, significantly supporting our efforts to restructure the Programme in the best possible way. All concerns of the EEC (e.g. regarding the structure of the programme, the updated literature, the practical training, etc.) have been considered and addressed by the Open University of Cyprus. To sum up, we submit the revised Greek-taught existing postgraduate Programme "Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning" to the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education to be approved. We are looking forward to a positive decision by the CYQAA regarding the accreditation of a programme that is being offered since the 2014-2015 academic year, which is now updated and revised to meet the needs of students and the relevant labour market, as per the recommendation of the EEC.

C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

Name	Signature
Professor Yannis Manolopoulos, Chairman	
Associate Professor Georgios Deligiannakis. Representative of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences	
Assistant Professor Antonis Zorpas, Representative of the Faculty of Pure and Applied Sciences	
Associate Professor Elpidoforos Soteriades, Representative of the Faculty of Economics and Management	
Mr. Christopher Christodoulides, Director of Administration and Finance	
Mrs. Elena Gregoriou, Head of the Students and Programmes of Study Support Unit	
Mrs. Erato Ioanna Sarri, Coordinating Officer of the Quality Assurance Office, International Relations, Development & Communication Unit	

Date: Click to enter date