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Date: Date.

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

- **Higher Education Institution:**  
Open University of Cyprus
- **Town:** Nicosia
- **School/Faculty (if applicable):** Economics and Management
- **Department/ Sector:** Department/Sector
- **Programme of study- Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)**

**In Greek:**

Programme Name

**In English:**

MA in Educational Leadership & Policy (1,5 years, 90 ECTS)

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



The present document has been prepared within the framework of the authority and competencies of the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education, according to the provisions of the “Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education and the Establishment and Operation of an Agency on Related Matters Laws of 2015 to 2019” [N. 136 (I)/2015 to N. 35(I)/2019].

## A. Introduction

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

On 16<sup>th</sup> October 2020 the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) was briefed in a Zoom meeting by Dr Lefkios Neophytou from the Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, all meetings had to be conducted remotely. The day of the evaluation meetings was Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> October 2020, when the EEC was welcomed by the rector of the Open University of Cyprus, Professor Petros Pashiardis, along with several members of the university, and throughout the day meetings were held with the academic staff who proposed the programme, representatives of administrative staff, the quality assurance committee, distance learning platform team, the university library and three members of the student body.

Members of the EEC were able to ask questions and engage in a fruitful dialogue throughout the day. All questions were answered fully. The committee felt that the event was extremely well organised and the presentations were very helpful.

## B. External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>University</i>
<b>Prof Linda Evans</b>	Professor of education and associate dean of faculty	University of Manchester, UK
<b>Prof. Huber Stephan Gerhard</b>	Professor of education	University of Teacher Education, Zug, Switzerland
<b>Rafaelia Ioannou</b>	Student	University of Cyprus
<b>Prof Rob Kober</b>	Professor	Open University of the Netherlands
<b>Prof Joe O'Hara</b>	Professor of education	Dublin City University, Republic of Ireland
<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>University</b>

## 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*
  - **Comment from the EEC: The programme is based on a similar programme which is taught in Greek and in developing this students and other stakeholders were involved.**
  - *benefits from external expertise*
  - *reflects the four purposes of higher education of the Council of Europe (preparation for sustainable employment, personal development, preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies, the development and maintenance, through teaching, learning and research, of a broad, advanced knowledge base)*
  - *is designed so that it enables smooth student progression*
  - *is designed so that the exams' and assignments' content corresponds to the level of the programme and the number of ECTS*
  - *defines the expected student workload in ECTS*

- *includes well-structured placement opportunities where appropriate*
- *is subject to a formal institutional approval process*
- *results in a qualification that is clearly specified and communicated, and refers to the correct level of the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area*
- *is regularly monitored in the light of the latest research in the given discipline, thus ensuring that the programme is up-to-date*

**Comment from the EEC: There is the intention to monitor regularly, but at the moment, as it is proposed, all three EEC members who research educational leadership are fully agreed that the programme content does not reflect the field's latest research, and in this respect, the programme is not up-to-date**

- *is periodically reviewed so that it takes into account the changing needs of society, the students' workload, progression and completion, the effectiveness of procedures for assessment of students, student expectations, needs and satisfaction in relation to the programme*
- *is reviewed and revised regularly involving students and other stakeholders*

**Comment from the EEC: This is not done so far as the programme is not yet running, but it is clearly intended.**

### 1.3 Public information

#### Standards

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

**Comment from the EEC: These are all listed in the application but not yet published or readily accessible – we assume they will be, once the programme is accredited and begins recruiting students.**

### 1.4 Information management

#### Standards

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

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

You may also consider the following questions:

- *What is the procedure for quality assurance of the programme and who is involved?*  
As described on page 22ff of the application, and as we were told during our site visit, different mechanisms are in place. First, the formal procedure of programme development and the process of the Open University occurs. These are described as internal evaluation procedures. Second is the expertise of the persons developing the programme. Third, regular (at least annual) evaluation by participants of the modules (or thematic units) and conceptual work by the facilitators is expected to ensure the quality and the quality development needed.
- *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.)?*  
The programme is based on an existing and positively evaluated programme delivered in Greek. Prof. Pashiardis led the design of the programme being evaluated, and he was supported by colleagues listed in the application as responsible for the different modules. In meetings as part of the onsite visit, the committee gained a very good impression of the common understanding of aims, target groups, content and macro- and micro-didactical features.
- *How/to what extent are students themselves involved in the development of the content of their studies?*  
No clear evidence was found to address this question.
- *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?*
  - a) To some extent, it does so, particularly in respect of the programme aims. However, the EEC is not entirely convinced that the focus within the



programme content on heroic interpretations and conceptions of institutional leadership reflects up-to-date labour market and workforce-related contextual features of society, in particular. The EEC argues that these elements of society are reflected in educational institutions, where, in many international contexts in the developed world, shared leadership is a prominent feature of school policy and practice. Even if the Cypriot and Greek national contexts deviate from this wider picture of European society trends, it is important for students to be exposed to such alternative practices and to critically examine them, for comparative purposes.

b) The EEC sees a contradiction between the aims and the content as is described in the summary and conclusion below. There is a readiness to take complexity, context and contingency into account, however, there is a strong emphasis on a less critical view of leadership's importance and effectiveness.

- *Do the content and the delivery of the programme correspond to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)?*

Yes, the programme corresponds to the EQF; it is based on the Bologna agreements as part of the 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?*

The programme follows a logical sequence with a clear focus within the stated aims, see pp. 9-14, p. 56, and pp. 58-91 of the application ("2. Application...pdf"). It comprises four compulsory modules and four elective modules; each module has a workload of 15 ECTS.

- *How does the study programme support development of the learners' general competencies (including digital literacy, foreign language skills, entrepreneurship, communication and teamwork skills)?*

The programme also supports general competences, such as those relating to team working and interpersonal relations in the workplace. For non-native English-speakers, the programme will support foreign language skills development. This latter point is important given the stated intention of delivering the programme through the medium of the English language.

- *What are the scope and objectives of the foundation courses in the study programme (where appropriate)? What are the pass rates?*

The programme's mandatory modules or thematic units cover organisation theories, leadership and management theories, systems theory, organisational change, quality management, school effectiveness, and school improvement.

- *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?*

This might vary from student to student. 1,5 years is presented as the target completion period.

- *How is it ensured that the actual student workload is in accordance with the workload expressed by ECTs?*  
The EEC has no information relating to this question.
- *What are the opportunities for international students to participate in the study programme (courses/modules taught in a foreign language)?*  
The programme is taught in English, so non-native English-speakers will be taught in a language that, to them, is foreign.
- *Is information related to the programme of study publicly available?*  
No, it is not yet publicly available.
- *How is the HEI evaluating the success of its graduates in the labour market? What is the feedback from graduates of the study programme on their employment and/or continuation of studies?*  
Since many – if not, most - participants are expected to be already employed (often in education contexts), this issue is less relevant to the programme being evaluated than it might be to other programmes.
- *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)?*  
The programme is not in operation so far, so student feedback cannot be available.
- *What are the reasons for dropping out (voluntary withdrawal)? What has been done to reduce the number of such students?*  
As for above: the programme is not yet in operation.

### 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 proposed graduate programme in Educational Leadership and Policy with 90 ECTS is newly designed and should be offered at the next possible point in time. The programme is well designed insofar as it is well structured, and in accordance with the strategy of the Open University of Cyprus (OUC) and grounded in a particular academic discourse, referred to in programme documentation. It seeks to expand participation beyond the usual participants of the OUC to other regions outside Greece and Cyprus. This appears to be the rationale for developing a programme that mirrors that already offered by the OUC in Greek. By doing that, the programme proposers seek opportunities to establish networks with other countries and attract participants from a wider geographic area than those normally participating in OUC programmes. The aims are quite broad and follow Bloom's learning taxonomy (see application, pp. 9-12). A challenge will be the potential heterogeneity of students as the aims state that both competence development of one's own research on leadership and competence development of one's own practice in leadership should occur. The programme covers areas such as organisation theories, leadership and

management theories, systems theory, organisational change, quality management, school effectiveness, school improvement, evaluation approaches, strategic planning, and quantitative research methods.

The EEC comes to the conclusion, based on the application, the study guides, and information derived from meetings during the on-site visit, that the educational leadership field's current academic discourse is not mirrored in all of the programme's facets. In particular, it is suggested that neither the programme content nor the research upon which it is based are up-to-date or cutting edge; rather, both reflect academic discourses that were current in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, and that have now been superseded, and, in some cases, questioned, within the educational leadership research and scholarship community. The EEC is concerned by, for example, statements in several of the course study guides that imply acceptance that school leaders – those holding principalships or headships – are key determinants of school quality and effectiveness, as indicated by student learning gains. Yet during at least the last decade – and probably a longer period – such causal links have been increasingly challenged and it is now generally accepted that there is no really compelling evidential basis to them. The oversimplified assumption of effective leadership that is presented in the study guides is strongly criticised by critical theoretical discourse – and this discourse is entirely missing from the programme curriculum. It is therefore of concern to the EEC that students enrolling on this programme will not be exposed to alternative perspectives to the heroic leadership one that is perceived as the key to school effectiveness, and, indeed, that they will not be exposed to other up-to-date critical leadership studies. The EEC therefore suggests that the presentation of leadership approaches, theories and theoretical perspectives needs to be problematised and presented within a framework of critical discourse. In this way programme participants will be provided with the conceptual and practical tools to both critique and apply current and emerging theories of educational leadership and related fields.

### Strengths

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

Besides the focus on competence development in various arenas, and allowing for the potential heterogeneity of the participants, the focus on the importance of contextual leadership in complex environments seems to be a very interesting strength, and should be developed. Moreover, the modules are well designed at a *structural* level, even though we feel that, in places, their content needs to be updated.

### 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 suggests that the programme team should reflect on the aims, whether the facilitators of the different modules and in particular the different tutors see potential in achieving both to a higher degree, that the practice and the research “route” of the programme can be successfully completed.

Moreover – even though it was stated by Prof. Pashiardis and colleagues that the current bibliographies are intended solely as foundation texts - it is suggested that the underlying research, reflected in the bibliographies, should be up-dated. As one of the programme’s stated aims is to disseminate cutting edge research, the EEC argues that this is essential. By doing this, critical perspectives within the discourse in leadership and management research could be included, as well as leadership in different contexts beyond education. Additionally, it would be interesting to include literature by authors from different geographical regions, including those of the anticipated students.

Among the texts recommended, are: a recent book by Ärlestig, Johansson and Day to map the state of research in 25 countries, articles by Hallinger et al. and Tian & Huber that map the discipline. Critical (educational) leadership scholarship by key scholars such as Peter Gronn, Helen Gunter, Jacky Lumby, James Spillane and others should be included, and chapter 3 of Linda Evans’s 2018 book on professors as academic leaders offers a ‘new wave’ critical leadership perspective on the concept of leadership. A book to be published by Bloomsbury in 2021 on critical leadership (edited by Steven Courtney, Helen Gunter and others) will serve as an excellent core textbook. The Handbook of Governance, Leadership, Management and Administration in Education by Springer, which is on the way, could serve to enrich the list of literature included in bibliographies. Since it is intended to attract students from the Arab world, the work of researchers of Islamic leadership – such as Saeeda Shah (Leicester University, UK) – would be a valuable addition. Finally, work by scholars such as Hood, McNamara, Brown & O’Hara and Altrichter in the area of culturally responsive evaluation and leadership might also be included, given the focus on context in the stated aims of the programme.

The EEC also has a concern about the predominant focus on quantitative research methods in applied educational research – not least because the bulk of educational leadership research in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is done by qualitative methods, including ethnography. We suggest, as discussed in the meeting, broadening the focus to include qualitative research, particularly in linkage to the units on evaluation. To include qualitative research methods of data collection and analysis could be very helpful for three reasons: first, to serve the aim of the programme in understanding context, complexity and contingency; second, to broaden students’ perspectives on research - even mixed-method approaches are important; third, to enhance the motivation, prior knowledge, and applications potential of students (besides the over-researched field in practice with its low response rates and the enormous amount of unanalysed data by quantitative approaches).

The EEC also recommends expanding the evaluation of teaching and teachers to the organisation level with additional process factors.

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

Sub-area	<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
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<b>1.1</b>	Policy for quality assurance	Compliant
<b>1.2</b>	Design, approval, on-going monitoring and review	Partially compliant
<b>1.3</b>	Public information	Not applicable
<b>1.4</b>	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**

**2.4 Study guides structure, content and interactive activities**

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

#### Standards

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

### **2.2 Practical training**

#### Standards

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

## 2.3 Student assessment

### Standards

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

## 2.4 Study guides structure, content and interactive activities

### Standards

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

*You may also consider the following questions:*

- *Is the nature of the programme compatible with e-learning delivery?*

Yes, it is compatible.

- *How do the programme, the material, the facilities, and the guidelines safeguard the interaction between students, students and teaching staff, students and the material?*

There appears to have been a great deal of care taken at both a structural and a process level to ensure that the interactions between staff, students and content are appropriate and developmental. The study guides are designed in a manner that seeks to structure student engagement in clearly defined sections – each of which is linked to an assessment task that appears to be broadly formative in nature. The nature of the relationship between students and staff is governed by formal guidelines that emphasise respect, developmental engagement, regular contact and a pastoral engagement for those experiencing challenges. The understanding of the operation of these processes was enhanced by engagement with staff and students from connected programmes. Both groups referenced the regular engagement suggesting that the culture of the University is one that is student focused and supportive, recognising the challenging nature of part-time, distance programmes for many students. The success of this type of engagement can be seen in the relatively low dropout rate for the University in general.

- *How many students upload their work and discuss it in the platform during the semester?*
- *How is it monitored that the teaching staff base their teaching and assessment methods on objectives and intended learning outcomes? Provide samples of examination papers (if available).*

The fact that the programme is not, as yet running means that no examination papers were available. However, in the course of discussions with both staff and students of an allied programme, both confirmed that assessment were explicitly linked to learning outcomes and objectives.

- *How are students' different abilities, learning needs and learning opportunities taken into consideration when conducting educational activities?*

The programme documentation indicates an awareness of the need to tailor the teaching and learning activities and approaches to the diverse range of experiences brought by the prospective student body. There is an emphasis, amongst other elements, on:

- applied assessment questions,
- the integration of professional experiences into the class engagement on topics, and
- the shaping of research approaches to the needs of the student body.
- 

The detailed learning outcomes and standards identified at programmatic and thematic unit levels also indicate an awareness to differentiate in a general sense – although it might be argued that more explicit statements of differentiation might be included, particularly given the potential challenges posed for those working in a second language context. The general pedagogic structure appears to take account of the particular needs of a diverse student body with a commitment to small classes (5 minimum / 30 maximum) supported by a designated staff member being important. In addition, the regular engagement between staff and students focusing on weekly assessment activities, structured feedback and what might be described as an 'student at risk' policy focusing



on contact in the event of students failing to engage appears to be important in this context.

- *How is the development of students' general competencies (including digital skills) supported in educational activities?*

(NOTE – I will comment on general competencies here) The programme at its core, as described in the documentation and by the staff in the course of the evaluation discussions, views itself as having an applied, professional development focus. Each of the four core thematic units is intended to examine a different aspect of the professional reality of school leaders working in a range of educational settings. As such, the activities, assessments and content are designed to enhance the participants capacity to deal with an evolving organisational landscape by focusing on the development of key competencies including, but not limited, to those in the areas of :

- Communication
- Research
- Observational
- Evaluation and appraisal
- Interpersonal and boundary management.
- 

The additional work undertaken in the thesis elements is explicitly linked to the enhancement of research and practice competences.

There is a case to be made for a more explicit identification of competences relating to culture and cultural context as a determinant of organisational leadership and evaluation. The need to provide students with a capacity to critique, adapt and perhaps adopt the different models of leadership and evaluation presented from a culturally responsive viewpoint would appear to be important.

- *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?*

As has been mentioned, at its core University faculty see this as an applied programme that explicitly seeks to use the professional practice experiences of the student cohort as a basis for class discussion, assessment and feedback. The centrality of the practice context is confirmed both by the programme documentation and the input of students from other Faculty programmes, and who were at pains to emphasise the relevance and rooted nature of the theoretical inputs to their professional lives.

*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?*

There does not appear to be practical training per se, although arguably the applied nature of many of the assessment activities, seeking in the research methods thematic area, for example, to guide students through the development and application of a number of different quantitative research approaches would have a practical element.

- ***Are students actively involved in research? How is student involvement in research set up?***

Yes, research is seen as a core function of this programme and is integrated in a number of elements. There is a formal research module included as part of the core structure focusing on quantitative research and an option to write a thesis. The programme team view research as being a core element of the programme and both the general programme standards and the specific thematic area standards make reference to its centrality. The academic content bears this out for the most part as did engagement with Faculty students. There is a case to be made for a change of focus with regards to the research thematic area proposed, changing it from one with a broadly quantitative focus that touches on other approaches to a mixed methods or even qualitative approach. This would bring the programme more in line with international comparitors and with what would normally be seen as the needs and capacities of a school leadership student cohort.

It might also be useful to have a more explicit statement as to how the participants who do not choose the thesis option deepen their research focus and competences in the alternative pathway undertaken.

- ***How is supervision of student research papers (seminar papers, projects, theses, etc.) organised?***

As has been mentioned, there is a formal supervisory and support structure put in place with staff required to engage with and provide formative feedback to all student work submitted. At thesis level, there appears to be a traditional supervisory structure in place with faculty given responsibility for regular engagement with individual students throughout the research period.

- ***Do students' assessments correspond to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)?***

The programme team and the students interviewees were both aware of the EQF and, in the latter case at least, had a general awareness of its applicability to the programme. Given the fact that assessments have not yet been undertaken, the explicit commitment of the programme team to reference the EQF along with its referencing in programme documentation can be seen as being important in this context.

- ***How are the assessment methods chosen and to what extent do students get supportive feedback on their academic progress during their studies?***

Programme documentation and engagement with staff both indicate that the choice of assessment methods is driven by pedagogic and regulatory requirements. The statues and practice covering the operation of distance learning institutions in Cyprus require an in-person exam element be included. In addition to this, each thematic area has two assignments and a series of online postings (5 from 10). These latter two are focused on shaping student engagement with the topics under discussion and are broadly formative in nature. The role of feedback in the two written assignments was emphasised by both the staff and student interviewees and was seen as being central to student success with programmes at the University.

There is also an appeals structure in place which provides students who are unhappy with the grade achieved to appeal. There is a possibility of re-grading, which appears to be at the discretion of the Dean.

There is an argument to be made that there are a large number of assessment points on the programme and notwithstanding the developmental nature of much of the feedback, the programme team might consider reducing the level of this requirement. Also, while the appeals mechanism appears very generous, there did not appear to be written criteria that were used to decide on whether appeals were granted or re-marking facilitated. These might be helpful.

- *How is the objectivity and relevance of student assessment ensured (assessment of the degree of achievement of the intended learning outcomes)?*

Again, the lack of an existing cohort makes it difficult to judge this, however, as has been mentioned, there is an awareness at both staff and student level of the need to connect the assessments used to the programme and thematic unit learning outcomes and standards. In addition, the applied nature of many of the assessment tasks as presented and discussed would appear to be indicative of an awareness of the need to link student assessment to the practice-focused learning outcomes presented.

### 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 HEI is explicit in its commitment to the wellbeing of the student cohort undertaking this programme and seeks, through its programme and assessment structures, to ensure that the content, methods and activities are relevant and useful to the programme participants. Both student and staff representatives confirmed the supportive nature of the structures and relationships developed in the HEI in general and there appears to be no reason to doubt that a similar approach will be underpin this new programme.

The applied, research focused and experiential nature of many of the assessment tasks appear appropriate to the cohort undertaking a programme in educational leadership. In addition the nature of the feedback, structure of assessment tasks and commitment to the support of students at all levels appears to be important.

### Strengths

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

Connection of leadership an evaluation as twin academic foci of programme

Detailed linkage of LOs and assessment activities

Nature of feedback structures

Applied nature of many of assessment activities

Centrality of research as a key theme of programme and assessment

**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.*

Broadening of curriculum focus beyond Anglo-American literature

Need for more explicit appeals criteria

Broadening of understanding of research thematic area beyond quantitative research

Need to include culture and cultural responsiveness as criteria for engaging with core literature.

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

Sub-area		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
2.1	Process of teaching and learning and student-centred teaching methodology	Compliant
2.2	Practical training	Compliant
2.3	Student assessment	Compliant
2.4	Study guides structure, content and interactive activities	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.*
- *Training, guidance and support are provided to the teaching staff focusing on interaction and the specificities of e-learning.*
- *Promotion of the teaching staff takes into account the quality of their teaching, their research activity, the development of their teaching skills and their mobility.*
- *Innovation in teaching methods and the use of new technologies is encouraged.*
- *Conditions of employment that recognise the importance of teaching are followed.*
- *Recognised visiting teaching staff participates in teaching the study programme.*

#### 3.2 Teaching staff number and status

##### Standards

- *The number of the teaching staff is adequate to support the programme of study.*  
**Comment from the EEC: additional adjunct staff are expected to supplement the full-time, permanent academic staff team**
- *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.*

**Comment from the EEC: since this programme has not run, this standard cannot be assessed with complete accuracy.**

### 3.3 Synergies of teaching and research

#### Standards

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

*You may also consider the following questions:*

- *Is the teaching staff qualified to teach in the e-learning programme of study?*

Many staff are experienced teachers of e-learning programmes, but new appointees must – along with experienced staff - undertake regular mandatory training on distance learning at the OU of Cyprus. All of those with whom the EEC met, and who are expected to undertake the bulk of the teaching on the programme, are appropriately qualified.

- *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?*

The mandatory training/development referred to above was introduced over a year ago and applies to all teaching staff. It is assessed on a pass/fail basis; it must be passed, and staff members are permitted two attempts to pass it. Adjunct teaching staff in particular commented on how helpful and supportive they had found this provision. Feedback on their teaching is discussed with staff in appraisal meetings, where strategies for development are discussed.

All newly appointed faculty members and adjunct staff are provided with training and development opportunities in relation to teaching methods used at the OUC and, specifically, they are taught to use the university's eLearning platform and other eLearning tools. Tutorials, videos and manuals are available online as supplementary support.

- *How is the teaching performance assessed? How does their teaching performance affect their remuneration, evaluation and/or selection?*

Teaching is assessed both by peers and by students, through feedback. Teaching expertise and proficiency are taken into consideration in recruitment and selection –

though for permanent staff a greater emphasis is placed on research profile. All appointments panels for permanent staff include a majority of external members – often from overseas – which helps to maintain standards in recruiting staff. The university operates an annual recruitment policy, issuing a call for academics who meet their criteria (referred to below), and contract renewal is also subject to these criteria being met.

- *Is teaching connected with research?*

The programme director is a distinguished professor (Pashiardis) with a strong research profile. His involvement should ensure that the programme remains research-led. Five academics are listed as having designed programme and prepared the study guides for each of the programme's courses. Four of these academics are adjunct staff – they are named as those intended to deliver the programme - and three of them were available for discussion on the day of evaluation. Each of them indicated his research interests, and each of their CVs indicate research activity, including participation in funded projects, but limited information is available on research outputs; often only one text is referred to as the most recent or most successful output.

The programme content overall very closely reflects the research interests and expertise of the staff delivering it – although additional adjunct staff are likely to be recruited, and they may be selected on the basis of matching their research interests to the course content. Matching existing staff's research interests and expertise with course design, however, potentially makes for a rather unbalanced curriculum, resulting in omission of key topical areas and issues if there is no one currently on the staff who researches such issues or areas. To a large extent, this matching of interests with course content occurs in all HEI taught programmes worldwide, but, once this OU of Cyprus programme is accredited and starts to run, there is scope to widen the range of topics/issues covered and to recruit adjunct or visiting staff to teach them. It is noted that the OUC's current policy does not allow the employment of visiting academics.

Since the programme being evaluated is a new one, and has not yet been rolled out, assessments of the research-teaching synergy can only be based on stated intentions. It is stated that the programme is intended to include evidence-informed research on 'real' schools and other educational institutions through the creation of professional learning communities where the production of research in the area of educational leadership and policy internationally (as well as locally), is infused in everyday practice, promoting a culture of research use that is incorporated into the programme content and delivery. Regular accessing and interpretation of collected research data and findings are intended to be included in course content across the programme. Specific emphasis is intended to be placed on the understanding of research approaches and methods and the strengths and limitations of each, as well as the ability to understand how the findings of any given study can be effectively re-contextualised. The aim is stated as ensuring that students apply research-based evidence to their practice adds, relying on it much more than on conventional wisdom.

It is noted, too, that the Open University of Cyprus applies a model regarding the division of the academic personnel's teaching load in the three main categories of

activities: teaching, research and administrative work. In the case of OUC faculty members, the teaching load is expected to account for about one third of their overall time, leaving the other two thirds for research and administrative work. Therefore, the academic personnel's teaching load is intended to avoid limiting engagement with research, publications and making contributions to society. This policy should support research-informed teaching. However, the EEC also notes that much of the research incorporated into the programme as a basis of its courses is rather dated and fails to reflect the most up-to-date and state-of-the-art discourses in the field of educational leadership research. This issue was discussed very briefly on the evaluation day with the university rector, who is the programme director. He assured the EEC that much more up-to-date research and related discourses would be incorporated into the programme and reflected in course bibliographies. Whilst this assurance is welcome, the EEC is also concerned that the pool of core teaching staff for this programme may draw upon those who are not necessarily engaged in cutting-edge research that would make the MA programme a flagship research-based programme that reflects 21<sup>st</sup> century discourses in the field, and that addresses an up-to-date research agenda.

*Does the HEI involve visiting teaching staff from other HEIs in Cyprus and abroad?*

The OU of Cyprus recruits adjunct staff – indeed, in the university as a whole, adjunct faculty outnumber permanent academic staff by almost 10 to 1. The policy states, however, that *visiting* staff are not employed. Even if visiting staff were sought, salaries offered may not be high enough to recruit distinguished researchers, of high academic standing, from countries in which it is practice to pay higher academic salaries than in Cyprus. Such academics have the potential to offer really cutting-edge perspectives that could enhance the curriculum – even through *ad hoc* guest lectures – but the costs of recruiting such scholars for more protracted periods may be prohibitive.

• *What is the number, workload, qualifications and status of the teaching staff (rank, full/part timers)?*

All academic staff appointed to the OU of Cyprus must meet specific criteria that are aimed at ensuring that the academic workforce is experienced, well qualified and research-active. They must, *inter alia*, have relevant research and professional experience, and be competent at distance learning teaching and able to use the university's state-of-the-art technology. The university's regulations allow for the recruitment of up to 25% of teaching staff who do not hold a doctorate; 75% must hold doctorates.

For recruitment to teach specifically on the programme, candidates are assessed on the basis of criteria such as:

- relevance of their expertise to the thematic unit that they are interested in teaching.
- general teaching experience at a university and specific experience in
- distance learning over the last five years.
- availability, as evidenced by a signed declaration of duties, and ability to use modern technology.
- research and writing work over the last five years.
- professional experience related to the subject areas of the MA.



- *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)?*

Teaching is evaluated by students, through anonymised questionnaires, and by thematic unit co-ordinators every year or every semester. Feedback is discussed in appraisal meetings with the programme academic co-ordinator, and development strategies are agreed.

### 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.*

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### Strengths

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

Among the teaching staff who met with the EEC, there was evident enthusiasm, high morale and satisfaction and a sense of a good team spirit. The students with whom the EEC met indicated extremely high levels of satisfaction with their teaching staff (most of whom will be those delivering the programme being evaluated) – above all, they emphasised teaching staff's supportive attitudes and their availability. It is evident that teaching staff are committed to providing an excellent student experience that includes nurturing and supporting students in all aspects of their lives as students at the OUC.

The programme being evaluated will benefit from having as its co-ordinator a distinguished professor who has a high profile among the educational leadership research community in Europe. This should ensure that the programme is research-led. Another strength is the incorporation into the programme of student research as a basis for professional practice – and the students with whom the EEC met confirmed that this research focus had greatly contributed to their own professional practice, enhancing it and injecting rigour into it.

There is evidently a research culture at the OUC, with all teaching staff being encouraged to engage with research, and to apply their research specialisms and expertise to the design and delivery of their courses. High standards are in place to ensure that teaching staff recruited are appropriately qualified for the substantive and methodological elements of what they teach, and engage in research to inform their teaching.

Staff professional development and training provision is good, and several members of the teaching staff who met with the EEC highlighted the benefits of engaging with such provision.

Staff recruitment is transparent, aimed at ensuring high standards, and draws upon the expertise of external – often overseas-based – expert advice, who form part of appointments panels.

### 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 is rather concerned by much of the content of the programme, as indicated in study guides. In particular, there are significant omissions of topics and issues that reflect up-to-date discourses in the field, and which have

been current for around the last decade or more, while very dated issues and perspectives dominate the content of the study guides. While much of this concern applies to and is addressed within section 1 of this report, it also reflects the issues covered in this section, for the EEC feels that this apparent out-datedness of course content reflects the research activity, foci and expertise of teaching staff – in particular, and notwithstanding the rector’s response to these concerns when they were expressed on the evaluation day, the EEC is concerned that those members of the programme teaching team who hold professional posts may simply not have had the time or opportunity to keep up with the most up-to-date research in the field, and, as a result, the research upon which they base course content is not state-of-the-art.

To address this problem, if the OUC wants this programme to truly reflect the most up-to-date research and associated discourses, it would benefit greatly from the involvement of distinguished overseas-based researchers in the field of (educational) leadership and policy, as visiting professors. This would mean revisiting the university’s policy on employing visiting academics. Such visiting professors’ involvement might initially be confined to a small number of guest lectures, which may be an extra-curricular element of the programme – thus adding value to the student experience. Categorising them as keynotes would, by raising the status of such guest lectures, encourage the participation of distinguished academics. While the OUC rector is himself very familiar with the educational leadership research community and should be able to identify potential guest lecturers whose involvement is likely to enhance the programme by contributing to a programme of controversial lectures intended to stimulate out-of-the-box thinking, the EEC chair, Linda Evans, is most willing to offer suggestions, if required.

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

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

###### Standards

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

##### 4.2 Student progression

###### Standards

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

##### 4.3 Student recognition

###### Standards

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

#### 4.4 Student certification

##### Standards

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

*You may also consider the following questions:*

- *Are the admission requirements for the study programme appropriate? How is the students' prior preparation/education assessed (including the level of international students, for example)?*

The students' degrees from prior education are taken into consideration for admission, to build an image about the theoretical or practical knowledge the candidates already have. Applicants must hold a degree from an accredited university/ tertiary education institution, have very good knowledge of English language as the programme is offered in English, and be competent in the use of computers and Microsoft programs. It is not clear what admissions criteria will be used if prospective students present certification and documentation obtained from international institutions.

- *How is the procedure of recognition for prior learning and work experience ensured, including recognition of study results acquired at foreign higher education institutions?*

There are no clear criteria relating to work experience; students' interests and what they want to do in the future are taken into consideration. Students enrolled in a programme of study offered by the Open University of Cyprus can apply for module recognition and transfer of credit units.

- *Is the certification of the HEI accompanied by a diploma supplement, which is in line with European and international standards?*

The certification of the HEI is 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.*

Through the on-site visit and the study of the material given provided by the OUC, it seems that student access policies are implemented consistently. For the admission requirements, students' prior education is assessed. As indicated by students met through the onsite visit, there are no clear criteria relating to work experience; students' interests and what they want to do in the future are the considerations. Students' degrees are taken into consideration for admission, to build an image about the theoretical or practical knowledge the candidates already have; applicants must hold a degree from an accredited university/tertiary education institution, have very good

knowledge of the English language, since the programme is offered in English, and have competency in the use of computers and Microsoft programs.

Processes and tools for collecting information about student progression are in place. Each faculty collects information about each student's progress; this exercise is manageable because of the small number of students in each class in master programmes. Very frequent communication and strong relationships between teachers and students are evident, because as the teachers said, they want to make up for having little face-to-face interaction with students. Synchronous and asynchronous communication tools facilitate frequent support, such as eClass, office hours, telephone, emails, virtual communication, and face-to-face meetings.

Appeals processes that involve external groups are in place for addressing problems, with the intention of keeping students happy and satisfied with their programmes. Student-centredness is a key tenet of the university's espoused culture and principles, where students' individual needs and interests are taken into consideration. As indicated by the students with whom the EEC met, frequent and regular evaluation occurs through weekly assignments, in order to monitor their progression. Students are given feedback every week – provision that, as the student representatives told the EEC, is of great benefit to them in preparing them for the final exams; the weekly assignments are manageable.

The students with whom the EEC met highlighted the excellent support they receive from their teachers, and the very good relationships they enjoy with them; they feel there is understanding on the part of their teachers, with whom they are in touch all year round, and who are readily available for discussion and for addressing problems.

From studying the documentation provided to the EEC, it seems that there is fair recognition of higher education qualifications that ensure students' progress in their studies. Students enrolled in a programme of study offered by the Open University of Cyprus can apply for module recognition and transfer of credit units. This recognition can involve up to 25% of the programme's total ECTS units. Students enrolled in a programme of study offered by the Open University of Cyprus, who have successfully completed stand-alone thematic units or another programmes offered by the OUC, can apply for module recognition and credit transfer, depending on the relevance of the modules, as long as these do not exceed 50% of the total ECTS credits of the programme in which they are enrolled.

Students are awarded 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. The master's degree is approved by the president and board of trustees of Saint Louis University. A diploma supplement is issued for all students participating in mobility programmes, such as Erasmus, and is in line with European and international standards

### Strengths

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

There are evidently extremely high levels of support and understanding between students and their teachers, cemented by strong relationships, student-centeredness, frequent and regular evaluation to monitor students' progress. This provision results in high levels of student satisfaction with the OUC. The rule which allows study periods to last for up to six years provides valued flexibility for part-time students facing changes and challenges in their professional and personal lives.

This programme provides many employment opportunities. Its graduates can be gainfully employed as, inter alia, officers in national ministries of education or regional educational regional offices, school principals or headteachers and other senior leadership positions in schools, school inspectors/advisors, officers at banking institutions' educational centres, university research centres, etc.

The EEC was impressed by the ambitions of university, and specifically of the programme staff, to recruit students from a diversity of academic backgrounds, including international students from all over the world. This ambition is well aligned with the aims of an open university.

### 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.*

One recommendation is to continue developing effective strategies for attracting international students and strengthening collaborations with overseas universities. This postgraduate programme in Educational Leadership and Policy could be advertised in various ways abroad, in Europe and on other continents.

It is not mentioned what admissions criteria will be used if prospective students present certification and documentation obtained from institutions other than universities within Cyprus and Greece. How are these dealt with? Who deals with foreign qualifications or even foreign students?

How is there a balance between theory and practice, for graduate students who do not work and cannot apply what they learn in their workplace? There should be an opportunity for these students to go to a workplace sometimes in semester as part of the course, in order to put into practice the theoretical background they are learning.

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

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

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

### 5.2 Physical resources

#### Standards

- *Physical resources, i.e. premises, libraries, study facilities, IT infrastructure, are adequate to support the study programme.*
- *Adequacy of resources is ensured for changing circumstances (change in student numbers, etc.).*
- *All resources are fit for purpose and students are informed about the services available to them.*

### 5.3 Human support resources

#### Standards

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

### 5.4 Student support

#### Standards

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

#### 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.*

#### In general

The available teaching and learning resources must fit the teaching and learning model of the university. Briefly described, they are as follows. The university:

- provides modular courses to mainly adult students (average 37 years old) in a semester system that can be studied within the context of a degree programme or as a single course for lifelong learners,
- offers the courses using flexible distance teaching facilities,
- uses a single, well maintained, digital learning environment (eClass) that is used for all its online education. eClass provides a unified digital learning environment that is composed of the different digital synchronous and asynchronous communication facilities and digital resources that are required to deliver high quality distance education,



- Uses, besides eClass, other communication media like telephone, email and face-to-face contact to communicate with students and tutors,
- puts effort into the selection and training of tutors who are able to teach at a distance, using the infrastructure of the OUC,
- has exam centres in Cyprus, Greece and other places for the final examinations where the student's physical presence is required.
- Students are very positive about the social interaction that is organised. In this way they do not feel isolated, as is the case with some other distance teaching institutions. Also the teaching staff is very approachable and willing to help them.

### *Standards: Teaching and Learning resources*

- *Weekly interactive activities per each course are set.*

The university sets standards for the interactive activities for every course. Required are 10 activities per semester (14 weeks incl. exams). The kind of interaction is not described, this is up to the individual tutors to decide. Activities can vary from essays, simulations, serious games to short quizzes. Important elements of this provision are providing feedback, working in small groups and stimulating discussions between students so that they are engaged constantly.

- *The e-learning material and activities take advantage of the capabilities offered by the virtual and audio-visual environment.*

Although most digital facilities for courses are still in development, during the visit it was mentioned that the team was aiming at the development of simulations and games, case studies and role-play. This development needs the support of the limited number of available resources at the university for pedagogical and technical support, so it could take time for the full implementation of these aspects of the programme.

- *A pedagogical planning unit for e-learning, which is responsible for the support of the e-learning unit and addresses the requirements for study materials, interactive activities and formative assessment in accordance to international standards, is established.*

Teachers are supported, through the UOC Educational Methodology & Educational Material Lab, to develop educational materials for their online courses and helps them to solve pedagogical design issues during course development. An issue is that only a limited number of staff is available for all the programmes of the university, e.g. 3 interactive designers. A priority list has been drawn up, but it could take a considerable time before this programme gets the support it needs for its full implementation.

- *Adequacy of resources is ensured for changing circumstances (change in student numbers, etc.).* There are some facilities that are dependent on student numbers, e.g. the number of computer(s) (rooms) for research methods courses using SPSS with tutor guidance. A room has 20-30 computers. When more computers are needed the number of rooms used can be increased, and, in cases of urgency, there is the possibility of using the facilities of the University of Cyprus.
- *All resources are fit for purpose.* This seems to be the case.
- *Student-centred learning and flexible modes of e-learning and teaching, are taken into account when allocating, planning and providing the learning resources.* Students have a lot

of flexibility in tempo, within certain boundaries (e.g. max. 6 years for a master's programme) and the programme is able to cope with the planning issues derived from this flexibility.

#### *Standards: Physical resources*

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

From the documentation and the site visit we learned that the university has adequate and readily available resources that are required for a distance teaching university, considering that students are not working on campus but at various locations, like their home or work. With respect to the library, there is a joint effort on the part of all three universities; students can access all the major journals for this programme. With respect to the IT infrastructure: the university maintains its own data centre with the required security and redundancy. Facilities for face-to-face classes, including computer rooms, are available.

#### *Standards: Human support resources*

- *Human support resources, i.e. tutors/mentors, counsellors, other advisers, qualified administrative staff, are adequate to support the study programme.*

The human support resources that are available at the university for this program are adequate and can be adapted to changing needs of the programme.

#### *Standards: Student support*

- *Students well supported, given their different backgrounds.*

Distance teaching universities have to deal with a very heterogenous student population, not only in age, but also prior knowledge and experience. At the UOC, students are well supported and informed. A good indicator of the adequacy of student support is the student retention rate (or its opposite, the dropout rate). The university reports 5% dropout. This is very low in comparison to other distance teaching universities. This is partly due to the way in which dropout is calculated (for a master's programme students who do not finish within 6 years are counted as dropouts), but is also attributed to the flexibility students have in their planning, and the intensive interaction that is provided to engage students. On average, students attain between 15-30 ECTS per study year in the university.

With respect to course support, all tutors are available 3 hours per week for students in general. Tutors have to be available for students during these 3 hours, and in addition students can make individual appointments with them.

The number of tutors available is planned by the university. Each new programme starts with a limited number of students and is expanded gradually. The standard is to have 5 – 30 students per tutor. When the number of students grows, new tutors are recruited.

### Strengths

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

*Adequate learning environment and learning resources, especially the eClass facility and the joint library facilities.*

*- Adequate pedagogical approach to engage students on a weekly basis with interactive activities. Students are very satisfied with this.*

### 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 number of interaction designers (3) and their limited availability for the programme is an issue. The EEC recommends increasing these resources and making at least one FTE interaction designers available for the programme the coming year. Otherwise the ambition to produce simulations, games and self-assessment tests are not feasible.

The drop-out number seems to be very low at 5%. However, the calculation used is also very liberal and atypical, and does not give a good (international) comparative overview of the actual dropout and retention. The recommendation is to report on a yearly basis the number of ECTs attained by the students, not only as an average, but also as a histogram. The students who attained near 0 ECTs can be categorised as dropouts. It could be that they restart their study the following year, but these should then be categorised as restarters after an interruption.

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

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

## 6. Additional for doctoral programmes (ALL ESG)

### Sub-areas

#### 6.1 Selection criteria and requirements

#### 6.2 Proposal and dissertation

#### 6.3 Supervision and committees

### 6.1 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*

### 6.2 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.*

### 6.3 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*
  - *support for writing research papers*

- *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:**

<b>Sub-area</b>		<b>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</b>
<b>6.1</b>	Selection criteria and requirements	Choose answer
<b>6.2</b>	Proposal and dissertation	Choose answer
<b>6.3</b>	Supervision and committees	Choose answer

## 7. Additional for joint programmes (ALL ESG)

### Sub-areas

#### 7.1 Legal framework and cooperation agreement

#### 7.2 The joint programme

### 7.1 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*

### 7.2 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		<i>Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant</i>
7.1	Legal framework and cooperation agreement	Choose answer
7.2	The joint programme	Choose answer

## D. Conclusions and final remarks

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

The EEC is appreciative of the warm welcome received from the Open University of Cyprus rector and staff, and of the time taken to prepare and present us with extensive information on the new programme, and to address our questions.

The committee concludes that the notion of a master's programme in educational leadership and policy, delivered in English, as proposed, is sound; it would cover an area of knowledge not currently covered by the OUC's taught programmes – an area that features as the subject of hundreds of taught programmes in universities worldwide. Particularly pleasing is the intended focus on applying research-derived knowledge to professional practice.

All the evidence that the EEC gleaned suggests that the OUC has an extremely strong record of student nurturing and emotional support, and the proposed programme will undoubtedly follow this well-established model of excellence in student welfare.

In terms of the programme's design and delivery – including its proposed curriculum – the EEC urges the OUC to extend its teaching team to include tutors (whether of adjunct, visiting or even permanent status) who undertake, and could disseminate, through the courses, cutting-edge research in the field that incorporates consideration of critical leadership studies, leader-scepticism, and different models of leadership presented from a culturally responsive viewpoint. Such recruitment of additional teaching team members could make significant contributions towards transforming what is in many respects a 20<sup>th</sup> century curriculum (as it is currently proposed) into one that reflects 21<sup>st</sup> century research and scholarship that is global in focus, rather than narrowly Anglo-American, in the (educational) leadership field; moreover, recruiting more women academics would not only help even out a gender imbalance among the teaching team, but would also convey to students the message that leadership is not the domain of men only. Increasing the number of e-learning support staff, too – specifically, interaction designers - would enhance programme delivery by facilitating the introduction onto the programme of innovative learning approaches involving simulations and games, and self-assessment tests.





## E. Signatures of the EEC

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Linda Evans	
Rafaelia Ioannou	
Stephan Huber	
Joe O'Hara	
Rob Koper	
Click to enter Name	

**Date:** 05.11.20