

Doc. 300.1.1/2

Date: Date.

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

- **Higher Education Institution:**
    - Frederick University
  - **Town:** Nicosia
  - **School/Faculty (if applicable):** School of Education and Social Sciences
  - **Department/ Sector:** Department of Education
  - **Programme of study:**  
Special Education (¾ academic semestres, 90/110, ECTS, Maser (MEd), Distance Learning)
- In Greek:**
- Ειδική Εκπαίδευση (3/4 ακαδημαϊκά Εξάμηνα, 90/110 ECTS\*, Μάστερ (MEd), Εξ αποστάσεως)
- In English:**
- Special Education
- **Language(s) of instruction:** Greek
  - **Programme's status:** Currently Operating



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.*

The Evaluation Committee consisted of 4 academics and a student representative who participated in the online evaluation of the Frederick University and the MEd program “Special Education” (Distance Learning). After a briefing by the Rector of the University, the Committee received a detailed presentation on the proposed program by the academic team. This was followed by meetings with teaching and administrative staff. The Committee also had an opportunity to meet and discuss matters with student representatives. Since the evaluation was conducted online and the program is offered online, a tour in the facilities was not necessary.

The Committee would like to thank colleagues at Frederick University for providing all the requested documentation and evidence for the purpose of conducting this evaluation and preparing this report.

These included among others:

1. Presentations to the Committee
2. Dissertation handbook and syllabus
3. Assessment guidelines for written assignments
4. CVs of permanent staff and associate teaching staff
5. Assessment guidelines for written assignments
6. Dissertation samples
7. Workload policy
8. Module evaluations
9. Recorded online lectures

## B. External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>University</i>
<b>Ona Bø Wie</b>	Full Professor	University of Oslo
<b>Susanne Schwab</b>	Full Professor	University of Vienna
<b>Pantelis Papadopoulos</b>	Associate Professor	University of Twente
<b>Joseph Calvin Brojomohun-Gagnon</b>	Full Professor	University of Helsinki
<b>Evrydiki Kolokoudia</b>	Student	University of Cyprus

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

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

### **Findings**

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

### **Strengths**

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

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

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

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

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

### Sub-areas

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

### 1.1 Policy for quality assurance

#### Standards

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

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

#### Standards

- *The programme of study:*
  - *is designed with overall programme objectives that are in line with the institutional strategy and have explicit intended learning outcomes*
  - *is designed by involving students and other stakeholders*
  - *benefits from external expertise*
  - *reflects the four purposes of higher education of the Council of Europe (preparation for sustainable employment, personal development, preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies, the development and maintenance, through teaching, learning and research, of a broad, advanced knowledge base)*
  - *is designed so that it enables smooth student progression*
  - *is designed so that the exams' and assignments' content corresponds to the level of the programme and the number of ECTS*
  - *defines the expected student workload in ECTS*
  - *includes well-structured placement opportunities where appropriate*
  - *is subject to a formal institutional approval process*

- *results in a qualification that is clearly specified and communicated, and refers to the correct level of the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area*
- *is regularly monitored in the light of the latest research in the given discipline, thus ensuring that the programme is up-to-date*
- *is periodically reviewed so that it takes into account the changing needs of society, the students' workload, progression and completion, the effectiveness of procedures for assessment of students, student expectations, needs and satisfaction in relation to the programme*
- *is reviewed and revised regularly involving students and other stakeholders*

### 1.3 Public information

#### Standards

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

### 1.4 Information management

#### Standards

- *Information for the effective management of the programme of study is collected, monitored and analysed:*
  - *key performance indicators*
  - *profile of the student population*
  - *student progression, success and drop-out rates*
  - *students' satisfaction with their programmes*
  - *learning resources and student support available*
  - *career paths of graduates*
- *Students and staff are involved in providing and analysing information and planning follow-up activities.*

You may also consider the following questions:

- *What is the procedure for quality assurance of the programme and who is involved?*
- *Who is involved in the study programme's design and development (launching, changing, internal evaluation) and what is taken into account (strategies, the needs of society, etc.)?*
- *How/to what extent are students themselves involved in the development of the content of their studies?*
- *Please evaluate a) whether the study programme remains current and consistent with developments in society (labour market, digital technologies, etc.), and b) whether the content and objectives of the study programme are in accordance with each other?*
- *Do the content and the delivery of the programme correspond to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)?*
- *How is coherence of the study programme ensured, i.e., logical sequence and coherence of courses? How are substantial overlaps between courses avoided? How is it ensured that the teaching staff is aware of the content and outputs of their colleagues' work within the same study programme?*
- *How does the study programme support development of the learners' general competencies (including digital literacy, foreign language skills, entrepreneurship, communication and teamwork skills)?*
- *What are the scope and objectives of the foundation courses in the study programme (where appropriate)? What are the pass rates?*
- *How long does it take a student on average to graduate? Is the graduation rate for the study programme analogous to other European programmes with similar content? What is the pass rate per course/semester?*
- ***How is it ensured that the actual student workload is in accordance with the workload expressed by ECTS?***
- *What are the opportunities for international students to participate in the study programme (courses/modules taught in a foreign language)?*
- *Is information related to the programme of study publicly available?*
- *How is the HEI evaluating the success of its graduates in the labor market? What is the feedback from graduates of the study programme on their employment and/or continuation of studies?*
- *Have the results of student feedback been analysed and taken into account, and how (e.g., when planning in-service training for the teaching staff)?*
- *What are the reasons for dropping out (voluntary withdrawal)? What has been done to reduce the number of such students?*

### Findings

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

The School of Education at Frederick University consists of a large group of teachers with solid credentials and a range of research interests covering diverse and relevant topics. The Special Education programme is



offered only online and includes a mandatory 3-semester programme (90 ECTS) and an optional practicum that can be completed in the fourth semester and accounts for 20 ECTS (for a total of 110 ECTS). The programme includes 6 mandatory courses, each accounting for 10 ECTS, while the students have the choice to work on a Master thesis (30 ECTS) or enroll in three elective courses (10 ECTS each).

The programme is highly successful with a total of 1700 students currently enrolled in all four running semesters. The vast majority of students are Greek citizens and according to the department the average student enrolled in the programme is a 40-year old in-service teacher with family obligations. The perceived profile of the average student and the wide range of the academic profiles of enrolled students is the basis for some of the decisions made in formulating the programme, according to discussions the Committee had with the University.

The University has an established Quality Assurance (QA) policy and a QA Committee with formal status and function across all offered programs. The role of the QA Committee is to focus on a higher level and examine dropout/retention rates, student satisfaction, program regulations, etc. At the programme level, a formal board is in charge of reviewing the study programme, the content, alignment and coherence of the courses offered, and the overall learning experience of the students. A student representative is included in both the QA Committee and the programme's review board.

The Committee's analysis of the study programme is based on two pillars

- Does the quality, depth, and focus of the offered programme mirror the MEd in Special Education degree one would expect from an EU university? And,
- Is the instructional design appropriate to deliver effectively and efficiently such a programme online?

The strengths and areas of improvement regarding these two topics are discussed in the following sections.

### Strengths

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

It is certainly a positive thing that students' opinion is taken into account in assessing and reviewing the offered programme.

It is also a strength that quality assessment and programme review cycles are happening regularly and that this process has already resulted in improvements to the programme during the last years. Such an improvement was the increased number of elective courses offered in the programme.

The high number of students enrolled and the low number of dropouts (~5%) also suggest that the program is highly desirable and that it fulfils actual educational needs.

The teachers involved in the programme are well-trained and they have to attend a 0 ECTS course on online teaching.

The Distance Learning Unit (DLU) is a formal unit in the University responsible for teaching training in online Education and it also acts as the liaison between the University and the students in several ways. The practices, services, and support from DLU seems well-designed and aligned to similar units in other EU universities.

### 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 programme seems to cover many different topics, but lacks focus despite the fact that the programme mentions that the students are expected to acquire “excellent knowledge” on several topics. There are courses that provide broad, introductory information (e.g., Current Trends) and courses that are too specialized and, maybe, detached from the rest of the programme (e.g., Antiracist Education). Students with Bachelor degrees in Primary or Secondary Education should be familiar with many of the topics covered in the programme, while courses such as Research Methodology appear content-heavy and highly challenging for someone that has no experience with quantitative methods and inferential statistics. In the end, the Committee believes that the programme should be better aligned to the advertised learning goals. With such a broad audience, it is expected that not all student needs will be matched perfectly with the offered programme. Therefore a suggestion would be to increase even further the number of elective courses, strengthen the role of study advisors, and provide different tracks for people with different backgrounds. Shorter courses of ECTS could also be used to provide added value to previously acquired knowledge (e.g., introductory/advanced statistics) and increase the flexibility and adaptability of the programme.

Understandably, a study programme should address the needs of an identified audience. At the same time, though, it has to be aligned with the learning goals routinely linked to an MEd in Special Education. The refugee crisis may provide justification for including a course on Antiracist Education, but it is not necessarily adequate justification to make the course mandatory. It may be beneficial for the University and the audience it attracts to make the target audience explicit (e.g., in-service teachers) and offer relevant, but not core courses, as electives for students that want a broader spectrum.

Another recommendation to increase the focus and flexibility of the programme is to include electives from different programmes across the university. This would allow for a focused set of core courses while offering different tracks to students with different backgrounds.

Because of the current success of the programme, each course may have many teachers. Even though there is only one course coordinator and there are efforts to synchronise the teachers, it is also expected that the learning experience offered may differ between groups of two teachers. Therefore, the University is further advised to monitor and review homogeneity in instructional design, delivery, engagement, etc. among the student groups within a course.

DLU has a central role in the success of any online programme. The tools, services, and training presented during the evaluation are in line with what should be expected from such a unit. Because of DLU's expertise in online pedagogy, the Committee suggests strengthening its role in reviewing the programme and ensuring its quality.

Making the attendance of the 0 ECTS course on online Education mandatory is a clear strength, but this could be further enhanced by having the teachers going through periodic training activities. Online Education requires innovative pedagogies and relies heavily on emerging technologies. Having regular round tables to discuss best practices, deal with online disengagement, understand student contribution in online groupwork could help teachers dealing with the needs of distance learning programmes.

The internal programme review board could be extended to include representatives of the teachers (apart from the coordinators who also teach) and of DLU.

Regarding the information provided on the programme on the University's webpage, the Committee saw discrepancies between the public information and the application to CYQAA. Specifically, there are only two available spots for elective courses; one in the second and one in the third semester. Similarly, Development Psychology appears as a mandatory course, while there is no description of any of the courses apart from their title. A short description of each course should be available before admission to the programme.

For international students it would be good if also courses in English language would be available. Having so many students there might be the possibility of offering the complete programme also in English language?

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

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

### Findings

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

The teaching staff at the School of Education at Frederick University seems to have a clear understanding about the importance of student-centered learning. DLU has, once again, a pivotal role in educating both teachers and students in effective modes of e-learning.

A teacher may be responsible for up to three course groups, each containing up to 30 participants according to official regulations, to ensure that students in the group remain active. A broad variety of teaching methods is employed (e.g., interactive presentations that include slides, videos, quiz questions, brainstorming techniques) to address students' different preferences for learning material. Moreover, case studies and examples from practices (e.g., videos) are used to ensure that theory and practice is linked well.

Students have an academic advisor who supports them in their individual development. Final grades always consist of various assessment components. Grading guides and rubrics are provided to ensure that the criteria for marking are clear to the students. To ensure that feedback is provided effectively a guide for mentors is used.

Students have the opportunity to be involved in (funded or non-funded) research projects and can also participate in research activities through their master thesis.

According to student's welfare, several services exist at Frederick University. For instance, the University offers the opportunity to form Student Clubs and operates a sports office. A support and counselling office empowers students to perform productively. Further, peer tutoring services are offered. In addition, low achieving students are placed under academic probation and supported within various mechanisms.

### Strengths

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

The teachers track students in DL to ensure that they are actively participating, even if course attendance is not compulsory. For instance, if a student is not attending the course and also not active on the online platform, the teacher will directly contact him/her.

The University offers many possibilities for counselling if a student is personally or academically struggling.

Some of the Frederick University's students who completed their research course and continue to write their thesis, are encouraged to collaborate with the staff and publish their work in international scientific journals. Some examples for joint publications (of students and staff members) were given.

Students have the possibility to participate at additional activities (e.g. webinars, conferences) which are focused on broad topics.

The DLU provides introductory information and tutorials on the use of the online platform and the requirements of the distance learning method.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

As stated in the Application 'Almost all courses include a written final exam in their assessment methods.' To create a more autonomous learning process and also to address students different learning styles it would be recommended to increase the flexibility and to vary with the final exam (e.g., oral exam, seminar work). Moreover, assessments could also be carried out by more than just one examiner. As only a very limited part of the grade is linked with interactive activities (around 5%) it is also recommended to overthink the criteria for marking – to ensure that students are in interaction among each other and with the teaching staff. In addition, multi-tiered systems of support should be established for students and evidence-based practice should be embedded within teaching methods in higher education.

According to the collaboration with schools (which are right now mainly focusing on practice), it is recommended that also research collaborations are strengthened. For example, within the Research Methods course, collaborations could be installed and research could directly address school's needs (e.g., evaluation of a new learning programme, running an intervention study etc.). This would link theory, research,

and practice further and make it obvious for students that research is also needed for school development process.

The access for students with disabilities should be further developed. Especially in the field of special needs, higher education students who themselves have a disability must have the possibility to participate without barriers.

Since the practicum is not mandatory, students, who do not actually teach in schools (or who have already collected teaching experiences), may find it difficult to link theory and practice. Especially for those students the practicum should be highly recommended or even mandatory since the advertised programme goals include practical experience.

Similarly, if students are not writing a thesis their practical experience with research is limited. For those students an elective course on research might be helpful. Otherwise, it would also be possible to divide the master's program into different tracks: one which addresses "Special Education" for in-service teachers and which is strongly focused on inclusive schooling and special schooling and one which is more research-oriented and attracts students, who plan to pursue a research career.

Based on the students' feedback, more knowledge is needed about "how to deal with students with behavioral problems". This is a very important topic in the field of special needs as many teachers are afraid of deviant behavior and class disturbances. Therefore, an elective course would be appropriate.

Opportunities for students to get involved as teaching assistants, research assistants or volunteers need to be expanded. Right now, it seems that there are very limited possibilities and almost no students are participating.

While the University already offers guidance to teachers and students on the requirements and particularities of distance learning through the DLU, these guidelines are not always applied in courses. Specifically, it was mentioned that in several cases, the students are unwilling to switch on their cameras or engage into classroom discussion. This is an issue that has been long identified in online Education and research suggests that such behaviour impedes learning and detaches the student from the class. This behavior has also a significant effect on the teacher's performance and the overall quality of the learning experience. Real-time, meaningful participation must be integrated in the instructional design. The fact that the perceived average student in the programme is 40 years old could suggest that many of the students are not familiar or comfortable interacting with the teacher and their peers online. However, since the programme is offered in a Master programme and not in a MOOC or SPOC, high interactivity, collaboration, group awareness, social inclusion, etc. must not only be encouraged but ensured.

A related issue is the overall production value of the online learning experience. A nicely arranged set up with a clear background, high definition video, right camera angle, and good sound quality can positively affect the learning experience. The University should support the teachers in improving their online presence with seminars and, where needed, appropriate equipment as the build-in camera/microphone of a middle-range laptop are not appropriate for a 2-hour lecture. Perhaps the University could organize teaching awards acknowledging effective and entrepreneurial practices in e-learning, thus further encouraging teachers to improve the overall experience the students have in the programme.

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

#### **3.3 Synergies of teaching and research**

##### Standards

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

- *Teaching staff studies and publications are closely related to the programme's courses.*
- *The allocation of teaching hours compared to the time for research activity is appropriate.*

*You may also consider the following questions:*

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

### Findings

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

The teaching staff qualifications are overall adequate and the number of teaching staff is acceptable to run the master program. All the lecturers hold a PhD securing an adequate level of knowledge. Within a course, there are 30 students per teacher and the teaching staff were motivated to follow up each student supporting them in achieving the planned learning outcomes of the master program. The workload for three groups is considered large, but although a teacher is expected to teach and be responsible for up to three groups and allocate 3h per group during the week, most of the staff had responsibility for 1-2 groups.

The teaching staff are working together effectively to develop and evaluate the content and the quality of this master program. There are ongoing, compulsory, and optional teaching training course for teachers that have issues with their course evaluations.

The qualification of the teaching staff reflects the content of the study programme as containing a more broad perspective of SEN (including a focus on changing the way disability is understood and assessed, managing diversity in education and in society). Although staff contains high expertise within specific areas such as language and mathematical development and disability, social and emotional difficulties, developmental psychology and assessment within special needs education, a part of the staff have background in areas not specific to SEN.

The teaching staff shows high engagement in different community and academic responsibilities. The research strength is strong in parts of the staff. Overall, the publications list show higher activity in conference participation than for publications in highly ranked international journals. The majority of publications are from 2018 or earlier.

### Strengths

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

- 1) Motivated teachers
- 2) The program coordinators are highly motivated, and are well placed to coordinate and evaluate the program and to manage the teaching staff.
- 3) The teaching staff effectively cooperation working together to develop and evaluate the content and the quality of this master program

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

- 1) Increase publication in highly ranking journals  
The list of publications shows there is room for improvement concerning the number of publications and number of staff that has publication in highly ranged journals. Most of the publications date back to 2018 or earlier.
- 2) Look into a possible reduction in teaching load allowing for the staff more time to research and thus higher synergy between teaching and own research.
- 3) Recruiting staff with more in depth knowledge of specific areas within SEN

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

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

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

##### Sub-areas

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

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

###### Standards

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

##### 4.2 Student progression

###### Standards

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

##### 4.3 Student recognition

###### Standards

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

##### 4.4 Student certification

###### Standards

- *Pre-defined and published regulations regarding student certification are in place.*

- *Students receive certification explaining the qualification gained, including achieved learning outcomes and the context, level, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed.*

*You may also consider the following questions:*

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

### Findings

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

Concerning student admission, progression, recognition and certification, the program has identified and published regulations related to the student admission process, including requirements for previous study, proficiency in Greek and English languages, requirements for digital literacy, and guidelines for the recognition of previous coursework. Additionally, requirements for degree certification are identified. Procedures and supports are in place to identify student academic progress and provide supports, if needed. Policies and procedures are also in place with regard to certification of student degrees.

### Strengths

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

It is positive that the requirements for what prospective students must submit in the application are clear. It is explicitly stated, "Prospective students are expected to submit their application and all related documents, such as copies of their degrees, transcripts, two letters of recommendation from professors or supervisors in the workplace and a research interest report."

There are significant strengths in the approach toward Student Progression. Grades serve as the clear requirement for, "*Pre-defined and published regulations regarding student progression are in place.*" Importantly, each student's academic progress is monitored via an Academic Advisor. Evidence of a strong plan for data collection on student progress, information sharing and follow-up sharing is evident: "Faculty members are expected to input in the "Electronic Student Absence and Performance" facility provided through the university's Extranet platform, information regarding student weekly absences and performance for all students in their courses. All Academic Advisors have access to the data concerning all students they are advising, so they can be informed at any point, throughout the semester, of each student's progress. This allows for the early identification and intervention of students with academic or other difficulties. Furthermore, the

Studies and Student Welfare Service organizes twice in each semester “Consultation Weeks” during which all students must meet with their Academic Advisors and discuss their academic progress and concerns.”

A process is also available to place students with inadequate progress on Academic Probation. Although the specifics are unstated, it is identified that students on academic probation are provided, “various mechanisms in order to help the students improve their academic performance.”

Pre-defined and published regulations regarding student recognition are in place. It is appropriately and clearly stated, “Transfer of credits from other academic institutions complies with the regulations of the University for transfer students and recognition of previous studies.”

Another strength is that, “*Pre-defined and published regulations regarding student certification are in place.*” Regulations for certification are clear and detailed.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

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

There are several concerns specifically concerning the requirement of Pre-defined and published regulations regarding student admission are in place. First there is a lack of clarity in the requirements. For example, it is required that applicants have, “A good undergraduate degree from a recognized university.” During the interview, a few examples were provided (e.g., primary education, psychology). However, as written, the requirement is too vague to be useful and to allow for follow-up to see if the requirement is being appropriately followed. There is a need for clarity in the written admission requirement.

A second concern is the alternative requirement to an undergraduate degree: “or the equivalent international qualification or an acceptable professional qualification is considered the main academic requirement.” There was clarification during the interview with administrators and an explanation that this could apply to professionals that earned their degree before the field of teacher education was integrated into the university system. However, there were questions as to if this is still relevant, given how long ago the change was made. Whether or not the issue remains applicable, there is a need for clarity in the written admission requirement.

A third concern is the requirement and assertion that, “very good knowledge of Greek and English is extremely important.” While, for example, the TOEFL is mentioned, there is no minimum requirement that would allow for the objective evaluation of future students. In our discussions with current students in the program, it was also evident that some of them did not have even the most basic level of spoken English. The specific language requirements need additional specificity.

A fourth concern is the mention that students entering the program must have proficiency in “digital literacy.” The term is undefined and there are no criteria for proficiency; both issues need to be addressed in the written information provided to students and used as the basis for acceptance in the program.

A fifth concern is the assertion that an interview will be part of the admissions process for just some prospective students: “Where the Evaluation Program Committee deems necessary, the candidates may be asked for an interview meeting.” There is no information provided that explains the circumstances for which a student would be required to participate in an interview, the focus of the interview, or criteria for a successful interview. These aspects need serious consideration and written explanation for students.

Because so many of the aspects of the admission criteria are undefined and no criterion level is set, it is not possible to ensure that, “Access policies, admission processes and criteria are implemented consistently and in a transparent manner.” Additionally, no information was provided in the application that specifically addressed consistency and transparency.

**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	Non-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.*

*You may also consider the following questions:*

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

- *How students' special needs are considered (different capabilities, different levels of academic preparation, special needs due to physical disabilities, etc.)?*
- *How is student mobility being supported?*

### Findings

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

The Distance Learning Unit has a central role in the Universities online Education and is responsible for a range of services offered to teachers and students. Specifically, DLU offers instructional material, seminars, tutorials, and a 0 ECTS course on modes of distance learning to educate and train teachers and students. In addition, DLU acts as the liaison between students and the University in issues such as welfare, accommodation, and counseling.

The programme includes different types of interactive elements each week such as quizzes, case studies, and problem-solving activities.

The Learning Management System (LMS) used is Moodle, which is a widely used, open-source, adaptable tool. The University maintains an up-to-date online library that can be accessible remotely via VPN services.

- Several human support resources are offered (e.g. academic advisory, tutors, counsellors) to support the study programme but also students personal development. Information about all these services is provided online - therefore students are well informed about the services available to them.

### Strengths

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

The University employs a multi-tier architecture to offer information to the public and services to its academic community through three different platforms.

The University is not solely focusing on students academic development but also offers a lot of social life possibilities.

### 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 lack of free online textbooks limits course materials to just some chapters. Therefore it is recommended to provide adequate access to online textbooks.

Social activities and inclusion efforts are missing for online students. Social interaction, inclusion, and the feeling of belonging to a learning community must be nurtured by the University. Online

events such as casual meetings with peers, past graduates, and teachers in a non-teaching capacity could help students create bonds.

The University kindly provided recorded lectures as supplementary material and it was apparent that the teachers had to rely on the quality of the build-in cameras and microphones of their computers for delivering online Education. Even though it is not connected to the quality of the learning material, the presentation layer of online education is crucial and the University is strongly advised to review the training and equipment the teachers have in setting up and delivering learning experience of high production value.

There is no information on interlibrary loans and agreements that would allow students and academic staff to access publications that are not currently available.

**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	Partially compliant
5.2	Physical resources	Not applicable
5.3	Human support resources	Compliant
5.4	Student support	Compliant

## 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 number of students attending the program, the framework present to secure student contact, and the teaching staff motivation and efforts to ensure that the student could reach their learning potential, impressed the panel.




To sum up the panels main areas for improvement the panel point at

- The broadness of the programme
  - The program strategy aim to give the students an excellent knowledge of the different areas in special needs education (e.g: hearing loss, Down syndrome, ADHD, etc.) The panel found the program to be too broad to be able to meet all the advertised learning goals/strategy. The panel advises to the staff to explore the possibility for increase type of courses that aim to give a more in depth knowledge.
- The need to improve admission criteria and transparency
- An vital need to constantly improve and develop the digital competence of the teachers
- A need to increase and strengthen the research capacity and the amount of academics publishing in top-tier publications

The panel thank the departmental team for their openness in discussions and very helpful attitude.

**E. Signatures of the EEC**

F.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Ona Bø Wie	
Susanne Schwab	
Pantelis Papadopoulos	
Joseph Calvin Brojomohun-Gagnon	
Evrydiki Kolokoudia	

**Date:** 17.04.2021