Doc. 300.3.1/1

External Evaluation Report

(Programmatic within the framework of Departmental Evaluation)

Date: Date.

- **Higher Education Institution:**
  University of Nicosia
- **Town: Nicosia**
- **School/Faculty: School of Business**
- **Department: Digital Innovation**
- **Programme(s) of study - Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)**

Programme 1 – MSc in Blockchain and Digital Currency

In Greek:
Programme Name
In English:
MSc in Blockchain and Digital Currency

Language(s) of instruction: English

Programme 2 – [Title 2]
In Greek:
Programme Name
In English:
Programme Name
Language(s) of instruction: Language(s)

Programme 3 – [Title 3]
In Greek:
Programme Name
In English:
Programme Name
Language(s) of instruction: Language(s)

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

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the assessment was conducted online. It took place on Monday, the 20th of July 2020.

10:00 – 10:10

- A brief introduction of the members of the External Evaluation Committee

10:10 – 10:40

- A meeting with the Rector - Head of the Institution and the Vice Rector of Academic Affairs – short presentation of the Institution
- A meeting with the members of the Internal Evaluation Committee

10:40 – 11:50

- A meeting with the Head of the relevant department and the programme's Coordinator.

Short presentations of:

- The School's / Department's structure
- The programme's standards, admission criteria for prospective students, the learning outcomes and ECTS, the content and the persons involved in the program's design and development

11:50 - 12:00

- *Coffee Break*

12:00 – 13:00

- A meeting with members of the teaching staff of each course for all the years of study (QA session).
  - Discussion on the CVs (i.e., academic qualifications, publications, research interests, research activity, compliance with Staff ESG), on other duties in the institution and teaching obligations in other programmes.
  - Discussion on the content of each course and its implementation (i.e., methodologies, selected bibliography, students' workload, compliance with Teaching ESG).
  - Discussion on the learning outcomes, the content and the assessment of each course and their compliance with the level of the programme according to the EQF.
  - Discussion on assessment criteria, samples of final exams or other teaching material and resources.

13:00 – 14:00

- *Lunch Break*

14:00 – 14:30

- A meeting with students only or/and their representatives.

14:30 – 14:45

- A meeting with members of the administrative staff.

14:45 – 15:30

- A virtual visit to the premises of the institution (i.e., library, computer labs, teaching rooms, research facilities).

B. External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

Name	*Position*	*University*
Horst Treiblmaier	Full Professor and Head of the Department of International Management	Modul University Vienna
Roman Beck	Full Professor at the Business IT department	IT University of Copenhagen
Markos Zachariadis	Full Professor in Financial Technology and Information Systems	University of Manchester
Andreas Sokratous	Student at the University of Cyprus	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 each 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.

Findings for MSc in Blockchain and Digital Currency

- UNIC has several mechanisms in place to guarantee internal and external quality assurance. The external procedures follow the respective standards of higher education institutions and especially private universities in Cyprus. According to the information the EEC received, the internal standards follow the European Guidelines and Standards for Quality Assurance (2015) and the Greek Law on Higher Education.
- The given information indicates that the present standards support the organization through the provision of appropriate structures, regulations and processes. When it comes to teaching, the EEC found that the workload of the respective courses (expressed in ECTS) is clearly specified. Furthermore, there are detailed processes for student placement.

Strengths

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

Strengths for MSc in Blockchain and Digital Currency

- The Department of Digital Innovation has policies that are designed to encourage student participation. This is especially important in an area that undergoes constant changes and needs the inflow of information from outside stakeholders, be it students or industry partners. Furthermore, the processes for the programme evaluation are detailed and are designed to ensure its flexibility. All in all, the programmes are well-aligned with the institutional strategy, innovative and designed to correspond to a need on the market. This can also be attributed to the fact that the distance learning programme has been on the market for a while and was already successfully tested.
- The EEC is also very positive in its assessment of students' future career perspectives which is also a major goal of quality assurance. There is strong evidence in the provided study guides that the course material incorporates recent developments and is well-suited to equip students with the skills currently needed on the labour market. Furthermore, the program is flexible in that it enables students to initially choose between an online and a traditional teaching mode and, later in their studies, to choose between a more business-oriented and a technical orientation, which serves the needs of different target groups.
- The external affiliates, namely the high-calibre industry partners are another outstanding feature of the programmes. The close connection with prominent players in the field not only supports the development of the curriculum, but also helps students to already establish important contacts with the industry during their studies.

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.

Areas of improvement and recommendations for MSc in Blockchain and Digital Currency

- To be able to fully assess the extent to which quality can be assured in all relevant areas, more information is needed. This especially pertains to information regarding to drop-out rates and student satisfaction. The latter should be given for each course. Additionally, data on how the satisfaction rates have developed over time would be helpful. To be able to cope with the problem of conducting online exam, trainings for instructors would be helpful to teach them how to identify and deal with plagiarism.
- The EEC also found insufficient information when it comes to ethical issues, which especially includes the topic of discrimination.
- A stronger focus should also be placed on the personal development of students. Strategies on how to achieve this can be incorporated, for example, through diverse teaching methods that foster collaboration. It is especially important to support students in their development of leadership skills. All in all, a structured way of monitoring students' satisfaction and overall progress is recommended. The optional nature of the Master Thesis is a weak point of the programme as the students who do not take this option will miss the opportunity to be involved in real-world research work. To evaluate this aspect further, data should be provided on how many students opt for a thesis in the current programme.

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

Sub-area		***Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant***		
		MSc in Blockchain and Digital Currency		
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	Compliant		

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

Sub-areas

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

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

Standards

- *The process of teaching and learning supports students' individual and social development.*
- *The process of teaching and learning is flexible, considers different modes of delivery, where appropriate, uses a variety of pedagogical methods and facilitates the achievement of planned learning outcomes.*
- *Students are encouraged to take an active role in creating the learning process.*
- *The implementation of student-centered learning and teaching encourages a sense of autonomy in the learner, while ensuring adequate guidance and support from the teacher.*
- *Teaching methods, tools and material used in teaching are modern, effective, support the use of modern educational technologies and are regularly updated.*
- *Mutual respect within the learner-teacher relationship is promoted.*
- *The implementation of student-centred learning and teaching respects and attends to the diversity of students and their needs, enabling flexible learning paths.*
- *Appropriate procedures for dealing with students' complaints regarding the process of teaching and learning are set.*

2.2 Practical training

Standards

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

2.3 Student assessment

Standards

- *Assessment is consistent, fairly applied to all students and carried out in accordance with the stated procedures.*
- *Assessment is appropriate, transparent, objective and supports the development of the learner.*

- *The criteria for and method of assessment, as well as criteria for marking, are published in advance.*
- *Assessment allows students to demonstrate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved. Students are given feedback, which, if necessary, is linked to advice on the learning process.*
- *Assessment, where possible, is carried out by more than one examiner.*
- *A formal procedure for student appeals is in place.*
- *Assessors are familiar with existing testing and examination methods and receive support in developing their own skills in this field.*
- *The regulations for assessment take into account mitigating circumstances.*

You may also consider the following questions:

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

Findings

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

Findings for MSc in Blockchain and Digital Currency

- The processes with which the programme promotes cooperation between students are well-developed, but room for improvement still exists. There appears to be a fair amount of flexibility in the way the programme is carried out, namely by combining frontal teaching with hands-on exercises. Students are encouraged to be active in the learning role. Teamwork among students in encouraged through team assignments and projects-based learning activities. Furthermore, the teaching staff promotes students' autonomy. Teaching methods at the university make use of modern equipment. The programme appeals to its diverse pool of students. The structure of the courses supports students who have a daytime job. Also, elective courses are available depending on the respective interests of the students.
- The university's policy makes the lecturers responsible for regularly updating their material. At the beginning of each semester, they are required to (re-)submit the course materials to be available online. Accuracy is maintained through inspection of the materials.
- Internal evaluation of the teaching and learning process, including assessment methods, is done through the periodic student surveys and the communication between the program coordinator and the lecturers.
- The programme offers both theoretical and hands-on experience through its variety of courses.
- The assessment consists of regular assignments and a final examination. A committee is in place to account for students' appeals.

Strengths

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

Strengths for MSc in Blockchain and Digital Currency

- The Master programme offers a lot of teamwork and hands-on work. Teamwork is expected in numerous project activities.
- The university has a modern equipment that fulfils the needs of its students. Through the elective courses in the 3rd semester of the programme the students have the chance to pursue their own interests by choosing courses they deem appropriate.
- The courses have multiple grading options for the students. Overall, the grading processes seem to be consistent.

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.

Areas of improvement and recommendations for MSc in Blockchain and Digital Currency

- The method of teaching could appeal more to students' individual and social development by applying a larger variety of pedagogical methods.
- Promoting leadership skills and active participation of the students in the learning process is key. Having the Master thesis as a compulsory task could assist students grow in that direction. One option would be to combine a Master thesis course with an elective course.
- Instructional seminars in the early stages of the Master programmes can help to bring students of different backgrounds up-to-date with either technological or business-related content.

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

Sub-area		***Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant***		
		MSc in Blockchain and Digital Currency		
2.1	Process of teaching and learning and student-centred teaching methodology	Compliant		
2.2	Practical training	Compliant		
2.3	Student assessment	Compliant		

3. Teaching staff *(ESG 1.5)*

Sub-areas

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

3.1.Teaching staff recruitment and development

Standards

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

3.2.Teaching staff number and status

Standards

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

3.3.Synergies of teaching and research

Standards

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

- *The allocation of teaching hours compared to the time for research activity is appropriate.*

You may also consider the following questions:

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

Findings

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

Findings for MSc in Blockchain and Digital Currency

- Continuous teaching course and pedagogical training is an important part of constant teaching improvement as well as personal development, well-being, and ultimately retention of teaching faculty. We propose a structured offering of seminars and supervision events where teaching staff can further improve its pedagogical qualifications, learn new teaching methods, or can discuss and give feedback on teaching cases and situations in the team. More scholarly activities should be put in place, such as organised meetings of all teaching staff and external lecturers in the program to discuss changes, issues, new procedures, but most importantly, learn from each other. We propose having a meeting at least once before each semester.
- The documentation provided elaborates in detail on regulations and rules in place at UNIC for recruiting new teaching personal. However, the documentation falls short on illustrating if there are structured offerings provided by the institution for developing skills and capabilities of existing teaching staff further. Life-long learning and continuous improvement to guarantee high quality of teaching on an ongoing base is essential, and we propose considering the formulation and enactment of dedicated teaching staff development rules and procedures.
- In line with the previous two bullet points, more scholarly activities should be put in place, such as organised meetings of all teaching staff and external lecturers in the program to discuss changes, issues, new procedures, but most importantly, learn from each other. We propose having a meeting at least once before each semester. While the documentation we received did not provide

a conclusive picture, it seems that the allocation of teaching hours and admin hours outweighs the time for research activities. This seems to be not unusual, given that the program is new, and a lot of time is dedicated on teaching and its preparation. However, for the development of academic teaching personnel it is important to give time to conduct program-related research, especially for young faculty and their promotion in the future. We propose that explicitly for assistant professors, time should be set aside to conduct their own research that helps to further improve the quality of teaching, e.g., by developing teaching cases. Assistant professors should also not be used too heavily for administrative duties.

Strengths

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

Strengths for MSc in Blockchain and Digital Currency

- We found the educational background, competence level, skills, and knowledge possessed by the teaching staff on the subject matter to be outstanding. The qualification of the teaching staff is excellent and internationally competitive, both regarding the internal as well as external teaching personnel. They command over a broad experience allowing them to cover a broad range of topics necessary for the teaching of the program at hand. The documentation provided reports a well-organized and explained promotion process in place for teaching staff, which is important for teaching staff satisfaction and retention.
- The faculty at UNIC has been able to attract a large network of external scholars as well as visiting teaching staff which has an excellent track record in teaching and education, being recognized scholars in the field. This is clearly strengthening the teaching staff workforce at UNIC and is allowing for an international exchange of emerging topics in the field. Continuous improvement of teaching style and material is secured via a well-developed and implemented teaching evaluation process has been implemented to assess and evaluate the teaching staff in a sophisticated way.
- The teaching staff is actively involved at international level in different consortia and research projects, which is reflected by the network of partners, cooperating universities, and different councils' activities. It is very impressive to see how visible UNIC has made itself on an international level with teaching staff being engaged in different projects, such as the ABC in Austria, or Bloxberg under the patronage of Max Planck Gesellschaft.

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.

Areas of improvement and recommendations for MSc in Blockchain and Digital Currency

- Given the rapidly changing nature of higher education in moving toward online courses or hybrid courses, regular engagement in skills and personnel development courses of the teaching staff is necessary. We propose an institutionalised provisioning of competencies development courses and events for teaching staff. Especially in the area of distant learning, the use of different technologies, teaching methods and techniques, as well as communication channels and platforms, e.g., for

allowing students to exchange information in addition to the exchange during courses, is important to provide. We propose to consider the use of a variety of teaching methods as well as latest tools for online teaching, as it is elaborated in more detail in section 6 of this report.

- Conditions of employment seem to recognize the fact that this is a teaching-oriented institution. Given the distribution of work across teaching, research, and administrative tasks, we recommend a policy that provides guidelines for assistant professors different from associate and full professor when it comes to the workload distribution. This is especially important as teaching and administration seems to be heavily on the side of the assistant professors. A more balanced mix of assistant/associate/full professors in teaching as well as taking the different career stages in consideration is recommended. It may be also worth considering to hire more internal teaching staff to reduce the dependency on visiting staff and external teaching staff, to make courses less vulnerable as well as guaranteeing a high quality of teaching over time.
- Scholarly education should integrate research and teaching, as well as offer a combination of hands-on exercises such as programming courses and exercises on the application of theory to promote double loop learning and critical analytical thinking. We propose considering mandatory assignments for students such as writing teaching cases where they are supposed to apply analytical insights on problematisations around practical cases. Thereby, research could be better integrated into teaching.

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

Sub-area		***Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant***		
		MSc in Blockchain and Digital Currency		
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)?*
- *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.

Findings for MSc in Blockchain and Digital Currency

- The EEC found the most important information regarding student admission online. More detailed information regarding the recognition is missing.
- The department gets support from the university when it comes to recruiting and supporting students. It also has dedicated centres such as the Centre for Research and Counselling Services (KESY) that supports students in stressful situations.
- When it comes to keeping students up-to-date, the most important information can be found in the academic calendar, which is published at least four months in advance and can be accessed online All in all, the website provides sufficient information about the programme to inform prospective students about the necessary details of their studies. The Department makes a clear commitment to the Bologna Process Declaration.

Strengths

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

Strengths for MSc in Blockchain and Digital Currency

- The requirements of the programme from a students' perspective that can be found online are informative and detailed. They contain the necessary information regarding the application process and what is expected from prospective applicants.
- The Department has a mentoring program in place that ensures students' success during their studies. Students are assigned to faculty members so that they have personal contacts in case the experience problems during their studies. For example, in case assignments are delayed, faculty members will follow up and try to find solutions. The Department uses various methods and techniques to continuously measures students' progress. The learning outcomes are aligned with the European Qualifications Framework and the Cyprus National Qualifications Framework.
- The students have the opportunity to provide feedback to the university and to participate in the internal evaluation procedures.

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.

Areas of improvement and recommendations for MSc in Blockchain and Digital Currency

- More detailed information about students' recognition would be helpful. This also pertains to information about learning outcomes and how specifically they relate to employers' needs.
- Sophisticated analytical tools can be used to track students' progress and performance.

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

Sub-area		***Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant***		
		MSc in Blockchain and Digital Currency		
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

- *Adequate and readily accessible teaching and learning resources (teaching and learning environments, materials, aids and equipment) are provided to students and support the achievement of objectives in the study programme.*
- *Adequacy of resources is ensured for changing circumstances (change in student numbers, etc.).*
- *All resources are fit for purpose.*
- *Student-centred learning and flexible modes of learning and teaching, are taken into account when allocating, planning and providing the learning resources.*

5.2 Physical resources

Standards

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

5.3 Human support resources

Standards

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

5.4 Student support

Standards

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

You may also consider the following questions:

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

Findings

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

The committee's findings in regard to the teaching and learning resources of the University of Nicosia were in general terms compliant with the requirements of each sub-area and the standards outlined above.

Findings for MSc in Blockchain and Digital Currency

- The lists of the readings and academic material provided to the students as part of the modules taught across the programme were quite comprehensive. These are also included in the module outlines readily available to the students in advance of the course which adds to the transparency and accessibility of the academic resources for the programme.
- The platform (Moodle) used to communicate the materials for the courses is also found to be easily accessible, comprehensive and intuitive to use. The material we examined as part of the courses that we were given access to was well-organized in sections and presented nicely with lectures, videos, reading, and assignments being readily accessible. Having said that, some of the feedback we received from the students we talked to highlighted the importance of having a more systematic way to engage with the student body in an organized manner and encourage participants to meet and interact between them in the context of group assignments or course work. According to student testimonies, such engagement was left to the participants to decide the means of communication which may impact student experience.
- In terms of the resources being sufficient to deal with changing circumstances (e.g. an increase in student numbers), we found that the high proportion of visiting faculty could compromise coping with higher number of students. There is a case to be made around whether visiting faculty will be readily available to offer more hours in case student numbers go up. Obviously, this is not the case with IT resources as these are scalable but student/staff ratio needs to be adequate when number of students rise.
- In terms of the student-centred learning and flexible modes of learning and teaching, we found that the two programs (DL and resident MSc) are both great options for students to choose from based on their flexibility, available time, and familiarity with the topic. Different modes of study are generally welcome and give lots of room for students to decide what is best for them. Also, the committee found that there is a good variety and number of electives and students can choose between business or computer science directions based on their interests and prior knowledge.
- The physical resources, i.e. premises, libraries, study facilities, IT infrastructure, were found to be generally of good quality. This was based on the video and description provided through documentation. As the University was established very recently the facilities seemed new which is something that can impact the student experience positively. Unfortunately, there was no way to assess that in person. Because of that it was difficult to also assess the adequacy of resources in case of changing circumstances (e.g. change in student numbers, etc.). More information would be needed to assess that, e.g. the use of classrooms and overall capacity during term times, availability

of study facilities and computer labs, etc. More details would also be welcome in terms of the available information to students concerning the services they can access during their studies.

- Faculty and teaching support was found to be overall adequate. While there were no details of the specific training opportunities to teaching staff (even though this was mentioned in the documentation and discussions) there seems to be pedagogical support through the e-Learning Pedagogical Support Unit (ePSU) which provides an internal workshop. Its role is to encourage innovative approaches to teaching learning and assessment which would lead to better teaching and learning outcomes. Having said that, the videos and means of student engagement we witnessed for the DL program via the online platform seemed quite conventional, albeit of good quality.
- From discussions we had with administrators, they articulated how they support staff as well as respond to student needs. Students we spoke were also happy with the University's response and level of services provided. There was also good communication between teaching staff, tutors/mentors, and administrative staff.
- Lastly, we found little or no information regarding student mobility in the context of the MSc we investigated, even though there seemed to be a long list of academic and industry partners.

Strengths

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

Strengths for MSc in Blockchain and Digital Currency

- Good amount of choice for students in terms of both modes of study as well as direction and focus of topics. Lots of electives to choose from and a comprehensive curriculum organized and communicated well. Adequate mechanisms and support are provided to assist students with special needs or disabilities.
- Great physical resources and new establishments that add to the student experience and learning.
- Very good and responsive support staff to service both teaching faculty as well as students.

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.

Areas of improvement and recommendations for MSc in Blockchain and Digital Currency

- Provide a platform through which student engagement is more organized and encourage students to interact. The Department could develop this further with technology, provide meet-up functionality for collaborative learning, group work, etc.
- We suggest to the University to allow for blended learning between the two programs (distance learning and resident program) and give even more flexibility to students to choose on how to take on their modules. This would give the opportunity to students to spend a term in person at the University and complete their MSc using distance learning from abroad.

- More details would also be welcome in terms of the available information to students concerning the services they can access during their studies. A comprehensive student pack when joining (if it does not already exist) would be a good addition.
- Lastly, improvements could be made on how the Department treats student from diverse backgrounds. At the moment there is not enough information on how the University deals with mature participants as opposed to non-experienced students (i.e. having no experience in the industry). There is a good possibility that the full-time resident program will be attended by students with no prior experience and thus they need to have further support or pre-enrolment short courses to bring participants to the same level based on their background and existing knowledge.

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

Sub-area		***Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant***		
		MSc in Blockchain and Digital Currency		
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:

Sub-areas		***Non-compliant/ Partially Compliant/Compliant***
6.1	Selection criteria and requirements	Choose answer
6.2	Proposal and dissertation	Choose answer
6.3	Supervision and committees	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 each programme of study under review may be achieved, with emphasis on the correspondence with the EQF.

The assessment of the MSc in Blockchain and Digital Currency was performed from July 20 until July 22, 2020. The assessment was done based on information given during a virtual visit on July 20 as well as the information provided by the Department in their application form for the evaluation of the programmes of study. Additional information was provided by the Department upon request.

This evaluation was made in good faith that the information provided is correct.

The overall assessment of the EEC is positive. We were impressed by the quality of the existing programme and how it fills a current need on the market. The University was one of the first academic institutions worldwide to realise the power of cryptocurrencies/blockchain/DLT technology and to offer educational programmes in this area. The fact that the MSc in Blockchain and Digital Currency was successfully launched in 2016 and has been in existence ever since, indicates that there is a pending need for education and research in this area. However, the recent decline in student numbers, most likely caused by the end of the blockchain hype in 2017, also shows that in order to be successful, the programme needs to be flexible and make sure that it constantly updates its educational content.

Summarising, the EEC concludes that proposed Master programme is innovative, internationally competitive and will benefit the University as a whole.

E. Signatures of the EEC

Name	*Signature*
Horst Treiblmaier	
Roman Beck	
Markos Zachariadis	
Andreas Sokratous	

Date: 23 July 2020

CYQAA
5 Lemesou Avenue, Lefkosia 2112
Tel.: +357 22 504 340 Fax: +357 22 504 392 email: info@dipae.ac.cy www.dipae.ac.cy