

SPECIAL REPORT ON ONLINE LEGAL EDUCATION IN CYPRUS

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ABSTRACT

This report considers the position of online legal education and the legal profession in Cyprus, both before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The outbreak of the pandemic has given a significant boost to online teaching in the law curriculum, a teaching delivery mode which was nearly absent due to the reluctance of law schools and accredited professional bodies in recognising distance learning LLB degrees in Cyprus. It also induced the implementation of an electronic justice system in Cyprus, namely the iJustice system, acknowledging the need to further enhance the lifelong training of judges and the continuing professional development of legal professionals. This report therefore aims to provide an overview of the legal profession in Cyprus and the impact of COVID-19 towards the digitalisation of the Cypriot justice system. It also aims to examine the evolution of online legal education in Cyprus by exploring the challenges and opportunities presented to reshape legal pedagogy, accelerating the transformation of a contemporary legal education embracing the use of digital technology in law curriculum.

1. INTRODUCTION

This report considers the position of online legal education and the legal profession in Cyprus, both before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The outbreak of the pandemic not only substantially impacted the global economy and public health, but also the way legal educational institutions operate in Cyprus. Indeed, due to the imperative urgency to prevent the spread of the COVID-19, the Cypriot government was asked to deal with an unprecedented challenge through imposing massive restrictions and lockdown measures to ensure social distancing. Following the announcement made by the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, and Youth ('MOEC') on 10 March 2020 to suspend face-to-face operations of all higher educational institutions in Cyprus,¹ this resulted in the temporary physical closure of Cypriot universities,²

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¹ MOEC, 'Προληπτικά μέτρα που αφορούν στα Ιδρύματα Ανώτερης Εκπαίδευσης έναντι του νέου κορωνοϊού (COVID – 19)' (10.03.2020) <<https://enimerosi.moec.gov.cy/archeia/1/ypp10528a>>; MOEC, 'Διευκρίνιση για τα Ιδρύματα Ανώτερης Εκπαίδευσης όσον αφορά στην ανακοίνωση του Υπουργείου Παιδείας, Πολιτισμού, Αθλητισμού και Νεολαίας για τη λήψη μέτρων πρόληψης της εξάπλωσης του ιού COVID-19, ημερομηνίας 11.03.2020' (12.03.2020) <<https://enimerosi.moec.gov.cy/archeia/1/ypp10547a>>; See also CYQAA, 'Εξ αποστάσεως συνέχιση των μαθημάτων, Επ' Αόριστον λόγω του COVID-19' (10.03.2020) <<https://www.dipae.ac.cy/index.php/en/news-and-events/announcements/13-dipae-el/dipaeel/anakoinoiseis/498-10-03-2020-anavoli-episkepseon-distance-learning>>.

² CYQAA, 'Εξ αποστάσεως συνέχιση των μαθημάτων, Επ' Αόριστον λόγω του COVID-19' (10.03.2020) <<http://www.dipae.ac.cy/index.php/en/news-and-events/announcements/13-dipae-el/dipaeel/anakoinoiseis/498-10-03-2020-anavoli-episkepseon-distance-learning>>; CYQAA, 'Διαδικτυακή διδασκαλία/εξέταση και προσωπικά δεδομένα (Αρ. 2)' (30.09.2020) <<http://www.dipae.ac.cy/index.php/el/nea-ekdiloseis/anakoinoiseis-el/546-30-09-2020-dia-diktyaki-didaskalia-exetasi-kai-prosopika-dedomena-2>>; See also, T. Farnell, A.S. Matijević, N.Š. Schmidt, 'The Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education: A Review of Emerging Evidence' (Publications Office of the European Union, 17.03.2021) <<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/876ce591-87a0-11eb-ac4c-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>>.

accelerating the transformation of legal education from the traditional in-classroom teaching into ‘emergency remote teaching’.³

Emergency remote teaching is defined by Hodges and others as the ‘temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances’.⁴ In comparison to online teaching, this does not aim ‘to re-create a robust educational ecosystem but rather to provide temporary access to instruction and instructional supports in a manner that is quick to set up and is reliably available during an emergency or crisis’.⁵ With emergency remote teaching, Cypriot law schools witnessed an evolution to online teaching, a teaching delivery mode which was nearly absent due to the reluctance of law schools and accredited/professional bodies to recognise distance-learning LLB degrees in Cyprus.

Although Cypriot universities smoothly adjusted to the transition of online teaching due to their digital infrastructures and development of new technologies, this was not the case with the legal profession. The lack of information communication technologies (ICT) across Cypriot courts has been a critical problem in its justice system, as courts are based almost entirely on manual and paper-based systems which led to excessive delays in resolving disputes. It was not until the outbreak of COVID-19 that we saw the implementation of an electronic justice system in Cyprus (the ‘iJustice’ system) in July 2021, aiming to change the operational norms of the legal profession by moving to the digitalisation of the Cypriot justice system. As a result of the transformation to an electronic justice system, the need has been acknowledged to further enhance the lifelong training of judges and the continuing professional development of lawyers.

This report aims to provide an overview of the legal profession in Cyprus, both before and after the pandemic, and evaluate the impact of COVID-19 towards the digitalisation of the Cypriot justice system. It also aims to examine the evolution of online legal education in Cyprus by exploring the challenges and opportunities presented to reshape legal pedagogy, accelerating the transformation of a contemporary legal education embracing the use of digital technology in the law curriculum.

2. BACKGROUND: LEGAL PROFESSION, UNIVERSITIES AND IT SYSTEMS GENERALLY

2.1. Legal Education and Professional Recognition Requirements

The accreditation of LLB degrees delivered by Cypriot universities is determined by the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance (CYQAA), the quality assurance (QA) and accreditation body of academic programmes in Cyprus. ‘Regulated professions’, including the legal profession, are subject to conditions of practice determined by applicable legislation.⁶ For lawyers, the relevant legislation is the Advocates Law (Cap 2). Thus, the (re-)accreditation of law degrees by the CYQAA does not automatically secure their professional recognition. According to the Advocates Law, the sole ‘gatekeeper’ to the legal profession is the Legal Council (LC).

³ C. Hodges et al, ‘The Difference Between Emergency Remote Teaching and Online Learning’ (EDUCAUSE, 27.03.2020) <<https://er.educause.edu/articles/2020/3/the-difference-between-emergency-remote-teaching-and-online-learning>>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Law on Quality Assurance and Certification of the Higher Education and on the Establishment and Function of an Institution for Pertinent Issues (Law 136(I)/2015), section 2.

According to CYQAA legislation, a degree can be accredited based on conventional⁷ or non-conventional modes of delivery (distance learning (DL) or a combination of both methods).⁸ While CYQAA can accredit an online LLB degree, the LC has not recognised any DL LLB degrees to date.⁹

Interestingly, the provision of legal education in Cyprus is quite recent. The first law school was only established on the island in 2006 at the University of Cyprus.¹⁰ Until then, prospective law students had no alternative but to undertake legal studies abroad. This was a general characteristic of higher education in Cyprus beyond the field of law. The University of Cyprus, as the first university of the island, was established in 1989 and admitted its first students in 1992.¹¹ Today, there is one public and six private universities¹² accredited by the CYQAA to deliver LLB degrees. These are the University of Cyprus, the only public university, followed by the private universities, namely the European University, Frederick University, Neapolis University, University of Central Lancashire Cyprus, University of Nicosia, and Philips University.

The vast majority of law graduates come from British and Greek universities.¹³ The former choice accords with the fact that Cyprus, as a former British colony, has a legal system which is principally founded on the principles of common law and equity.¹⁴ Hence, studying law at a British university is an attractive choice in terms of pursuing a career in law. At the same time, the shared culture and language between Greece and Greek Cypriots, renders Greek universities a natural choice for studies in higher education, whether in law or another field. This also explains the fact that even though Cyprus has the highest number of lawyers per capita in the EU, law schools in Cyprus generally have small classes.¹⁵ This state of affairs is expected to be redefined in the next few years because of Brexit and its financial implications for tuition fees.¹⁶

2.2. Entry Requirements

The powers of the LC are set out in section 3 of the Advocates Law.¹⁷ The LC is responsible for the admission to practice and enrolment of advocates. It decides whether individuals satisfy the legal requirements for their initial registration as trainee lawyers. The qualifications necessary to be admitted to the Bar are provided in section 4 of the Advocates Law. An individual seeking admission to practice must hold a law degree recognised by the LC, whether

⁷ According to the CYQAA, attendance with physical presence is compulsory for conventional programmes of study. See: CYQAA Announcement (27.07.2016) <http://www.dipae.ac.cy/index.php/el/nea-ekdiloseis/ana-koimoseis-el/86-yepochreotiki-parousia-programmata-spoudon>.

⁸ Ibid, section 24.

⁹ The sole exception is the DL LLB of the University of London which has been recognised by section 4 of Advocates Law (Cap 2) since almost the independence of Cyprus (Advocates (Amending) Law (Law 42/1961))

¹⁰ University of Cyprus, Department of Law <https://newdev.ucy.ac.cy/law/>.

¹¹ Cyprus Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport, and Youth, 'Historical Background' (Higher Education) <https://www.highereducation.ac.cy/index.php/en/dae/istoriki-anadromi>.

¹² The Cyprus Council of Recognition of Higher Education Qualification (KY.S.A.T.S.), 'Private Education'. <https://www.kysats.ac.cy/index.php/en/genikes-plirofories/idiotiki-ekpaidefsi>

¹³ Statistical Service, Education Statistics - 2018-2019 (31.03.2021). <https://www.cystat.gov.cy/en/PublicationList?s=33>.

¹⁴ N. Hatzimihail, 'Cyprus as a Mixed Legal System' (2013) 6 (1) *Journal of Civil Studies* 37.

¹⁵ See sections 2.3 and 3.1.1 below.

¹⁶ Press and Information Office, Cyprus, and Brexit <https://brexit.com.cy/students.html>.

¹⁷ Advocates Law (Cap 2), section 3. See also: Legal Counsel, *Powers of the Legal Council* <https://www.legalcouncil.org.cy/the-powers-of-the-council/?lang=en>.

obtained in Cyprus, another EU member state or third country.¹⁸ Additionally, a trainee lawyer must complete a 12-month legal practice period and successfully pass examinations set by the LC.¹⁹ Significantly, the LC organises the trainee lawyers' lectures and conduct of exams.²⁰ Every advocate qualified to practice must enrol in the 'Register of Practising Advocates', maintained by the CBA Council.²¹ The CBA Council issues the annual licence to practice of advocates upon satisfaction of specific requirements,²² including the requirements for continuous professional development.

2.3. Size of the Legal Profession

The legal profession in Cyprus is large in absolute numbers and proportional to the population. Since the European Justice Scoreboard (EJS) commencement in 2013, Cyprus has consistently ranked among the countries with the highest number of lawyers per capita in the EU. According to the 2021 EJS, Cyprus had the highest number of lawyers in 2020, with over 450 lawyers per 100,000 inhabitants.²³ Almost 500 new lawyers are registered each year in a country with a population of around one million.²⁴ As of April 2022, there were almost 4,200 active members on the CBA's website.²⁵ However, only a proportion of new lawyers elect to remain in the profession as practicing lawyers. Many seek employment elsewhere after the 12-month legal practice and LC examinations. Thus, the actual number of law graduates is much higher than the number of practicing lawyers. The reason why so many people decide to study law but only a portion of them eventually end up working as practising lawyers, is because a law degree is regarded as a strong and versatile option for career development, both in the public and private sectors.²⁶

2.4. Continuous Professional Development

2.4.1. Advocates

¹⁸ Ibid section 4(d)(i)-(ii).

¹⁹ Ibid, section 4.

²⁰ Ibid section 5.

²¹ Ibid, section 6A.

²² Ibid.

²³ European Commission, *European Justice Scoreboard 2021*, figure 34

https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/eu_justice_scoreboard_2021.pdf. A similar picture is reflected in the previous years: EU Justice Scoreboard 2020, figure 37 (second); EU Justice Scoreboard 2019, figure 35 (first); EU Justice Scoreboard 2018, figure 43 (first); EU Justice Scoreboard 2017, figure 38 (fourth); EU Justice Scoreboard 2016, figure 33 (fourth); EU Justice Scoreboard 2015, figure 42 (fourth); EU Justice Scoreboard 2014, figure 25 (fifth); EU Justice Scoreboard 2013, figure 21 (fifth).

²⁴ A.C. Emilianides, 'How Did the Number of Registered Lawyers Increase During British Rule' (*Dikaiosyni portal*, 02.12.2019) <https://dikaiosyni.com/katigories/arthra/pws-avxithike-o-arithmos-twn-eggegrammenwn-dkikgorwn-stin-agglokra-tia/>. According to the latest demographic statistics, at the end of 2019, the population in the areas of the Republic of Cyprus which were under the effective control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus was estimated at 888,000.

<https://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/All/55FC039F275B7049C225862D003ACD70?OpenDocument&sub=1&sel=1&e=&print>

²⁵ Lawyers – Members (Cyprus Bar Association).

<https://www.cyprusbar.org/CypriotAdvocateMembersPage.aspx> (visited on 11.4.22).

²⁶ According to the Cyprus Statistical Service, law and business administration are the most popular choices for undergraduate studies of young adults between the ages of 25-34. See: Statistical Service, Infographics – Young Adults and Education – 2nd Quarter 2019 (06.11.2019) <https://www.cystat.gov.cy/en/PublicationList?s=33&p=1>.

Section 24 of the Advocates Law allows the CBA Council to provide for the continuous legal training of lawyers. However, compulsory continuous professional education (CPE) for lawyers was only introduced as recently as 2017.²⁷ The CBA determines the number of hours which may be varied accordingly. The renewal of a lawyer's license is contingent upon successful CPE completion, unless certain exceptions apply (e.g., if a lawyer is over 60 years of age, provided they have been practicing for 30 years).²⁸ CPE programmes include 'seminars, lectures or other educational activities delivered face to face or via the web or other electronic means, including audio-visual material prepared by approved providers'.²⁹ Notably, a lawyer will not be considered to have attended more than 4 CPE hours by merely watching audio visual material.³⁰ This ensures quality standards with lawyers' continuous education focusing primarily on synchronous learning.

In March 2020, as a result of the emergency government measures to address the COVID-19 pandemic, all scheduled courses were postponed by the CBA until late April.³¹ In June 2020, the CBA Council waived the requirement for mandatory CPE units/hours to renew lawyers licenses for the year 2021, recommencing on 1.1.21 with twelve required CPE units/hours by the end of 2021, to renew licenses for 2022.³² Both the CBA and local bar associations made an effort to organise online courses to count towards a lawyers' CPE obligations.³³ More recently, the CBA decided that, as of 2022, approved international seminars could count towards the total number of teaching hours.³⁴

While the CBA was initially slow in responding to challenges created by COVID-19, its eventual reaction demonstrated an ability to adapt to ensure the uninterrupted continuous professional education of practicing lawyers through online legal education. Online seminars and workshops are now considered the norm and are expected to remain even when COVID-19 restrictions ease or lift. The addition of international seminars has positively broadened the scope and variety of knowledge and training available to practicing lawyers.

2.4.2. Judges

The functional needs and operations of the Cypriot courts have been the subject of internal reports for several years, the most recent being the 2016 report by George Erotocritou, former Judge of the Supreme Court and Director of Reform and Training.³⁵ The lifelong training of Cypriot judges was among the key issues identified by the Erotocritou report. The report recommended establishing a training department for judges, legal officers, registrars, and court

²⁷ Continuous Professional Education (Regulatory Administrative Act 386/2017) http://www.cylaw.org/KDP/data/2017_1_386.pdf.

²⁸ Continuous Professional Education (Regulatory Administrative Act 386/2017) as amended by Regulatory Administrative Act 80/2020 http://www.cylaw.org/KDP/data/2020_1_80.pdf.

²⁹ Ibid, para. 5(a).

³⁰ Ibid, para. 5(b).

³¹ CBA Announcement (18.03.2020) <http://www.cyprusbarassociation.org/index.php/el/news/2385-2020-03-18-07-29-41>.

³² CBA Announcement (16.06.2020) <https://www.cyprusbarassociation.org/index.php/el/news/3840-2020-06-16-06-45-02>; CBA Announcement (08.12.2020) <https://www.cyprusbarassociation.org/index.php/el/news/8340-2020-12-08-11-24-09>.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ CBA Announcement (24.09.2021) <https://www.cyprusbarassociation.org/index.php/en/news/15070-2021-09-24-10-17-47>.

³⁵ Supreme Court Report on the Functional Needs of the Courts and Other Related Matters (June 2016) [http://www.supremecourt.gov.cy/judicial/sc.nsf/All/58D9022CA52B670BC225839A00300FA8/\\$file/fina%20inside%20PAGES.pdf](http://www.supremecourt.gov.cy/judicial/sc.nsf/All/58D9022CA52B670BC225839A00300FA8/$file/fina%20inside%20PAGES.pdf).

staff. In 2017, Professor Jeremy Cooper and Judge George Erotocritou developed a more comprehensive study and action plan, subsequently approved by the Supreme Court of Cyprus and facilitating the establishment of a judicial college.³⁶ In January 2017, the Supreme Court created the Office of Reform and Judicial Training, requiring newly appointed judges to undertake a rigorous 10-day training course before embarking on their roles. A legislative framework was introduced in 2020 with the adoption of the Law on the Establishment and Operation of the Judicial College.³⁷ Section 3 of the Law provides the Judicial College is responsible for issues regarding the professional training and education of judges, based on the needs that arise from time to time, including training in the development of skills, information technology, case management, and professional development.

Cyprus was one of the last EU member states to introduce a formal system for the continuous training of judges, in contrast to EU law and policy.³⁸ Although the objective is to train all legal professionals, the European Commission placed particular emphasis on the training of judges and professionals responsible for the enforcement and respect of EU law.³⁹ Judicial training is perceived as a means to improving the efficiency of the justice system and cross-border cooperation. The European Commission thus called upon all actors to bolster this by requesting that ‘budgets must be allocated; time must be made available, incentives developed, and clear commitments taken.’⁴⁰

The EU judicial training strategy for 2021-2024 further strengthens judicial training. Emphasis is placed on the upscaling of the digitalisation of justice considering lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic and need to shift from face-to-face to online proceedings.⁴¹ In this regard, judicial training should encourage utilisation of new technologies to reach wider audiences and support quality training.⁴²

Cyprus still lags behind EU member states. The annual EJS often highlights the lack of and/or inconsistent provision of judicial training in Cyprus. However, key steps and significant progress have been achieved in the last few years regarding the lifelong training of judges. According to the 2019 EJS, more than 80% of Cypriot judges undertook continuous training activities in EU law or law of another member state.⁴³ However, the progress of judge craft, IT

³⁶ J. Cooper, ‘Creating the Cyprus School for Judicial Training’. The content of the report is not publicly available but its adoption is mentioned in the Functional Review Report (p.19) and in public speeches (e.g., ‘Speech for the Ceremony of the Official Delivery of the Final Report on the General Reform of the Courts’, G. Erotocritou, Former Judge of the Supreme Court and Director of Reform and Training (27.03.2018) <http://www.supremecourt.gov.cy/judicial/sc.nsf/All/4F4B016078A6DA93C22583BD003D9CDB?OpenDocument>

³⁷ See also: N. Mouttotos, ‘Reform of Civil Procedure in Cyprus: Delivering Justice in a More Efficient and Timely Way’ (2020) 49(2) *Common Law World Review* 99, 123-124.

³⁸ Law on the Establishment and the Operation of the Judicial College (Law 101(I)/2020).

³⁹ Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).

OJ C 326, 26.10.2012 p. 47–390, articles 81(2)(h) and 82(1)(c).

⁴⁰ European Commission Communication, ‘Building Trust in EU-Wide Justice a New Dimension to European Judicial Training’ (COM(2011) 551 final, 13.09.11), 4.

⁴¹ Ibid, 12.

⁴² European Commission Communication, ‘Ensuring Justice in the EU — a European Judicial Training Strategy for 2021-2024’ (COM(2020) 713 final, 02.12.2020), 9.

⁴³ Ibid. See also types of actions provided in Article 8 of Regulation (EU) 2021/693 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 April 2021 establishing the Justice Programme and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1382/2013, *OJ L 156, 05.05.2021, p. 21–38*, in particular sub-paragraph 8(e).

⁴⁴ EU Justice Scoreboard 2019, figure 36

https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/justice_scoreboard_2019_en.pdf.

skills, court management and judicial ethics is less clear and consistent.⁴⁴ On balance, the establishment of the Judicial College ushered a new era in the continuous and professional development of judges.

During the pandemic, the newly established Judicial College remained active continuing the provision of judicial training in an uninterrupted manner. International training sessions, originally scheduled to take place face-to-face, were converted online.⁴⁵ While the Judicial School tried to organise its own webinars and online courses; because of its limited capabilities, it also relied on the assistance of its European and international partners to provide regular training courses to judges on a weekly basis, such as the EJTN, ERA and UNODC and other national Judicial Colleges.⁴⁶ In 2021, most judicial training seminars continued online, not only because of COVID-19 restrictions but also because many trainings involved training partners from abroad.⁴⁷

2.5. Legal Professionals

The lack of information communication technologies (ICT) across Cypriot courts has fostered chronic issues affecting the administration of justice, including excessive delays and weak case management. Notably, the courts rely almost entirely on manual and paper-based systems.⁴⁸ The lack of ICT presents challenges to all stages in a case, from its initiation, its progression and its hearing and judgement stages, up until the completion of an appeal.⁴⁹ The Functional Review Report therefore recommended the introduction of digital audio recordings (DAR) in court proceedings.⁵⁰

The use of ICT in court proceedings has been a key feature of the annual EJS assessments. Cyprus' performance is one of the poorest across the EU. According to the 2018 EJS, the use of ICT between courts and lawyers was one of the lowest in the EU, accounting for less than 5% of correspondence.⁵¹ Significantly, in 2018, the Council of the European Union, characterised the 'low digitalisation of courts and the lack of lifelong training for judges'⁵² as being a critical problem in the Cypriot justice system, recommending the

⁴⁴ There was evidence of such training in the EU Justice Scoreboards of 2020 (figure 38), 2018 (figure 45), 2017 (figure 41), and 2016 (figure 36) but not in the other reporting periods.

⁴⁵ Judicial Training School Announcement, 'Speech for the Judicial Deontology Ethics Seminar for New Judges, G. Erotocritou, Former Judge of the Supreme Court and Director of Reform and Training (06.10.2020) <http://www.supremecourt.gov.cy/Judicial/SC.nsf/All/1CE0617FB333794DC22585FA002C32C0?OpenDocument>.

⁴⁶ Judicial Training School Announcement, 'Online Judicial Training in Times of COVID-19' (22.04.2020) <http://www.supremecourt.gov.cy/Judicial/SC.nsf/All/CC1C1897F2BE70E8C22585520037C833?OpenDocument>.

⁴⁷ E.g., Judicial Training School Announcement, Online Seminars on 'Briefing the Trainers' for Judges, Registrars and Lawyers on the New Civil Procedure Rules (19.07.2021) <http://www.supremecourt.gov.cy/Judicial/SC.nsf/All/B605A36A7801B9A3C2258717002E4BDE?OpenDocument>.

⁴⁸ Functional Review Report, 5-7.

⁴⁹ Functional Review Report, 225.

⁵⁰ Functional Review Report, recommendation 14, 147. See also: Feasibility Study on the Introduction of Digital Audio Recording (DAR) in Court Proceedings in Cyprus, Technical Assistance Project 2019, IPA Ireland (Supported by the Structural Reform Support Service (SSRS) of the European Commission) (04.07.2019), 5 [http://www.supremecourt.gov.cy/Judicial/sc.nsf/All/A47FDB9DC8E6F7B5C2258480003AC7C4/\\$file/Feasibility%20Study%20on%20the%20Introduction%20of%20Digital%20Audio%20Recording%20\(DAR\).pdf](http://www.supremecourt.gov.cy/Judicial/sc.nsf/All/A47FDB9DC8E6F7B5C2258480003AC7C4/$file/Feasibility%20Study%20on%20the%20Introduction%20of%20Digital%20Audio%20Recording%20(DAR).pdf).

⁵¹ EU Justice Scoreboard 2018, figure 30.

⁵² Council Recommendation of 13 July 2018 on the 2018 National Reform Programme of Cyprus and delivering a Council opinion on the 2018 Stability Programme of Cyprus, *OJ C 320*, 10.09.2018, p. 55–59.

implementation of an e-justice system.⁵³ The linked digitalisation of the courts with judicial training is illustrative of the mutually reinforcing relationship between IT systems (in court proceedings) and IT skills (by judges and court staff) and the necessity of online legal education in advancing these aims. More broadly, the engagement of legal professionals with ICT is reflective of Cyprus' performance so far towards digitisation. According to the 2021 edition of EU's Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI), Cyprus has improved its performance in almost all DESI categories. Most of the progress achieved concerns connectivity. That said, Cyprus still ranks 21st among the 27 EU member states. Hence, the country is still one of the poorest performers with a score of 43.5 compared to the EU average score which stands at 50.7.⁵⁴

More recently, the 2021 EJS accorded special attention to the digitalisation of the courts, which proved crucial for keeping courts functional during the COVID-19 pandemic, and more generally, as a means of promoting efficient and accessible justice systems. Cyprus had consistently ranked among the lowest-performing countries vis-à-vis all indicators.⁵⁵ These poor findings accord with the Supreme Court's response during the months-long lockdowns imposed by the Cypriot authorities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵⁶

Initially, the Supreme Court suspended adjudication and further promotion of cases between 16 March 2020 and 30 April 2020, except for urgent cases.⁵⁷ This reaction demonstrates an implicit acknowledgement on the part of the Supreme Court to the existence of systemic limitations affecting the administration of justice in Cyprus, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the Supreme Court's approach was one of prudence and reserve. When restrictions eased in May 2020, the Supreme Court decided Courts would reopen in line with the decrees of the Ministry of Health.⁵⁸ The operation of the courts and progress of cases were subject to specific needs and particularities of each jurisdiction, including the condition of the court premises and buildings. To avoid overcrowding, the Supreme Court rescheduled first appearances. In the absence of digital trials, the progress of a substantial number of court cases was hampered by postponements and delays. To alleviate the situation, in September 2021 the Supreme Court adopted a new procedural regulation, enabling Courts to handle cases in the absence of the parties, provided it was deemed appropriate, and the parties consented.⁵⁹ Furthermore, the Courts now have power to use electronic mail for the issuance

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2021 – Cyprus <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/countries-digitisation-performance>.

⁵⁵ EU Justice Scoreboard 2021, 'Digitalisation', figures 39-47.

⁵⁶ See also: Demetra Loizou and Despina Christofi, 'The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Operation of the Cypriot Courts: Technological Challenges and the Maintenance of Rule of Law – A Comparative Analysis with Other Common Law Jurisdictions' in the Rule of Law Monitoring Mechanism, School of Law, UCLan Cyprus (11.06.2020) <https://ruleoflawmonitoringmechanism.eu/posts/the-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-the-operation-of-the-cypriot-courts-technological-challenges>.

⁵⁷ Supreme Court Announcement (16.03.2020).

<http://www.supremecourt.gov.cy/judicial/sc.nsf/All/CABFC161B80C9E6BC225852D00465B6E?OpenDocument>.

⁵⁸ Supreme Court Announcement (30.04.2020)

<http://www.supremecourt.gov.cy/Judicial/sc.nsf/All/00E7188B24D219A7C225855A00391080?OpenDocument>

⁵⁹ Electronic Justice (Electronic Communication) Procedural Regulation of 2021 (17.09.2021)

<http://www.supremecourt.gov.cy/judicial/sc.nsf/All/2AF4BC3788347815C2258753002E6CB1?OpenDocument>

Lawyers were trained on using the system so they could aid other colleagues.⁶⁹ There were technical difficulties on the contractor company regarding the fully integrated and uninterrupted access to the system.⁷⁰ Full access to the system revealed trainers and lawyers were not comfortable with the system. In response, the Supreme Court extended the virtual use of the system, postponing its launch.⁷¹ The system's pilot phase was ultimately launched on 14 April 2021, lasting until 20 July 2021.⁷²

Over 840 lawyers participated in the first online training seminar organised by the CBA. During the seminar, more than 130 questions were answered.⁷³ The seminar recording was made available on the CBA website.⁷⁴ Despite some delays by the contractor company, a user manual was prepared and made available on the iJustice platform.⁷⁵ The Deputy Ministry of Research Innovation and Digital Policy disseminated videos with guidelines outlining processes for submission of a new case, updating a current case, and studying cases.⁷⁶ The CBA website has a FAQs page on iJustice on its website.⁷⁷

Support and training of users on the new system has also been undertaken by the local bar associations. In preparation for the court commencement period in 2021-22, the Nicosia Bar Association, appointed a responsible person to assist lawyers – members of the Nicosia Bar Association – during the month of September. Lawyers/firms who were not previously supported were prioritised to explain and train lawyers on the system and submission process, especially colleagues lacking knowledge of computer operations.⁷⁸

A prevalent feeling among members of the legal profession was that the training and preparation provided were inadequate. The early use of the system vividly demonstrates lawyers have yet to embrace electronic justice. In late October 2021, data presented to the Cyprus House of Representatives, revealed that only 10-15% of lawyers (700) chose to use the iJustice platform and submit documents electronically, suggesting resistance to change on the

[4%CE%95%CE%9B%CE%A4%CE%99%CE%9F%20%CE%A4%CE%A5%CE%A0%CE%9F%CE%A5%20iJustice%2015.1.21.pdf](https://www.cyprusbarassociation.org/index.php/el/news/announcements-ijustice/8268-e-justice).

⁶⁹ CBA Announcement (06.12.20) <https://www.cyprusbarassociation.org/index.php/el/news/announcements-ijustice/8268-e-justice>.

⁷⁰ CBA Announcement (15.01.21) <http://www.cyprusbarassociation.org/index.php/en/news/announcements-ijustice/9165-i-justice0>.

⁷¹ Supreme Court Announcement (04.02.21)

[http://www.supremecourt.gov.cy/Judicial/sc.nsf/All/B39F705F13B5B8D9C22586720043574E/\\$file/ANAKOIN%CE%A9%CE%A3%CE%97%20AN%CE%A9%CE%A4%CE%91%CE%A4%CE%9F%CE%A5%20CE%94%CE%99%CE%9A%CE%91%CE%A3%CE%A4%CE%97%CE%A1%CE%99%CE%9F%CE%A5%20%20%CE%99-JUSTICE%204-2-2021.pdf](http://www.supremecourt.gov.cy/Judicial/sc.nsf/All/B39F705F13B5B8D9C22586720043574E/$file/ANAKOIN%CE%A9%CE%A3%CE%97%20AN%CE%A9%CE%A4%CE%91%CE%A4%CE%9F%CE%A5%20CE%94%CE%99%CE%9A%CE%91%CE%A3%CE%A4%CE%97%CE%A1%CE%99%CE%9F%CE%A5%20%20%CE%99-JUSTICE%204-2-2021.pdf).

⁷² Supreme Court Announcement, Pursuant to Regulations 6 and 40 of the Electronic Justice (Electronic Submission) Procedural Regulation of 2021 (12.04.21)

<http://www.supremecourt.gov.cy/Judicial/sc.nsf/All/BB10733C2D6C3F00C22586B5002A5D2A?OpenDocument>.

⁷³ CBA Announcement (27.01.21) <https://www.cyprusbarassociation.org/index.php/en/news/announcements-ijustice/9461-i-justice-4k>.

⁷⁴ CBA Announcement (04.02.21) <https://www.cyprusbarassociation.org/index.php/en/news/announcements-ijustice/9578-ijustice-questions-2>.

⁷⁵ iJustice, <https://ijustice.judicial.gov.cy/#/login/:b94dn7hfjj>.

⁷⁶ Deputy Ministry Research Innovation Digital Policy <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCwRFBkICzdlmTbC5wOjfUBQ>.

⁷⁷ CBA, iJustice – FAQs <https://www.cyprusbarassociation.org/index.php/el/for-lawyers/ijustice/faqs1>.

⁷⁸ Nicosia Bar Association Announcement (28.07.21) <https://www.nba.org.cy/anakoinosi-dikigorikou-sylogou-lefkosias-2/>.

part of civilians and lawyers.⁷⁹ Despite delays and compromises, the electronic system of justice dramatically changed the way legal professionals had worked for decades. Moreover, it was undertaken during a politically charged and highly contested reform of the whole Cypriot legal system. Hence, an in-depth assessment of electronic justice, including training, may not yet be appropriate, as further significant developments are expected in the short term. The Supreme Court recently decided all new cases are to be submitted electronically, as of the 1st of February 2022, except for courts indicated in its announcement.⁸⁰

2.6. Universities and Students

In March 2020, the CYQAA announced all universities in Cyprus could switch to DL mode to curb the spread of COVID-19. In parallel, they were obliged to abide by necessary quality standards in terms of maintaining a full record of their actions (e.g., videoconferences, student activities, attendance, and communication with the teachers at prescribed times etc.).⁸¹ The CYQAA also provided a list of tools for online classes which each institution could choose from.⁸² On 20th March 2020, the Cyprus Rectors' Conference recognised the full compliance of universities with the emergency government measures in addressing the pandemic, including their high quality adoption and implementation of DL for study programme and online digital tools and techniques. This reflected the investments universities made in their digital infrastructures and development of new technologies.⁸³ Alternative forms of assessment were similarly adopted for final exams, including online written exams.⁸⁴

Alternative forms of teaching and assessment continued throughout the academic years of 2020-21⁸⁵ and 2021-22.⁸⁶ Universities proceeded with blended teaching, relying on a conventional and online teaching, to support the attendance of students unable to attend in-person classes.⁸⁷ The CYQAA recently clarified that students registering for conventional programmes of study for the winter semester of 2021 could return face-to-face.⁸⁸ However, it

⁷⁹ '15% of lawyers submit the documents electronically' (*Philenews*, 26.10.21)

<https://www.philenews.com/oikonomia/kypros/article/1320940/15-ton-dikigron-katachoroyn-ilektronika-ta-engrafa>.

⁸⁰ Supreme Court Announcement (21.12.21)

<http://www.supremecourt.gov.cy/judicial/sc.nsf/All/42C8E4A5B6258385C22587B2004247C4?OpenDocument>

The exemption from electronic submissions concerns the International Protection Administrative Court, the courts exercising criminal jurisdiction, including the Assize Courts, the Military Court and the Supreme Court.

⁸¹ CYQAA Announcement (10.03.2020) <http://www.dipae.ac.cy/index.php/el/nea-ekdiloseis/ana-koinoseis-el/498-10-03-2020-ana-voli-episkepseon-distance-learning>.

⁸² CYQAA Announcement (17.03.2020) <http://www.dipae.ac.cy/index.php/el/nea-ekdiloseis/ana-koinoseis-el/501-17-03-2020-ergaleia-tilemathima>.

⁸³ CYQAA Announcement (20.03.2020) <http://www.dipae.ac.cy/index.php/el/nea-ekdiloseis/ana-koinoseis-el/505-20-03-2020-psifisma-sinodou-pritaneon>.

⁸⁴ CYQAA Announcement (31.03.2020) <http://www.dipae.ac.cy/index.php/el/nea-ekdiloseis/ana-koinoseis-el/511-31-03-2020-final-exams-koronoios>.

⁸⁵ CYQAA Announcement (05.11.2020) <http://www.dipae.ac.cy/index.php/el/nea-ekdiloseis/ana-koinoseis-el/552-5-11-2020-endiameses-kai-telikes-exetaseis-cheimerinou-examinou-2020-2021-sta-idrymata-anoteris-ekpaidefsis-kai-asfaltikes-diklides-poiotitas>; CYQAA Announcement (27.04.2021)

<http://www.dipae.ac.cy/index.php/el/nea-ekdiloseis/ana-koinoseis-el/582-27-04-2021-endiameses-kai-telikes-exetaseis-y-po-synthikes-pandimias>.

⁸⁶ CYQAA Announcement (03/01/2022) <https://www.dipae.ac.cy/index.php/el/nea-ekdiloseis/ana-koinoseis-el/628-03-01-2022-exetaseis-xeimerinou-earinou-examinou-2021-2022-2>.

⁸⁷ CYQAA Announcement (13.05.2020) <http://www.dipae.ac.cy/index.php/el/nea-ekdiloseis/ana-koinoseis-el/527-13-05-2020-leitourgia-idrymaton-xeimerino-examino-20-21>.

⁸⁸ CYQAA Announcement (24.08.2021) <http://www.dipae.ac.cy/index.php/el/nea-ekdiloseis/ana-koinoseis-el/604-24-08-2021-engrafi-neoeiserchomenon-foititon-gia-to-cheimerino-examino-2021-2022>.

has also enabled the continuation of blended teaching and learning methods as ancillary means to facilitate the education process, and assist students who belong to vulnerable groups and for reasons of force majeure.⁸⁹

While universities in Cyprus have invested in digital infrastructure and registered students with access to hardware and software on campus, the pandemic forced some students to rely on their own or their families' resources, which were not necessarily equipped for educational purposes. In April 2020, CYQAA obliged universities to ensure all registered students had a computer appropriate for facilitating education processes.⁹⁰ There is no evidence to indicate whether such an obligation was implemented (or not) in practice.

3. MOVES TOWARDS ONLINE EDUCATION: AN ERA OF CHANGE?

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the implementation of emergency remote teaching into the legal educational system in Cyprus has posed technological, pedagogical, and social challenges.⁹¹ With the COVID-19 pandemic changing the operational norms of higher educational institutions, it is more important than ever to ensure the effectiveness and stability of legal education in Cyprus through robust practices and innovative teaching and learning approaches.⁹² As Emilianides states, 'in an era of globalisation, liberalisation and unprecedented technological change, law schools need to be as open-minded and innovative as possible, in order to effectively address the challenges and opportunities that these developments present'.⁹³ Therefore, this portion of the report examines the challenges and opportunities identified both before and after the outbreak of the pandemic, including the impact of COVID-19 on the legal education in Cyprus and its future.

3.1. Pre-Pandemic Legal Education

3.1.1. Universities

Until recently, the option to study an online LLB degree seemed impossible, as degrees offered in Cyprus were held exclusively face-to-face,⁹⁴ with the only exception of distance learning offered by the University of London through a locally Recognised Teaching Centre in Cyprus.⁹⁵ A person seeking admission to the CBA as a practicing lawyer must hold a recognised LLB degree either from a university of an EU Member State, or any other university, whether in the Republic of Cyprus or a third country.⁹⁶ Section 4 of the Cyprus

⁸⁹ CYQAA Announcement (27.07.2021) <http://www.dipae.ac.cy/index.php/el/nea-ekdiloseis/ana-koinoseis-el/598-28-07-2021-programmata-spoudon-kai-poiotiki-leitourgia-tis-a-noteris-ekpaidefsis-kata-to-cheimerino-examino-2021>. See also CYQAA Announcement (16.09.2021) <http://www.dipae.ac.cy/index.php/el/nea-ekdiloseis/ana-koinoseis-el/617-16-09-2021-programmata-spoudon-kai-poiotiki-leitourgia-tis-a-noteris-ekpaidefsis-kata-to-cheimerino-examino-2021>.

⁹⁰ CYQAA Announcement (07.04.2020) <http://www.dipae.ac.cy/index.php/el/nea-ekdiloseis/ana-koinoseis-el/519-07-04-2020-distance-learning-computer>.

⁹¹ F. Ferri, P. Grifoni and T. Guzzo, 'Online Learning and Emergency Remote Teaching: Opportunities and Challenges in Emerging Situations' (2020) 10(4) *Societies* 1, 4.

⁹² L. Pitsillidou, 'Legal Education in An Era of Change: The Impact of Covid-19' (Rule of Law Monitoring Mechanism Blog, 12.08.2021) <<https://ruleoflawmonitoringmechanism.eu/posts/legal-education-in-an-era-of-change-impact-covid19-lida-pitsillidou>>.

⁹³ A.C. Emilianides, 'A Post-Pandemic Legal Education', (Gold: The Business Magazine of Cyprus, 18.07.2021) <<https://www.goldnews.com.cy/digitaledition/#/reader/39983/1486800>>.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Cyprus Advocates Law (Cap 2) 83(I) 2020, s 4; See also Cyprus Advocates Law (Cap 2) 124 (I) 2005.

⁹⁶ Cyprus Advocates Law (Cap 2) 83(I) 2020, s 4(d).

Advocates Law (Cap 2) provides that any qualifications recognised before the amendment of Cap 2 in 2020, are still recognised, including the distance learning law degree offered by the University of London. A distance learning LLB degree has neither been validated nor approved by the CYQAA or the LC.⁹⁷

With the traditional method of teaching being prevalent in law schools, the LLB degree is predominantly delivered and taught through face-to-face lectures and seminars. However, this teaching method has been criticised for its failure to provide enough opportunities for students to participate during classrooms as ‘except for the student who happens to be sitting on the hot seat, no one else actively participates in the dialogue’.⁹⁸ This is compounded as lectures encourage passive learning through surface, rather than deep, approaches to student learning.⁹⁹ Students are required to listen and take notes for the majority of their classes and, therefore, no sufficient opportunities arise for student engagement and participation. As Hess argues, ‘students do not learn much just sitting in classes and listening to teachers, memorising pre-packaged assignments, and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences, and apply it to their lives’.¹⁰⁰

However, enrolments in Cyprus Law Schools are very low which eliminates the challenges of engaging many students during classes. Lectures usually comprise 30-40 students whereas seminars usually comprise 10-15 students. Due to this small number, students are provided with opportunities to actively interact in discussions with their teachers and peers, thus helping to enhance their knowledge and understanding on the subject-matter.

The rapid development of technology has revolutionised practices of teaching and learning in legal education in Cyprus. Law lecturers have re-considered their current teaching practices by adopting more innovative e-learning approaches to enhance traditional methods of teaching in law schools. Indeed, Law Schools have witnessed an increasing growth in the use of technology over the last decade, as lecturers have been given the opportunity to deploy a wide array of e-learning technologies to enhance student learning and participation. While the LLB by distance learning is not offered as an option, virtual learning platforms, such as Blackboard and Moodle, are at the forefront of recent technological advances in legal education in Cyprus. Virtual learning platforms have been adopted by all universities to provide access to various online teaching and learning materials, including PowerPoint slides, lecture and seminar handouts, audio and video clips, online quizzes, and online discussion groups.

Nevertheless, although it has been accepted that the adoption of virtual learning platforms have ‘revolutionised the traditional teaching system’ through acting as an aid to pedagogy,¹⁰¹ it has also been recognised that many of these platforms tend to focus on the

⁹⁷ CYQAA, ‘Bachelor Degree Accredited Programmes’ (2022). <<https://www.dipae.ac.cy/index.php/en/accreditation-en/accredited-programmes-bachelor-en>>; Cyprus Legal Council, ‘List of Approved Degreeed’ (2022) <https://www.legalcouncil.org.cy/list-of-approved-degrees/?lang=en>>.

⁹⁸ P.L. Caron and R. Gely, ‘Taking Back the Law School Classroom: Using Technology to Foster Active Student Learning’ (2004) 54(4) *Journal of Legal Education* 551, 554.

⁹⁹ J. Biggs and C. Tang, *Teaching for Quality Learning at University* (4th ed, McGraw-Hill Education 2011); See also, P. Ramsden, *Learning to Teach in Higher Education* (2nd ed, RoutledgeFalmer 2003).

¹⁰⁰ G.F. Hess, ‘Heads and Hearts: The Teaching and Learning Environment in Law School’ (2002) 52 *Journal of Legal Education* 75, 85.

¹⁰¹ J.A. Aloklu, ‘The Effectiveness of Blackboard System, Uses and Limitations in Information Management’ (2018) 10 *Intelligence Information Management* 133, 134.

delivery of information rather than the improvement of teaching and learning practices.¹⁰² Indeed, prior to COVID-19, virtual learning platforms were primarily used for downloading and accessing module materials, with few lecturers using them to engage students with e-learning activities.

This is mainly due to the unwillingness of lecturers to use e-learning technologies to enhance student learning, primarily due to their preference of using traditional teaching methods. Although e-learning technologies offer a variety of pedagogical benefits, many are not convinced their implementation could help improve their teaching delivery and make their classes more interactive and engaging. Another reason is the fact that, prior to the pandemic, it was not necessary to offer trainings on the available e-learning technologies and their pedagogical benefits. Even if such trainings were offered in the past, they were non-mandatory and therefore, only those who were interested in learning more about new technologies were willing to attend such trainings. Indeed, many of the universities in Cyprus are offering non-mandatory trainings, especially to new members of staff as part of their induction training,¹⁰³ in comparison to UCLan Cyprus in which a mandatory training on teaching and learning is offered to all members of staff, through obtaining the Fellowship of the UK AdvanceHE.

In addition, implementing e-learning technologies to theoretical-based modules, such as Jurisprudence, may be seen as counterproductive, as students are mainly required to enter debates with their teachers and peers on various theoretical aspects, such as justice and fairness. This makes the use of e-learning technologies challenging and difficult. Finally, they see the implementation of e-learning technologies as time-consuming, as it requires a great amount of time to learn and implement new technologies in the curriculum. Although, the number of students in Law Schools is small, the pressure of academia is still present. This is also evidenced from the fact that the student-teacher ratio in Cyprus is relatively high as compared to other EU countries, with a ratio of 22.0 students per member of staff.¹⁰⁴

3.1.2. Legal Profession

Even prior to the pandemic, the CBA offered its Bar training online, undertaken to provide flexibility to trainee lawyers to attend lectures either synchronously or asynchronously without the need to travel to the capital city, Nicosia, to physically attend lectures. The fact the Bar training initially occurred in Nicosia made it difficult for those living in long-distance provinces to attend lectures physically. Offering the Bar training online has given them the flexibility to organise their time more effectively, as they can access training materials online at any time and place. In addition, the increase in the numbers of law trainees in the last decade¹⁰⁵ has made it difficult to host face-to-face lectures as it is impossible to fit everyone within the same class.

¹⁰² Ibid; See also, A. Heirdsfield, S. Walker, M. Tambyah, D. Beutal, 'Blackboard as An Online Learning Environment': What Do Teacher Education Students and Staff Think? (2011) 36(7) *Australian Journal of Education* 16, 1; J. Herrington, T.C. Reeves, R. Oliver 'Online Learning as Information Delivery: Digital Myopia' (2005) 16(4) *Journal of Interactive Learning Research* 353.

¹⁰³ See University of Cyprus, 'Workshops and Seminars for UCY Instructors' <<http://www.ucy.ac.cy/ct/en/activities/for-instructors/workshops-seminars>>; UNIC, 'Training and Development for Faculty' <<https://www.unic.ac.cy/psu/training-and-development-for-faculty/>>.

¹⁰⁴ Eurostat, 'Tertiary Education Statistics' <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Tertiary_education_statistics&oldid=552003%20%20https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Tertiary_education_statistics&oldid=552003#Teaching_staff_and_student_academic_staff_ratios>.

¹⁰⁵ CBA, <<https://www.cyprusbar.org/CypriotAdvocateMembersPage>>.

On the other hand, the Bar exams have always been conducted with physical presence. The Cyprus Advocates Law (Cap 2) requires a trainee lawyer to hold a recognised university law degree to join the CBA and sit the exams of the LC. A trainee lawyer is required to sit ten modules, eight of them are compulsory and two are optional. The exam covers a range of areas of law such as Constitutional Law, Contract Law, Criminal Law, Company Law, Tort Law, Law of Evidence, Civil and Criminal Procedure, Property Law, Wills and Succession Law, Advocates Law and Deontology, and Family Law.¹⁰⁶ In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, no significant changes were made to the operation of the exams and the Bar Training remained unchanged as before the pandemic.

3.2. Post-Pandemic Legal Education: Opportunities and Challenges

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the Cyprus legal educational system has witnessed an increasing growth in the use of e-learning technologies. The announcement made by the MOEC on 10th March 2020 to suspend face-to-face operations of all universities, spurred an urgent use of e-learning technologies, accelerating the transformation of all Law Schools from in-classroom teaching to emergency remote teaching.¹⁰⁷ The sudden move to emergency remote teaching has transformed the way teaching occurs in law schools. Although online legal education previously seemed impossible due to the resistance of law schools, technological changes in the operation of the legal educational system have made this necessary.

However, the transformation to emergency remote teaching has posed significant challenges to Cypriot Law Schools. As no further research has been conducted regarding the legal educational challenges due to the pandemic, further examination should be conducted of the identified challenges to fill the gaps, using the UCLan Cyprus experience as a case study. Despite emergency remote teaching posing significant challenges to legal education in Cyprus, the pandemic has offered opportunities to cultivate potential benefits of online education and explore new means of teaching and learning. Indeed, the ‘emergency remote teaching has given a significant boost to online teaching, opening up new opportunities and reflections for the educational system’.¹⁰⁸ As a result, this report aims to explore not only challenges, but also opportunities that have been presented to reshape legal pedagogy in Cyprus considering the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.2.1. Technological Challenges and Opportunities

The proliferation of the COVID-19 pandemic has sparked some of the greatest technological developments in the 21st century. With e-learning technologies gaining prominence in Law Schools, many lecturers have re-considered their teaching and learning practices towards adopting more innovative e-learning approaches. As a response to the inescapable emergence

¹⁰⁶ Cyprus Legal Council, ‘Exam Schedule’ (2022) <<https://www.legalcouncil.org.cy/exam-schedule/?lang=en>>.

¹⁰⁷ MOEC, ‘Προληπτικά μέτρα που αφορούν στα Ιδρύματα Ανώτερης Εκπαίδευσης έναντι του νέου κορωνοϊού (COVID – 19)’ (10.03.2020) <<https://enimerosi.moec.gov.cy/archeia/1/ypp10528a>>; MOEC, ‘Διευκρίνιση για τα Ιδρύματα Ανώτερης Εκπαίδευσης όσον αφορά στην ανακοίνωση του Υπουργείου Παιδείας, Πολιτισμού, Αθλητισμού και Νεολαίας για τη λήψη μέτρων πρόληψης της εξάπλωσης του ιού COVID-19, ημερομηνίας 11 Μαρτίου 2020’ (12.03.2020) <<https://enimerosi.moec.gov.cy/archeia/1/ypp10547a>>; See also CYQAA, ‘Εξ αποστάσεως συνέχιση των μαθημάτων, Επ’ Αόριστον λόγω του COVID-19’ (10.03.2020) <<https://www.dipae.ac.cy/index.php/en/news-and-events/announcements/13-dipae-el/dipaeel/anakoimoseis/498-10-03-2020-anavoli-episkepseon-distance-learning>>.

¹⁰⁸ F. Ferri, P. Grifoni and T. Guzzo, ‘Online Learning and Emergency Remote Teaching: Opportunities and Challenges in Emerging Situations’ (2020) 10(4) *Societies* 1, 6.

of the pandemic, the need for technology has induced Law Schools to explore different learning options through video-conferencing applications and platforms, such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype, Blackboard, and Moodle.¹⁰⁹ For example, MS Teams has become an integral e-learning platform at UCLan Cyprus, creating a supportive remote learning environment which allows law students to connect to online classrooms in real-time and engage with teachers and peers on various e-learning activities.

Although e-learning technologies existed before COVID-19, ‘the unprecedented situation created by the pandemic provided the impetus for their further development and enhanced use’, as Law Schools have been forced to ‘adopt newer e-learning technologies and use old modalities in more innovative and inventive ways’.¹¹⁰ Law Schools have smoothly adjusted to the technological changes imposed to transform in-classroom teaching to emergency remote teaching. A key reason for the smooth transition is the fact many universities already had IT infrastructure in place with access to video-conferencing and online platforms. The transition to emergency remote teaching was successfully achieved due to the collaborative efforts of all Law Schools to adjust to the rapid changes imposed on legal education in response to the pandemic, including cooperation made with the CYQAA to ensure implementations were as smooth as possible.¹¹¹

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has given a significant boost to online teaching, it has also exposed technological challenges in law schools, including the lack of internet connectivity and access constraints.¹¹² Although many students have smoothly adjusted to online teaching, others have struggled due to poor internet connectivity which prevented them harvesting the fruits of online teaching. Over the last two years, access to a reliable internet connection has become vital, as students regularly use the Internet to access online classes and teaching materials. The increased use of the Internet during the pandemic has caused significant disruptions and delays which has impacted the students’ capacity to attend and participate in online classes.¹¹³

Aside from the lack of internet connectivity, students were prevented from accessing electronic devices, such as computers, laptops, and tablets which were available via their university library. The library is an important resource for students as it provides access to electronic devices and various research and study materials, a resource which was not considered available during lockdown restrictions.¹¹⁴ Due to access constraints, some students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds residing in countries and regions with poor internet connectivity, were forced to use mobile phones to attend online classes and access

¹⁰⁹ CYQAA, ‘Εργαλεία για τηλεμαθήματα’ (17.03.2020) <https://www.dipae.ac.cy/index.php/el/nea-ekdiloseis/ana_koinoseis-el/501-17-03-2020-ergaleia-tilemathima>.

¹¹⁰ L. Pitsillidou, ‘Legal Education in An Era of Change: The Impact of Covid-19’ (Rule of Law Monitoring Mechanism Blog, 12.08.2021) <<https://ruleoflawmonitoringmechanism.eu/posts/legal-education-in-an-era-of-change-impact-covid19-lida-pitsillidou>>.

¹¹¹ A.C. Emilianides, ‘A Post-Pandemic Legal Education’, (Gold: The Business Magazine of Cyprus, 18.07.2021) <<https://www.goldnews.com.cy/digitaledition/#/reader/39983/1486800>>.

¹¹² F. Ferri, P. Grifoni and T. Guzzo, ‘Online Learning and Emergency Remote Teaching: Opportunities and Challenges in Emerging Situations’ (2020) 10(4) *Societies* 1, 6.

¹¹³ M. Smith, ‘Integrating Technology in Contemporary Legal Education’ (2019) 54(2) *The Law Teacher* 209, 211-212.

¹¹⁴ L. Pitsillidou, ‘Legal Education in An Era of Change: The Impact of Covid-19’ (Rule of Law Monitoring Mechanism Blog, 12.08.2021) <<https://ruleoflawmonitoringmechanism.eu/posts/legal-education-in-an-era-of-change-impact-covid19-lida-pitsillidou>>.

teaching and library materials.¹¹⁵ This had a detrimental effect on their performance as many students struggled to properly conduct their research to complete assignments on time. As a result, law schools witnessed an increased number of applications for extensions and mitigating circumstances, as students were unable to cope with their studies due to the uneven access to necessary technologies, such as fast internet connection and computer devices.¹¹⁶

The technological challenges have unmasked digital inequalities among students from more socially deprived and economically challenged backgrounds. Digital poverty has become a major issue in legal education, as the transition to emergency remote teaching has ‘exposed technology’s weakness to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds, including those with disabilities. Indeed, the inequality gaps between students in legal education have been exposed during the pandemic because of the uneven access to technology’.¹¹⁷

Another technological challenge is the lack of adequate training on the use of video-conferencing applications and online platforms.¹¹⁸ Due to the well-known resistance of Law Schools to online teaching,¹¹⁹ it was not previously essential to provide training on available e-learning technologies. It was not until the outbreak of COVID-19 which has posed the urgent need to put in place trainings and technical support to enhance the digital skills of both lecturers and the students. However, although guidance has been provided to the students on e-learning technologies, such as MS Teams, it was identified that many students have found it difficult to adjust to the rapid technological changes. By contrast, students who were ‘born into a world that has embraced technology’ and had been using the Internet since childhood, have smoothly adjusted to those changes.¹²⁰

3.2.2. Pedagogical Challenges and Opportunities

Aside from the technological challenges, COVID-19 has also induced the implementation of innovative methods of teaching, helping in the development of new pedagogical approaches.¹²¹ As a result of the paradigm shift to online teaching, an opportunity was provided for all lecturers to reconsider current methods of teaching by exploring innovative e-learning technologies to enhance student learning. As Pistone argued, ‘technological innovations are not only changing the ways that students learn, communicate, and interact, but they are also allowing educators to do things that were not possible without technology’.¹²² According to Shavers, there are several reasons why lecturers should consider using e-learning technologies, including ‘the recognition of different learning styles (for example, the use of classroom

¹¹⁵ F. Ferri, P. Grifoni and T. Guzzo, ‘Online Learning and Emergency Remote Teaching: Opportunities and Challenges in Emerging Situations’ (2020) 10(4) *Societies* 1, 7.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, 6.

¹¹⁷ L. Pitsillidou, ‘Legal Education in An Era of Change: The Impact of Covid-19’ (Rule of Law Monitoring Mechanism Blog, 12.08.2021) <<https://ruleoflawmonitoringmechanism.eu/posts/legal-education-in-an-era-of-change-impact-covid19-lida-pitsillidou>>.

¹¹⁸ See A.M. Johnson et al, ‘Challenges and Solutions when Using Technologies in the Classroom’ in S.A. Crossley and D.S. McNamara (eds), *Adapting Educational Technologies for Literacy Instruction* (Routledge 2016).

¹¹⁹ C. Easton, ‘An Examination of Clicker Technology Use in Legal Education’ (2009) 3 *Journal of Information, Law, and Technology* <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/elj/jilt/2009_3/easton/>.

¹²⁰ M. Pistone, ‘Law Schools and Technology: Where We Are and Where We Are Heading’ (2015) 64(4) *Journal of Legal Education* 586, 586.

¹²¹ A.W. Shavers, ‘The Impact of Technology on Legal Education’ (2001) 51(3) *Journal of Legal Education* 407, 409-410.

¹²² M. Pistone, ‘Law Schools and Technology: Where We Are and Where We Are Heading’ (2015) 64(4) *Journal of Legal Education* 586, 589.

computer projections may help the student who learns best through visual cues), the incorporation of new learning experiences, accommodation of disabled students, the ability to access information not readily available at the researcher's location, the possibility of multiparty discussions with colleagues around the world, communication with students outside of the classroom, and the provision of courses to students in distant location'.¹²³

Since the onset of COVID-19, the implementation of innovative e-learning activities in law curriculum has become vital, as they could transform the law classroom into a supportive active-learning environment for all students to engage and participate in discussions with teachers and peers.¹²⁴ For example, at UCLan Cyprus, e-learning activities, such as online multiple-choice questions, mini quizzes, online discussions, blogs, and virtual field trips have been used to tackle the challenges of the pandemic. Implementing these e-learning activities have helped students receive adequate formative feedback on their modules, allowing them to identify gaps or misconceptions that could be improved before taking their summative assessments, such as written assignments and exams. With the help of digital technology, law lecturers provided prompt formative feedback to their students, helping them 'to take control over their own learning by obtaining necessary remediation for identified deficiencies in their understanding, and to adjust their approaches to future learning tasks'.¹²⁵ E-learning activities present a unique opportunity to transform law students from passive to active learners, as the learning process did not only involve the 'usual suspects' but also students who are usually reluctant to participate during classrooms.¹²⁶

Recent technological developments have also induced the use and implementation of recorded lectures in Law Schools. In comparison to other countries, such as the UK where recorded lectures are a common phenomenon in legal education,¹²⁷ the Law Schools in Cyprus implemented recorded lectures for the first time after the outbreak of the pandemic. Following the announcement made by the CYQAA in March 2020,¹²⁸ all universities were required to implement recorded lectures in their curriculum in compliance with the EU Regulation 2016/679¹²⁹ and the provisions of the Cypriot Law for the Protection of Natural Persons about the Processing of Personal Data and for the Free Movement of such Data of 2018 (Law 125(I)/2018).

¹²³ A.W. Shavers, 'The Impact of Technology on Legal Education' (2001) 51(3) *Journal of Legal Education* 407, 409-410.

¹²⁴ L. Pitsillidou, 'Legal Education in An Era of Change: The Impact of Covid-19' (Rule of Law Monitoring Mechanism Blog, 12.08.2021) <<https://ruleoflawmonitoringmechanism.eu/posts/legal-education-in-an-era-of-change-impact-covid19-lida-pitsillidou>>.

¹²⁵ R.A. Lasso, 'Is Our Students Learning? Using Assessments to Measure and Improve Law School Learning Environment' (2010) 15(1) *Barry Law Review* 73, 75.

¹²⁶ L. Pitsillidou, 'Legal Education in An Era of Change: The Impact of Covid-19' (Rule of Law Monitoring Mechanism Blog, 12.08.2021) <<https://ruleoflawmonitoringmechanism.eu/posts/legal-education-in-an-era-of-change-impact-covid19-lida-pitsillidou>>.

¹²⁷ M. Smith, 'Integrating Technology in Contemporary Legal Education' (2019) 54(2) *The Law Teacher* 209, 212.; See also, M.J. Draper, S. Gibbon, J. Thomas, 'Lecture Recording: A New Norm' (2018) 52(3) *The Law Teacher* 316.

¹²⁸ CYQAA, 'Διαδικτυακή διδασκαλία/εξέταση και προσωπικά δεδομένα' (10.04.2020) <<https://www.dipae.ac.cy/index.php/el/nea-ekdiloseis/anakoinoseis-el/516-10-04-2020-distance-learning>>; See also CYQAA, 'Διαδικτυακή διδασκαλία/εξέταση και προσωπικά δεδομένα (Αρ. 2)' (30.09.2020) <<https://www.dipae.ac.cy/index.php/el/nea-ekdiloseis/anakoinoseis-el/546-30-09-2020-dia-diktyaki-didaskalia-exetasi-kai-prosopika-dedomena-2>>.

¹²⁹ Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons regarding the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation) [2016] OJ L119/1.

The shift to recorded lectures benefited students vastly as they were given the opportunity to revert to the recordings and rewatch the lectures at any time and place, allowing them to make their own notes and pay closer attention to taught material. Embedding the recorded lectures into the law curriculum could also support an inclusive education with flexibility for all learners to access the materials taught.¹³⁰ Informal discussions with students at UCLan Cyprus have shown great satisfaction with the implementation of this new feature, with students advising they would like to see recorded lectures permanently added and used throughout their LLB studies. However, the introduction of the recorded lectures has caused much controversy and debate, with some lecturers expressing their concerns over the impact on teaching.¹³¹ Concerns were mainly based on the negative impact of recorded lectures on the students' performance, as students tend to considerably rely on recordings, thus preventing them from paying attention during the lectures with some students very often missing their classes.

The pandemic also induced the development and promotion of open access to various online courses and webinars, providing the opportunity to all learners to attend previously unavailable and non-accessible online courses, such as trainings and summer schools. Due to the lockdown measures which prevented students accessing hard copy research materials, the use of online resources thrived significantly, as students were able to access a variety of online research materials, such as e-books and journals, which were made available online to tackle the challenges of the pandemic and its impact on Higher Education, 'thus heading towards a more inclusive learning environment'.¹³²

Furthermore, open access helped facilitate research and knowledge transfer, as academics around the world were able to attend and participate in online conferences, research seminars, workshops, and trainings. Open access has provided an opportunity for academics to actively contribute to the dissemination of new knowledge and research across the world. This 'provides significant pedagogical benefits to the students, as by being actively involved in research, educators could support their teaching by keeping students up to date with the new legal developments'.¹³³ As Smith argues, open access could 'provide the opportunity to increase the efficiency of legal education and offer greater access to knowledge of the law'.¹³⁴

Although the pandemic has induced the development of new pedagogical approaches, it also highlighted various pedagogical challenges. One of the key challenges is student engagement, as the shift to online teaching has made it difficult to engage students in classrooms. This is because, by having the sessions fully online, students often find themselves easily distracted, preventing them from engaging in discussions with teachers and peers. It is

¹³⁰ J.R.D. MacKay, 'First Year Undergraduates Make Use of Recordings to Overcome Barriers in Higher Education: Evidence from a Survey' (2020) 28 *Research in Learning Technology* 1, 2-3.

¹³¹ J.R.D. MacKay, E. Nordmann, L. Murray, A. Browitt, M. Anderson, J. Hutchison, 'The Cost of Asking: 'Say that Again?': A Social Capital Theory View into How Lecture Recording Supports Widening Participation' (Front. Educ, 14.10.2021) <<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/educ.2021.734755/full>>; N. Skead, L. Elphick, F. McGaughey, M. Weson, K. Offer, M. Montalto, 'If You Record, They Will Not Come – But Does it Really Matter? Student Attendance and Lecture Recording at an Australian Law School' (2020) 54 *The Law Teacher* 349; M.J. Draper, S. Gibbon, J. Thomas 'Lecture Recording: A New Norm' (2018) 52(3) *The Law Teacher* 316.

¹³² L. Pitsillidou, 'Legal Education in An Era of Change: The Impact of Covid-19' (Rule of Law Monitoring Mechanism Blog, 12.08.2021) <<https://ruleoflawmonitoringmechanism.eu/posts/legal-education-in-an-era-of-change-impact-covid19-lida-pitsillidou>>.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ M. Smith, 'Integrating Technology in Contemporary Legal Education' (2019) 54(2) *The Law Teacher* 209, 213.

even challenging to identify whether students are attending online sessions, as most of them have their cameras off. This is because during the academic year 2020/21, it was not mandatory for students to turn their cameras on. Although with the new academic year 2021/22 this became mandatory, most of the students are still unwilling to turn their cameras on, preventing them from being fully engaged.

The lack of human interaction which exists in traditional face-to-face teaching makes it difficult to assess student performance and identify any misconceptions or gaps in their learning. In an era of change, increasing student motivation to engage throughout their LLB studies was found to be challenging. Indeed, ‘making students engage in their learning during such an increasingly complex world that places high demands on students, is one of the biggest struggles that educators have been asked to deal with during the pandemic’.¹³⁵ Further, as many law students are used to the traditional method of teaching, many perceive online teaching as burdensome.

The pedagogical challenges of online learning were also exposed when the universities were asked to shift their attention to hybrid approaches to teaching (also known as ‘blended learning approach’) in September 2020,¹³⁶ requiring lecturers to simultaneously deliver classes in-person and online at the same time. The main reason behind the implementation of the hybrid approach to teaching is to provide flexibility to a diverse range of students, as most of the students coming from abroad are facing difficulties in traveling to Cyprus due to COVID-19 reasons and visa restrictions, thus preventing them from attending their classes physically.

Although the hybrid approach to teaching enhances inclusivity in Law Schools,¹³⁷ it also poses significant challenges. Although many students at UCLan Cyprus have shown their satisfaction of implementing a hybrid approach to teaching, others have expressed concerns of not receiving the same quality of teaching compared to on-campus students. Many students have felt left out from various teaching and learning opportunities, as more focus was given to on-campus students. This is because law lecturers struggled to deliver a hybrid mode of teaching to simultaneously engage on-campus and online students, especially in circumstances where online students demonstrated little or no interest in participating in discussions with teachers and peers. The hybrid approach to teaching also had a negative impact on the physical attendance of students as many preferred to continue attending classes remotely. Due to the small number of law students, this makes the use of hybrid approach to teaching challenging. Irrespective, it seems that hybrid approaches to teaching are here to stay, as they offer the flexibility to deliver the LLB in a more innovative and flexible way.

Following the announcement made by the CYQAA on 31st March 2020, all universities were instructed to use alternative assessment methods to eliminate challenges posed by social

¹³⁵ L. Pitsillidou, ‘Legal Education in An Era of Change: The Impact of Covid-19’ (Rule of Law Monitoring Mechanism Blog, 12.08.2021) <<https://ruleoflawmonitoringmechanism.eu/posts/legal-education-in-an-era-of-change-impact-covid19-lida-pitsillidou>>.

¹³⁶ CYQAA, ‘Λειτουργία Ιδρυμάτων Ανώτερης Εκπαίδευσης κατά το Χειμερινό Εξάμηνο 2020-21’ (13.05.2020) <<https://www.dipae.ac.cy/index.php/el/nea-ekdiloseis/anakoimoseis-el/527-13-05-2020-leitourgia-idrymaton-xeimerino-examino-20-21>>; CYQAA, ‘Λειτουργία Ιδρυμάτων Ανώτερης Εκπαίδευσης κατά το ακαδημαϊκό έτος 2020-2021’ (07.09.2020) <<https://www.dipae.ac.cy/index.php/el/nea-ekdiloseis/anakoimoseis-el/540-07-09-2020-leitourgia-idrymaton-2020-2021>>.

¹³⁷ M. Castan and R. Hyams, ‘Blended Learning in the Law Classroom: Design, Implementation and Evaluation of an Intervention in the First Year Law Curriculum Design’ (2017) 27(1) *Legal Education Review* 1, 2.

distancing restrictions.¹³⁸ Although the shift to alternative assessment methods has not caused any significant issues to traditional written courseworks, it affected the operation of the final written exams as universities were instructed to carry out exams remotely. Using an alternative assessment exam was challenging, as the traditional on-campus exam was swapped with a 24-hour online exam. Although many students at UCLan Cyprus have found that shift beneficial, instances of malpractices, such as plagiarism and collusion, have been identified. Due to difficulties in invigilating a 24-hour seen exam, it was impossible to identify whether the exam paper was wholly written by the student or by a third party.

3.2.3. Social Challenges

The biggest challenge of the emergency remote teaching was not physical but psychological. Students were prevented from physically communicating with teachers and peers during the pandemic, and thus, mental health issues such as anxiety and depression, surfaced among students. The lack of social and cognitive presence has affected the motivation of students to participate and engage during their studies, with many performing lower in their coursework and final exams. Further, not all students have ‘a reliable working environment...with some finding themselves working in bedrooms they share with their siblings or in busy communal areas.’¹³⁹ Indeed, ‘working in such an environment makes it difficult for students to concentrate, with many struggling to cope... [T]he shift to online teaching has forced many law students to be working from home where there are enormous distractions and other domestic issues’.¹⁴⁰ Therefore, most students find it challenging to maintain focus during online teaching.

Despite this, the hybrid approach has helped eliminate some social challenges. It has offered an opportunity for all learners to collaborate and communicate with teachers and peers via electronic means, which can reinforce the feeling of community belonging.¹⁴¹

3.3. CONCLUSION

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has served as a catalyst in reshaping the operation of contemporary legal education and legal professions in Cyprus. With regards to legal education, the immediate transition from in-classroom to emergency remote teaching has posed significant technological, pedagogical, and social challenges. This has led universities to reconsider various aspects of legal pedagogy, such as accessibility, equality, and inclusivity. The lack of internet connectivity and access constraints have unmasked digital inequalities between students in accessing the materials taught to harvest the fruits of online teaching, with

¹³⁸ CYQAA, ‘CYQAA Statement on Covid-19 Pandemic’ (2020)

<<https://www.dipae.ac.cy/archeia/anakoinoseis/CYQAA%20STATEMENT%20ON%20COVID.pdf>>;

CYQAA, ‘Τελικές εξετάσεις σε καταστάσεις έκτακτης ανάγκης λόγω κορονοϊού: Πρότυπα Ποιότητας και Κατευθυντήριες Γραμμές για Εναλλακτικές Μορφές Αξιολόγησης’ (31.03.2020)

<<https://www.dipae.ac.cy/index.php/el/nea-ekdiloiseis/anakoinoseis-el/511-31-03-2020-final-exams-koronoios>>.

¹³⁹ L. Pitsillidou, ‘Legal Education in An Era of Change: The Impact of Covid-19’ (Rule of Law Monitoring Mechanism Blog, 12.08.2021) <<https://ruleoflawmonitoringmechanism.eu/posts/legal-education-in-an-era-of-change-impact-covid-19-lida-pitsillidou>>; F. Ferri, P. Grifoni and T. Guzzo, ‘Online Learning and Emergency Remote Teaching: Opportunities and Challenges in Emerging Situations’ (2020) 10(4) *Societies* 1, 10.

¹⁴⁰ L. Pitsillidou, ‘Legal Education in An Era of Change: The Impact of Covid-19’ (Rule of Law Monitoring Mechanism Blog, 12.08.2021) <<https://ruleoflawmonitoringmechanism.eu/posts/legal-education-in-an-era-of-change-impact-covid-19-lida-pitsillidou>>; F. Ferri, P. Grifoni and T. Guzzo, ‘Online Learning and Emergency Remote Teaching: Opportunities and Challenges in Emerging Situations’ (2020) 10(4) *Societies* 1, 10.

¹⁴¹ F. Ferri, P. Grifoni and T. Guzzo, ‘Online Learning and Emergency Remote Teaching: Opportunities and Challenges in Emerging Situations’ (2020) 10(4) *Societies* 1, 10.

many struggling to cope with their studies due to their incapacity to attend and participate in online classes. One of the problematic areas highlighted by the pandemic is the inequality gap and digital poverty, as ‘socio-economic inequalities are still a current problem in legal education nowadays.’¹⁴² The COVID-19 pandemic has therefore highlighted the need to support students ‘in their learning activities by mitigating the risks of inequality and uneven access to education through embedding activities that support wider participation and inclusivity.’¹⁴³

Re-considering current pedagogical approaches and practices to assess student performance and enhance student learning could support in the transformation of a contemporary legal education in Cyprus, which embraces digital technology and supports innovative practices to enhance participation and inclusivity. Although the use of online legal education was nearly absent before the pandemic, COVID-19 has led Law Schools in Cyprus to experiment with online teaching, leading towards the implementation of digital technology in law curriculum.

Therefore, the recent technological developments are not a ‘panacea’ to legal education,¹⁴⁴ but rather, an opportunity to explore a wide array of new innovative methods of teaching. Indeed, the implementation of innovative e-learning technologies has become a necessity, as they could transform the law classroom into a supportive and inclusive environment for all students to participate and engage. The rapid technological developments have induced the need to implement recorded lectures in Law Schools in Cyprus for the first time, leading towards a supportive and inclusive legal education with flexibility for all learners to access the materials taught as well as participate in law classrooms. The development of open access to various online materials and courses has also played a catalyst role in supporting all learners during their learning journey, helping to mitigate the challenges students have been asked to tackle with, to cope with their studies.

Aside from legal education, the COVID-19 pandemic has also posed unprecedented challenges to the legal profession in Cyprus, as legal professionals and the courts have been asked to deal with operational changes during challenging times. In an era of change, a shift to online continuing professional development was seen to be essential, as it has provided opportunities to legal professionals to access CPD workshops and seminars remotely. This change has embraced a new format of professional development to legal professionals in Cyprus. In an ever increasing globalised and competitive society, the shift to online CPD cannot be overstated as it has improved access to professional development in a more flexible way. With the demands of legal profession rapidly evolving, online CPD becomes a hallmark for legal professionals in Cyprus, as it helps them maintain and improve their legal knowledge and skills, ensuring that high standards are maintained in legal professionals’ practice.

The legal profession in Cyprus has also seen the establishment of the first Judicial college in 2020, which aims to provide a lifelong training of judges in Cyprus. Although this can be seen as a significant development to legal profession aiming to improve the efficiency of the Cypriot justice system, further improvements are needed to strengthen the resources for

¹⁴² L. Pitsillidou, ‘Legal Education in An Era of Change: The Impact of Covid-19’ (Rule of Law Monitoring Mechanism Blog, 12.08.2021) <<https://ruleoflawmonitoringmechanism.eu/posts/legal-education-in-an-era-of-change-impact-covid19-lida-pitsillidou>>.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ F. Ferri, P. Grifoni and T. Guzzo, ‘Online Learning and Emergency Remote Teaching: Opportunities and Challenges in Emerging Situations’ (2020) 10(4) *Societies* 1, 6.

continuing education of judges, especially with regards to the digitalisation of justice and the shift from face-to-face to online proceedings, leading towards an alignment with other EU members states.

It was not until the implementation of the iJustice system in Cyprus which has revolutionised the traditional court system and the way legal professionals have been working for decades. Although iJustice was an initiative since 2017, COVID-19 has urged the need for its official implementation in 2021 to address the difficulties posed in the operation and function of the courts during the pandemic. COVID-19 has exposed the low digitalisation of the Cypriot courts as well as the limitations that exist on the administration of justice due to enormous delays and disruptions to obtain justice in Cyprus. The introduction of iJustice system aimed to usher the Cypriot legal system into a new age of speedy and effective justice that embraces the use of digital technology in legal profession. As iJustice is still at its early stages, more is to be seen in the future as to what gaps are needed to be filled in to improve the Cypriot justice system.

As a result of the pandemic, the recent technological developments have therefore transformed the legal profession and legal education in Cyprus and will likely continue to do so in the coming years. COVID-19 has highlighted the importance and power of online education to help students acquire the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes they need to contribute constructively to society as well as create a stable and effective legal profession through enhancing the digitalisation of the Cypriot court system, the lifelong training of judges and the continuing professional development of legal professionals in Cyprus.