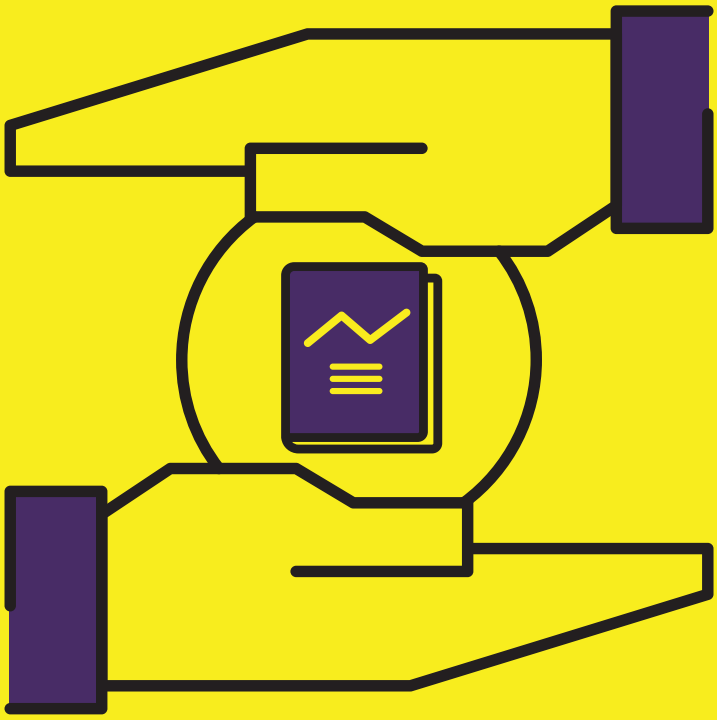
Republika e Kosovës
Republika Kosova – Republic of Kosovo
Agjencia e Kosovës për Akreditim
Agencija Kosova za Akreditaciju
Kosovo Accreditation Agency

ANNUAL WORK REPORT



of The State Council of Quality and Kosovo Accreditation Agency for the Year 2020

PRISHTINA, 2021

ANNUAL WORK REPORT

of the State Council of Quality
and Kosovo Accreditation Agency
for the Year 2020

PRISHTINA, 2021

Supported by:
Qaint

Dizajn:
Envinion

This report has been supported from the Quality, Accountability, Integrity and Transparancy in Higher Education (QAINT) Project.

The QAINT project is funded by Austrian Development Agency (ADA) with the contribution of the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI), and is implemented by the consortium KEC, ORCA and ZSI.

CONTENT

1. ACRONYMS 7

2. Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) 8

3. State Council of Quality (SCQ) 11

4. MEETINGS AND DECISIONS OF STATE COUNCIL OF QUALITY FOR THE YEAR 2020 ... 13

5. EVALUATION AND ACCREDITATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTIUTUTIONS IN 2020 14

5.1 INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTIUTUTIONS IN 2020 17

5.1.1. ACCREDITATION OF PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION INSTIUTUTIONS IN 2020 18

5.1.2. INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION OF PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN 2020 19

5. 2. ACCREDITATION OF STUDY PROGRAMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTIUTUTIONS IN 2020 20

5.2.1. ACCREDITATION OF STUDY PROGRAMS IN PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION INSTIUTUTIONS 21

5.2.2. ACCREDITATION OF STUDY PROGRAMS IN PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTIUTUTIONS 23

6. MONITORING 24

7. APPROVAL OF NEW STANDARDS FOR DOCTORAL PROGRAMMES 2020 25

8. APPEALS COMMITTEE 27

9. INTERNAL QUALITY ASSUARANCE OF KAA 28

10. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION, PARTNERSHIP AND PROJECTS 29

11. DATA MANAGEMENT 32

12. PUBLIC RELATIONS 33

13.ENQA RECCOMENDATIONS AND ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN TO IMPLEMENT THEM 34

1. ACRONYMS

ADA	Austrian Development Agency
KAA	Kosovo Accreditation Agency
CEENQA	Central Eastern Europe Network of Quality Assurance
ENQA	European Network for Quality Assurance
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register
ESG	European Standards and Guidelines
HERAS	Higher Education, Research and Applied Science Plus
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
Public HEI	Higher Education Institutions financed by the Government of the Republic of Kosovo
Private HEI	Self-financed Higher Education Institutions
INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
AC	Appeals Committee reviewing the appeals to SCQ decisions submitted by HEIs
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
SCQ	State Council of Quality
Law on HE	Law on Higher Education
MESTI	Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation
QAINT	Quality, Accountability, Integrity and Transparency in Higher Education Project
SER	Self-Evaluation Report
QA	Quality Assurance
AI	Administrative Instruction
WUS Kosova	World University Service Kosovo

2. KOSOVO ACCREDITATION AGENCY (KAA)

Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) is a public, independent agency responsible for accreditation and re-accreditation of public and private institutions of higher education in Kosovo and their study programs. It was established in 2008 by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST), in accordance with the Law on Higher Education No. 2003/14.[1]

Through the accreditation process, KAA supports development of quality in higher education and at the same time provides the society with assurance that the quality of higher education teaching and study meets the minimum international standards.

The legal basis for the operations of Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) is the Law on Higher Education in Kosovo (No. 04/L-037, dated 31.08.2011) and the Administrative Instruction on the Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Kosovo (No. 15/2018)[2], as amended in 2019 by the MEST (IA 02/2019 [3]; IA 08/2019 [4] and UA 13/2019) [5]

In line with the Article 7. of the LHE (No. 04/L-03), the KAA responsibilities include: advising with the Ministry on applications from institutions for licences to offer courses or programs; inspecting providers of higher education and advising with the Ministry related to granting, modification or revocation of licences; performing periodic audits over the quality of

1 https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2015/06/2-ligji-per-arsimin-e-larte.pdf
2 https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2018/10/ilovepdf-merged.pdf
3 https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2019/07/4dd5f6a7-x.pdf
4 https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2019/05/ua-masht-08-2019-per-ndryshim-dhe-plotesim-te-ua-nr-15-18.pdf
5 https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2019/07/4dd5f6a7-x.pdf

licensed providers of higher education and taking decision on accreditation or their re-accreditation; undertaking periodic quality assessment of programs offered by accredited providers of higher education;

KAA provides accreditation in these levels:

- Accreditation of higher education institutions
- Accreditation of study programs
- Accreditation of institutions and study programs
- Accreditations of HEI branches and study programs offered in these branches
- Recognition/validation of international accreditations

Following its establishment, in line with the European Standards and Guidelines in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), KAA [6] developed its accreditation standards and procedures and published them on their official website. [7]

An accreditation request may be submitted by:

- A higher institution itself to be evaluated at institutional level or to have the study programs evaluated
- Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI)
- State Council of Quality within the KAA, in specific cases

6 https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf
7 https://akreditimi.rks-gov.net/guidelines/

To have a transparent accreditation process, KAA has prepared all the documents needed for the accreditation procedures that may be used by the HEIs, such as: KAA standards, KAA Guidelines on drafting the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) for Higher Education Institutions and their programs evaluation, respectively the Accreditation Manual. [8]. These documents served as guidelines for higher education institutions for accreditation purposes, but also as guidelines for internal quality assurance and management.

KAA consists of an administrative structure, headed by the KAA Director, and a governing and decision-making body - the State Council of Quality (SCQ). The administrative structure of the KAA currently consists of the Director and 8 officials.

Due to frequent interferences by politics in appointing and discharging the KAA Director, the KAA operated with an Acting Director until March 2020. These frequent changes have had an effect in KAA efficiency, especially at the time it got excluded from the European Quality Assurance Register - EQAR in 2018, [9] and lost its member status in the European Network for Quality Assurance - ENQA [10], following a re-evaluation in 2019.

Following a professional and transparent recruitment process, supervised and supported by the British Embassy in Kosovo, on 6 March 2020, Mr. Naim Gashi was appointed the Director of the KAA, receiving the majority of the votes from the Government of Kosovo. [11] So for the first time since 2014, the KAA has a permanent Director and this is expected to bring sustainability and increase the KAA efficiency.

The KAA Director is a non-voting member of the SCQ.

8 . https://akreditimi.rks-gov.net/accreditation/standards/
9 EQAR https://www.eqar.eu/assets/uploads/2018/04/T_180313_KAA_Publicagencyment.pdf
10 ENQA https://www.enqa.eu/review-database/external-review-report-of-kaa-2/
11 https://kallxo.com/arsim/dy-vite-pas-shpalljes-se-konkursit-emerohet-drejtori-i-agjencise-se-akreditimit/

3. STATE COUNCIL OF QUALITY (SCQ)

The State Council of Quality (SCQ) is the governing body of the Kosovo Accreditation Agency and is responsible to make decisions on the accreditation of higher education institutions and their study programs. The activity of the SCQ is based on the Law on Higher Education in the Republic of Kosovo No. 04/L-037. [12]

Election of SCQ members is regulated with the provisions of the Law on Higher Education, specifically Article 7, paragraph 4, stating that *'The KAA shall be governed by a Board consisting of not less than five and not more than nine persons, appointed by the Ministry for a fixed term; among persons of both genders active in academic work in higher education and/or the professions within and outside of Kosovo, such that there are at least three persons ('international experts') not employed by any higher education provider in Kosovo. This Board shall be designated the State Council of Quality of the KAA. Its membership shall be ratified by the Assembly. Decisions or recommendations regarding the accreditation are made with the majority of votes by its members. Council reports annually to the Ministry and Assembly about its accreditation activities and the adequacy of the supporting infrastructure available'.*

In addition to the Law on Higher Education, MESTI drafted a special Administrative Instruction on the criteria and procedure for the election of members of the SCQ (No. 05/2018, dt.15.03.2018). [13] The list of nominated candidates is ratified by the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo. This Ad-

12 https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2015/06/2-ligji-per-arsimin-e-larte.pdf
13 https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2018/05/ua-nrmasht-06-2018-per-kriteret-dhe-procd-e-emerimit-te-anetareve-te-kshcaka-x.pdf

ministrative Instruction allows for the election of SCQ members based on professional and transparent criteria and procedure, which were applied in Kosovo for the first time since the establishment of the Accreditation Agency. The work of the SCQ is based on the Regulation on the work of the State Council of Quality (No. 621/18D, dt.12.06.2018) [14], published on the KAA website. Based on this Regulation, SCQ sets annual agendas for the HEI accreditation process, approves accreditation standards, procedures and criteria, approves the international expert teams proposed by the KAA Director, makes accreditation decisions and approves the KAA Statute and Regulations.

The SCQ operated with 8 members in 2020, five national and three international members, experts of different areas, appointed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in 2018.

One SCQ national member resigned in 2019 and was substituted with another member, proposed by the Minister of MEST, with no ratification by the Assembly of Kosovo as foreseen with the Law on Higher Education.

The members of the SCQ in 2020:

- Prof. Dr. Gazmend Luboteni, President
- Prof. Asoc. Dr. Vjollca Krasniqi, Vice-president
- Prof. Asoc. Dr. Arta Basha - Jakupi
- Dr. Sc. Spec. Rozafa Koliqi-Lila
- Prof. Dr. Magdalena Ziolo
- Prof. Dr. Herbert K. Amato
- Prof. Msc. Jeffery Butel
- Prof. Ass. Dr. Dukagjin Zeka
- Prof.ass. Binak Beqaj - appointed by the Minister of MEST

14 https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B7etG3bh-SBVVkt4T2J5bmZuOTdYVFN4bFZmMnFwakx3Z0tR/view?resourcekey=0-QuhrtZa6eTC2uk1Lt0rUiw

4. MEETINGS AND DECISIONS OF STATE COUNCIL OF QUALITY FOR THE YEAR 2020

In 2020, SCQ held six meetings, of them five regular meetings and one emergency meeting.

1. 16-17.01.2020, the 79th meeting of the SCQ

2. 1.04.2020, the 80th meeting of the SCQ (emergency meeting), a continuation of the meeting in January (attended online due to the situation with the Covid-19 pandemics)

3. 17.04.2020, the 81st meeting of the SCQ (online)

4. 25.06. 2020, the 82nd meeting of the SCQ (online)

5. 2-3.09.2020, the 83rd meeting of the SCQ (online)

6. 10-11. 12.2020, the 84th meeting of the SCQ (online)

5. EVALUATION AND ACCREDITATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTIUTUTIONS IN 2020

Institutional and study program evaluation is an activity implemented periodically by KAA. The process in based on the evaluation of documents submitted by HEIs (Self-Evaluation Report) and findings from the international expert team field visit. Based on the KAA published procedures, HEIs should prove that they meet the accreditation criteria in order to be accredited.

Based on Article 10 of the Administrative Instruction on Higher Education Institutions' Accreditation (No. 15/2018), each HEI that submits a request for institutional accreditation/re-accreditation of one or more study programs, along with the Application/Request, should present the list of their academic staff, who previously should have declared through the KAA e-accreditation platform that they are engaged with that HEI, in the respective program, for the respective academic year. The application, along with the list of staff, is evaluated against the formal accreditation criteria and if the application is approved by the SCQ, it is included in the KAA annual evaluation agenda. If the evaluation by SCQ is negative, the application is refused and not evaluated further. The HEI, for which the application and the list of staff is approved, should submit to KAA a Self-Evaluation Report, which will be forwarded to the external evaluation team prior to their visit to HEI, respectively before the distance (online) evaluation via conference call.

In 2020, evaluation and accreditation process for Higher Education Institutions and their study programs by KAA was done based on standards that were revised in 2019 and the new Accreditation Manual, used by HEIs as a basis when drafting their SER. The new standards aim to advance the quality in HEIs in Kosovo and are focused on the consolidation of their quality assurance internal systems.

Compared to previous years, 2020 was not a regular year due to Covid-19 pandemic. The situation affected the work of KAA as well; its activities were adapted and reorganized in line with the situation created and recommendations from the Government of Kosovo on fighting and preventing the spread of Covid-19. Consequently, in the meeting held on 19 April 2020, SCQ decided to have the accreditation process implemented in distance (online). The final decision that allowed for distance (online) accreditation was made by the former Minister of Education, (Ref: 35/018 Dated: 07.05.2020). [15] This Decision regulated the procedures for external evaluation by international peer reviewers via conference calls during the period the measures set to manage the emergency situation created with the Covid-19 pandemic by the Government of Kosovo were in place, as per the paragraph 1.2 of the Decision No.01/07, dated 11.03.2020 [16]. The latter, among others, suspended all national and international forms of transportation, making it impossible for the international peer reviewers to be present in person for the accreditation and re-accreditation process in the Republic of Kosovo.

The KAA initially started with distance (online) institutional accreditation of Higher Education Institutions, applying the best regional and European accreditation practices during the situation with the pandemics.

Before the initiation of the process, the KAA Director and KAA senior officers for evaluation and monitoring, organized individual trainings with all HEIs subject to distance accreditation, explaining the process in detail. The process of distance accreditation was similar to the process imple-

15 https://akreditimi.rks-gov.net/about-us/dispozitat/dokumente/
16 https://kryeministri-ks.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Vendimet-e-Mbledhjes-se-7-te-te-Qeverise-se-Republikes-se-Kosoves.pdf

mented before the pandemic, except for the visit to the institution, which now would be implemented in distance. Since it was not possible to have the experts visit the institution in person, verification of environments and lab equipment was done through video recordings prepared by HEIs.

The KAA team and the Director visited all institutions subject to accreditation and all persons involved in the process, all documents provided and video registrations were verified.

The KAA submitted written guidelines to all the HEIs subject to evaluation, informing them about the distance accreditation process to take place. Similar guidelines were used also for program accreditation. For distance evaluation, the KAA used online platforms and conference calls. If translation was needed, a translator was present in the room where the conference call was organized to provide translation from Albanian to English and vice-versa.

After a successful implementation of distance evaluation at institutional level, from July 2020 the KAA continued with the second stage of the process, evaluating study programs in the area of medicine, economics and jurisprudence. These three areas of study were chosen by SCQ since they had the highest number of students in HEIs.

5.1 INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTIUTUTIONS IN 2020

In 2020, KAA completed the institutional evaluation of 14 HEIs, 5 public universities and 9 private colleges; applications were refused for three colleges because they did not meet the criteria stipulated in the Administrative Instruction.

On 25.06.2020, SCQ held its regular meeting to analyse and vote the evaluation reports prepared by international experts. Based on recommendations from international experts, out of 14 evaluated higher education institutions, 6 were re-accredited and 8 were refused.

9 international experts were engaged in institutional evaluation of HEIs, of them 3 student experts, as recommended by ENQA in its KAA evaluation report in 2019.

5.1.1. ACCREDITATION OF PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION INSTIUTUTIONS IN 2020

Table1. Public higher education institutions subject to institutional accreditation in 2020 and SCQ Decision

No.	Institution	SCQ Decision
1	University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina"	Accredited for 5 years
2	University of Prizren "Ukshin Hoti"	Accredited for 3 years
3	University of Peja "Haxhi Zeka"	Accredited for 3 years
4	University of Mitrovica "Isa Boletini"	Accredited for 3 years
5	University of Applied Sciences in Ferizaj	Accredited for 3 years

Of 5 public universities that were evaluated, The University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina" was re-accredited for the maximum period of 5 years, whereas the University of Prizren "Ukshin Hoti", the University of Peja "Haxhi Zeka", the University of Mitrovica "Isa Boletini" which were not accredited in 2018 by KAA, were now accredited for a 3-year period. The University of Applied Sciences in Ferizaj was accredited for 3 years.

5.1.2. INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION OF PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN 2020

Table 2. Private higher education institutions subject to accreditation in 2020 and the SCQ Decision

No.	Institution	SCQ Decision
1	Dukagjini College	Not accredited
2	FAMA College	Not accredited
3	Iliria College	Not accredited
4	Tempulli College	Not accredited
5	Pjeter Budi College	Not accredited
6	UBT College Branch in Ferizaj and Prizren	Accredited for 3 years
7	Arbëri College	Not accredited
8	Universi College	Not accredited
9	Biznesi College	Not accredited

Of 9 private colleges subject to institutional accreditation process in 2020, only two branches of UBT College, one in Ferizaj and the other one in Prizren, were accredited. Eight colleges were not accredited at institutional level.

5. 2. ACCREDITATION OF STUDY PROGRAMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTIUTUTIONS IN 2020

In 2020, KAA received applications for re-accreditation of a total of 258 study programs at Bachelor, Master and Doctoral level.

In the SCQ meeting held on 02-03.09.2020 (the 83rd meeting of the SCQ held in online mode), the SCQ decided to have the accreditation extended for one year for currently re-accredited programs since they had been accredited already several times, whereas the new programs were going to be evaluated.

Also in this meeting, based on the evaluation reports from international experts, 29 study programs were accredited by SCQ. 27 programs had positive recommendation for accreditation, of them 16 in public HEIs and 11 in private HEIs, whereas 2 programs were not accredited. 3 programs in private HEIs were accredited in the SCQ meeting in January 2020.

Based on previous decisions, apart from the ones that were accredited in 2020, there were

362 ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

→ of them

234 IN PUBLIC HEIS

128 IN PRIVATE HEIS.

5.2.1. ACCREDITATION OF STUDY PROGRAMS IN PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION INSTIUTUTIONS

Of 234 academic programs that were already accredited in 2020 in public HEIs,

124 WERE BACHELOR PROGRAMS

including

3 INTEGRATED PROGRAMS

MEDICINE, DENTISTRY AND VETERINARY MEDICINE

91 MASTER PROGRAMS

19 DOCTORAL PROGRAMS.

16 OTHER PROGRAMS, 9 BACHELOR PROGRAMS AND 7 MASTER PROGRAMS, THAT WERE ACCREDITED IN 2020 WERE ADDED TO THESE.

9 BACHELOR PROGRAMS

7 MASTER PROGRAMS

Programs in public HEIs subject to evaluation and successfully accredited in 2020:

Institution	Program
University of Prishtina	Nursing BSc
University of Prishtina	Physiotherapy BSc
University of Prishtina	Economics BSc
University of Prishtina	Economics MSc
University of Prishtina	Accounting BSc
University of Prishtina	Marketing BSc
University of Prishtina	Marketing MSc
University of Prishtina	Banking and Finance BSc
University of Prishtina	Banking and Finance MSc
University of Prishtina	Management BSc
University of Prishtina	Management MSc
University of Prishtina	Money, Banking, Finance and Insurance MSc
University of Prishtina	Urban Agriculture MSc
University of Gjilan	Management and Entrepreneurship BSc
University of Gjilan	General Law BSc
University of Prizren	Business Administration MSc

5.2.2. ACCREDITATION OF STUDY PROGRAMS IN PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTIUTUTIONS

In 2020, 128 study programs in private HEIS were already accredited, of them one level V program as per the NQC, 87 Bachelor programs and 40 Master programs. 14 other programs accredited in 2020 were added to this number.

Programs in private HEIs subject to evaluation and successfully accredited

Institution	Program
AAB College	Management MA
AAB College	Nursing BSc
AAB College	Law LLB Prishtina
AAB College	Law LLB Ferizaj
AAB College	Law LLB Gjakova
AAB College	Criminal Law LLM
UBT College	Management, Business and Economics MSc
UBT College	Nursing BSc
UBT College	Public Policy and Management MA
UBT College	Law LLB
UBT College	International and European Business Law LLM
Rezonanca College	Dentistry (integrated program)
Heimerer College	Health Sciences for Diagnostic Profiles – Laboratory Technician
ESLG College	Management of Real Estate and Infrastructure (MA)

6. MONITORING

In accordance with the Article 7, item 2 of the Law on Higher Education in the Republic of Kosovo No. 04 / L-037 [17] and Article 29 of Administrative Instruction on the Accreditation of HEIs in Kosovo No. 15/2018 [18], Kosovo Accreditation Agency is obliged to monitor and inspect accredited higher education institutions. As per the KAA requirements, all accredited HEIs at the end of each academic year shall present a plan detailing how they will implement the recommendations provided by the team of experts in their evaluation report.

Currently, the KAA monitors higher education institutions by analysing and verifying the qualification of their academic staff to ensure that the HEIs meet minimum requirements. The KAA regularly monitored whether HEIs maintain the minimum criteria in relation to their academic staff. All the files of the staff in higher education institutions are submitted to KAA and after a thorough revision and verification to ensure they meet the formal criteria, final lists are drafted and forwarded to the State Council of Quality for review.

If SCQ concludes that minimum criteria are not met, they withdraw the accreditation for that program. KAA responsibilities include also a follow up procedure and monitoring of HEI's response towards SCQ decisions.

17 https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2015/06/2-ligji-per-arsimin-e-larte.pdf
18 https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2018/10/ilovepdf-merged.pdf

7. APPROVAL OF NEW STANDARDS FOR DOCTORAL PROGRAMMES 2020

In December 2019, KAA organized a workshop sponsored by the HERAS Project, to discuss and develop standards for Doctoral programmes. Representatives of higher education institutions, members of SCQ and KAA staff attended this workshop. The workshop helped in producing a draft document to be used as a starting point for further discussions and development of standards for doctoral programmes. As a result of further work done based on this draft document, several quality standards previously optional for HEIs were included and promoted to substantial standards.

This review of quality standards for Doctoral programmes resulted in a higher number of standards for the evaluation of Doctoral programmes and this presents a considerable reinforcement of standards.

While reviewing the document, KAA added the following standards that were not included previously in the draft document as substantial standards:

2.4. Applicants must be able to demonstrate a satisfactory working knowledge of English.

7.2. The thesis should reflect original thinking and represent an added value to the topic of knowledge.

The following standards were optional (supplementary) in the draft document and they were promoted to substantial by KAA in the revised document.

2.3. In the selection process, doctoral candidates' potential for research should be assessed.

5.6. Responsibilities of the institution, supervisor and doctoral student must be set out clearly in a policy document.

6.4. The institution must have a clearly documented protocol for the assessment process including the composition of the evaluation committee.

6.7. Institutions must have clear policies and procedures to address any kind of misconduct such as unethical practice, plagiarism, fabrication of data, etc.

6.9. A supervisor may not serve as a member of the evaluation committee.

7.2. The thesis should reflect original thinking and represent an added value to the topic of knowledge.

The final document, approved in the SCQ meeting on 25 June 2020, consists of a total of 52 standards: 36 core and 16 supplementary standards. The document also includes the criteria to be met to be fully compliant, substantially compliant, partially compliant or non-compliant with the standards.

The revised standards for accreditation of doctoral programmes along with the Guidelines for drafting the SER were made public and have started to be implemented for the accreditation of doctoral programmes in 2020.

8. APPEALS COMMITTEE

The right to appeal SCQ Decisions is regulated with the Article 22 of the AI 15/2018, [19] stating that the HEIs may file an appeal within a period of 30 days from the day the party was notified of the SCQ Decision on accreditation, and this procedure is in compliance with the Law on Administrative Procedure. [20] The work of Appeals Committee is regulated with the Regulation No.2/2019 [21] on the KAA Appeals Committee operation. This committee should review the appeals received and respond to HEIs within a period of 30 days. An independent Appeals Committee was established in September 2020, consisting of 5 external members, 3 permanent members and 2 reserve members. One of the permanent members is a lawyer, with more than 10 years of experience. The committee members have a two-year mandate.

In 2020, the committee received 15 appeals, one from a public university and 14 from private colleges. The appeals were reviewed; the committee approved one of the appeals as grounded, one other appeal partially grounded, whereas 13 appeals were considered ungrounded, thus confirming the SCQ Decisions.

19 . https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2018/10/ilovepdf-merged.pdf
20 https://mpb.rks-gov.net/ap/desk/inc/media/FC95CB25-50B5-4385-A800-CB31810A35CC.pdf
21 http://akreditimi-ks.org/docs/LawRegulation/Rregullorja_e_komisionit_te_ankesave.pdf5 Administrative Instruction on Amendment a

9. INTERNAL QUALITY ASSUARANCE OF KAA

With the support from the project funded by U.S. Embassy "Supporting KAA to meet some of the ENQA recommendations", implemented by WUS Kosova, KAA developed the Manual on internal evaluation of staff, a mechanism that will contribute to KAA staff management and development.

The Manual is based on performance management process and is used for administrative and development purposes. The Manual aims to offer guidelines for developing staff performance evaluation process to be implemented by KAA. With this process in place, the KAA is dedicated to support all staff members to develop their potential and achieve personal objectives, which on the other hand will help the KAA to achieve its objectives.

10. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION, PARTNERSHIP AND PROJECTS

KAA is engaged in a number of international networks for quality assurance in higher education and activities:

- KAA is a member of the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education - CEENQA [22]. In 2014, KAA hosted CEENQA's annual meeting in Prishtina.
- In 2018, KAA presented its accreditation experience to the North Macedonia Accreditation Agency.
- There is an informal agreement with the Albanian Accreditation Agency to exchange international peer reviewers.
- KAA is member of INQAAHE, the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education. [23]
- In 2014, KAA became a member of ENQA, from which was excluded in 2019, following a preliminary evaluation process after the exclusion from EQAR.

22 Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education. https://www.ceenqa.org/
23 The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) https://www.inqaahe.org/

- KAA became registered with EQAR (European Quality Assurance Register) in 2015, but it lost its registration in 2017 due to interferences by politics that hindered its ability to act autonomously.

The emergency situation created with the Covid -19 pandemic in 2020 triggered changes in agendas and the way activities were organized in the area of quality assurance in higher education in Europe and beyond. Despite this, KAA continued to maintain constant contacts with the CEENQA, INQAAHE and other international partners.

CEENQA (in its issue in December 2020, Vol. 10, No.2 [24]) praised the work of the KAA with regards to accreditation process and its organization during the pandemic. In this article, it is emphasized that the KAA has been one of the first agencies to start with the online evaluation of higher education institutions.

It is also emphasized that prior to the process of evaluation, KAA organized training with external evaluation experts. The aim of the trainings was to inform the experts for the accreditation standards that KAA implements, especially experts that were part of evaluation with the KAA for the first time. Also, information was provided about the procedures of distance evaluation, because this was being organized for the first time.

In October 2020, more specifically on 12 and 13 October, KAA went through an assessment / exercise related to the fulfilment of the ESG, organized by RCC (Regional Cooperation Council). The purpose of this exercise was to assist the QA Agencies in the countries of the Western Balkans in their preparations for membership in ENQA and registration in EQAR. Through this exercise, QA Agencies would identify gaps and shortcomings for their future ENQA membership and EQAR registration. The evaluation was organized online, through online platforms, with the participation of the KAA staff, SCQ members and all stakeholders.

The KAA also paid special attention to cooperation with international institutions and participation in different projects supporting the KAA work.

24 CEENQA –Newsletter-December 2020
https://www.ceenqa.org/wp-content/uploads/CEENQA-Newsletter_December_2020_version_12-07.pdf

In 2020, Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) and Higher Education, Research and Applied Sciences Project (HERAS+) signed a Memorandum of Understanding, with KAA receiving institutional and technical support to strengthen its capacities to develop and regulate higher education and to meet the criteria of becoming a member of the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) again.

The QAINT project (Quality, Accountability, Integrity and Transparency in Higher Education Project), financed by Austrian Development Agency - ADA, will support KAA to raise capacities to monitor higher education providers, develop the Regulation for internal organization and systematization of working positions, currently being finalised, and to implement the ENQA recommendations as part of the efforts to regain membership in these QA agencies network and EQAR.

The implementing partner of the project, Kosovo United State Alumni (KUSA) engaged by U.S. Embassy in Kosovo, on 21.09.2020, signed contracts with the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) and implementing partner WUS Kosova, to finance two projects, in a value of 65 thousand dollars; the projects aim to strengthen institutional and technical capacities of Kosovo Accreditation Agency and meet the main criteria to regain the membership of Kosovo Accreditation Agency in the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

Recently, KAA along with the Austrian Accreditation Agency were chosen for a twinning project that will be financed by Heras+. The purpose of this project, with a value of €40.000, is to have these two agencies work together and exchange their experience in the area of quality assurance in higher education.

11. DATA MANAGEMENT

The Agency has an e-archive and a backup system for all the data and sensitive material.

12. PUBLIC RELATIONS

The public and especially students, may be informed about the activities of the KAA and SCQ on the KAA website https://akreditimi.rks-gov.net/

All SCQ Decisions on accrediting institutions and study programs for each year are published on the new KAA website. KAA is one of the very few institutions in Kosovo to have all the data published on website in three languages: Albanian, Serbian and English.

All legal acts forming the legal basis for the KAA activity, accreditation procedures, standards, manuals, projects and partnerships with other institutions are published on the website as well.

No negative news was reported this year about KAA by media in Kosovo or by civil society.

13. ENQA RECCOMENDATIONS AND ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN TO IMPLEMENT THEM

In 2014, following a positive evaluation from the ENQA expert panel confirming that KAA had satisfactorily met the European Standards and Guidelines, KAA became a full member of the ENQA.

In 2015, KAA applied for membership and became a member of EQAR. This membership allowed the KAA to be registered in the European Quality Assurance Register, equal to all similar agencies in European countries.

EQAR excluded KAA from the Register in September 2017, after the dismissal of the KAA full Board and Acting Director.

The ENQA informed KAA that the dismissal had caused concerns regarding the independence of KAA, and thus with its compliance with ESG.

On 19 April 2018 ENQA's General Assembly decided to assign the KAA as 'Member under review'. The visit of the ENQA external evaluators team to KAA took place in March 2019. ENQA's Decision in September 2019 stated that KAA does not fulfil re-accreditation standards, therefore it will be excluded from membership.

ADDRESSING ENQA BOARD RECOMMENDATIONS

Quotation: "3.1. ENQA Activities, policy, and process for quality assurance

The Board shares the panel concern that there is no HE-wide consensus about the Agency role and activities that would be the basis for a sound KAA Strategic Plan."

KAA appointed a group of experts to draft the Strategic Plan. The first draft has been finalised and will undergo a public consultation. The plan defines strategic objectives for a period of time and presents clear indicators to measure their implementation. An American expert engaged by the U.S. Embassy and an Austrian expert from the Heras+ project will provide their contribution to the Strategic Plan.

Quotation "3.4. Thematic Analysis

The evaluation report says: "The survey on stakeholders' opinions (SR2017) presents useful information, but a close connection with the general findings of the external assurance activities as carried out by KAA is missing. Developments, trends and areas of good practice or persistent difficulty should be made clear, to bring these reports more in line with the guideline to the present ESG standard." The panel requires the Agency to closely follow the standard requirement."

With the support from the project funded by U.S. Embassy in Kosovo and the implementing partner WUS Kosova, KAA developed the methodology of drafting thematic analysis and implemented two thematic analyses.

The first one is related to market needs for specific professions in Kosovo and the second one is related to institutional accreditation process.

KAA currently has a methodology of drafting thematic analysis and in the future, they will be developed with their own resources.

Quotation "3. 5. ENQA: The Board is concerned with the lack of human and financial resources needed for conducting the activities expected from KAA."

Currently KAA operates with seven staff members and the KAA Director.

The issue of the lack of staff has been addressed with the relevant institutions and based on the Law on budget appropriations for the budget of the Republic of Kosovo for year 2020 [25], KAA has a budget for 32 working positions. However, complicated administrative procedures from Civil Services Department within MIA impede the selection of appropriate qualified staff to fulfil the KAA needs. In addition, low salaries compared to the volume of work are discouraging for potential candidates who apply for KAA opened positions.

The infrastructure - the available space where the KAA currently operates is limited to enable for full human capacity development. The issue has been addressed with the Government and MEST and in 2022 KAA is expected to be transferred to a new building near the Palace of Justice, with 1200 square meters available.

A working group established by MEST drafted and submitted the Law on KAA to the MESTI and the same will be submitted to the Assembly for approval. This Law would strengthen the autonomy of KAA in terms of organisation, operations and financing.

25 LIGJI NR. 07/L-001 MBI NDARJET BUXHETORE PËR BUXHETIN E REPUBLIKËS SË KOSOVËS PËR VITIN 2020 https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=27690

Quotation "3.6. ENQA: Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

The Board considers that it is necessary to have the implementation of formal rather than informal mechanisms to create solid routines of internal quality assurance, as recommended by panel.

Supported by the U.S. Embassy project, implemented by WUS Kosova, KAA drafted the Manual on internal staff evaluation. The Manual is based on the process of performance management and is used for administrative and development purposes. The Manual will offer guidelines for staff performance evaluation to be implemented by KAA.

Quotation "2.3 ENQA: Implementing processes

In the evaluation report it is written: "For over the last 1½year no reviews of full applications have taken place." Moreover, the panel explains: "In 2018 a full year extension of current accreditations has been allowed. There has been no monitoring of follow-up of recommendations in earlier reviews. Monitoring has been limited to formal requirements only, that is: limited to control rather than to quality enhancement. For this matter the 2014 recommendation has not been followed up.

The Board considers the critical remarks of the panel of secondary importance and encourages the Agency to provide external quality assurance processes that are in line with the standard, i.e., that are reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published."

In 2017, the KAA Board and acting director were dismissed by the former Minister of MEST, therefore no institutional or program evaluation was done by KAA in 2018. This disrupted the periodic evaluation of HEIs and their programs.

After the new Board members and the Director of KAA were appointed in 2019, KAA continued with the accreditation of HEIs and their programs.

In 2020, although in emergency situation due to Covid-19 pandemic, KAA organized a distance (online) accreditation of institutions and programs, following the best European practices.

Due to limited human capacities, KAA still cannot perform the monitoring of HEIs. Engagement of new staff within KAA as soon as possible would enable a proper monitoring of accredited HEIs and would help to implement the recommendations of the previous evaluation.

In 2021, KAA evaluated all the programs which applied, and from October 2021 all academic programs in Kosovo will be evaluated.

Quotation "2.4 ENQA: Peer-review experts

The Board shares the concern of the evaluation panel that peer-review experts should posses the skills and competences to perform their tasks and be supported with trainings and information.

As it is written in the report: "it would be very useful to work hard on better preparation of experts as regards the demands of AM2018 and have consensus meetings among experts so as to make consistent judgement on the many standards in AM2018 possible. Moreover, the panel requires the KAA to seriously review the recommendation from the panel and guarantee the involvement of students in institutional and programme evaluations. "

To address this ENQA recommendation, KAA in cooperation with the Heras+ Project drafted and finalised the procedures to approve the Manual for peer-review experts. This manual is provided to peer-review experts before they begin the external evaluation process [26].

To meet these criteria, KAA organizes the training for all peer-review experts that are part of the accreditation process.

26 https://akreditimi.rks-gov.net/about-us/dispozitat/dokumente/

In regards to the recommendation to have students involved in institutional and program evaluation, KAA has started to seriously address this recommendation and in 2020 they engaged 3 students to be part of evaluation teams.

To have the best selection of peer-review experts, KAA decided that apart from the list with the names of experts to be engaged in evaluation teams, to ask for their CVs so that their professional background can be assessed. This will allow to match programs with the expert's area of qualification.

Previous KAA practices have shown that meetings between members of expert teams and meetings between experts and KAA staff one day before the visit to the institution are necessary and useful to get to know the experts and to discuss about the HEI or the study program to be evaluated.

Quotation "2.6. ENQA Reporting

Full reports should be regularly published and be better supported with facts/evidence."

KAA has its own website, the first one in Kosovo to have the content published in three languages: Albanian, Serbian and English.

All Evaluation Reports of public and private HEIs and their study programs since 2010 are published on the KAA website. [27]

27 https://akreditimi.rks-gov.net/vendime/