



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



PBHE “Universum International College”

Computer Science
Bachelor of Science

Re-accreditation

REPORT OF THE EXPERT TEAM

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Context

Date of site visit: 27.03.2024

Expert Team (ET) members:

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- Dr. Anastasios Dagiuklas
- Dr. Seifedine Kadry
- PhD Cand. Damian Michalik, Student Expert

Coordinators from Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA):

- Ilirjana Ademaj-Ahmeti, Senior Officer for Evaluation and Monitoring

Sources of information for the Report:

- *Accreditation Manual*
- *The Manual for External Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions*
- *Self-evaluation Report*
- *Syllabi of the courses*
- *CV-s of the academic staff*
- *License agreement between the Arizona Board of Regents and Universum College*
- *Student Handbook for 2021-2022*
- *Accessibility and Inclusiveness Rules and Regulations*
- *Policy on Anti-discrimination for Academic and Administrative Staff*
- *Childcare Services Agreement Between Universum College and the Finnish School of Kosovo*
- *Smoke-free Policy*
- *Policy Handbook on Health Support Center & First Aid*
- *Policy on Anti-discrimination of Students*
- *Gender Equality Plan 2022-2027*
- *Access to Universum College Sport Facilities*
- *Income Statement 2021-2026*
- *Student Statistics for years 2021, 2022, 2023*
- *List of students and staff using Erasmus+ mobility grants (from 2020/2021 acad.year)*
- *Comprehensive Analysis Report and Action Plan for the study program Computer Science*
- *External Review Report*

- *Summaries of discussions between the Universum College and Cintana teams about various academic matters (student mobility, research strategy, Cintana products and services, dual degrees, course enhancement, faculty/staff recognition, etc).*
- *Anonymized employment contracts of an assistant professor and of a lecturer.*
- *Academic Staff Responsibilities (extract from the Faculty Handbook)*
- *Regulation of Undergraduate Studies (English Summary)*
- *Data on the use of computer classes (both existing and under construction) by study programs*

Criteria used for institutional and program evaluations

- *Accreditation Manual*

1.2. Site visit schedule

Time	Meeting	Participants
09:00 – 09:50	Meeting with the management of the faculty where the programme is integrated	Alejtin Berisha Shqipe Gerguri Rashiti Stephen Keck Isabel Salvat Jenny Orlova (Online)
09.50 – 10.35	Meeting with quality assurance representatives and administrative staff	Uran Rraci Donjeta Pllana Nazim Haliti Uresa Vllasa
10:40 – 11:40	Meeting with the heads of the study programme	Ramadan Dervishi Arianit Krypa Nysret Demaku
11:40 – 12:40	Lunch break	
12:40 – 13.10	Visiting Facilities	Arlinda Qehaja
13:10 – 13:55	Meeting with teaching staff	Ilir Berisha Reshat Selmani Qendrim Hyka Kimete Bilalli Valmir Sinani Arlinda Berisha Martin Cunningham Filip Ruxho

14:00 – 14:45	Meeting with students	Eshref Shala Kujtim Gjokaj Blerton Hoti Alban Krasniqi Melos Buçinca
14:50 – 15:35	Meeting with graduates	Shkodran Hasani Petrir Elshani Albion Burrniku Elita Rexha Mehreme Gashi Faton Nuha
15:40 – 16:25	Meeting with employers of graduates and external stakeholders	STIKK - Vjollca Çavolli TIVE - Albin Bushi Linkplus - Iliriana Ibraj Kidsday - Getoar Krasniqi Tensor LLC – Gezim Hapciu Crea CO – Avni Ternava
16:25 – 16:30	Internal meeting of KAA staff and experts	
16:30 – 16:35	Closing meeting with the management of the faculty and program	

1.3. A brief overview of the institution under evaluation

Universum International College (*College*) is a private higher educational institution founded in 2005, with three campuses located in Prishtina, Ferizaj, and Gjakova. It offers a broad range of academic fields, with 13 bachelor and 3 master study programs. These range from traditional subjects such as English and political science to locally demanded areas of study like dentistry and fashion design.

Universum International College is committed to providing quality, accessible and affordable educational opportunities to Kosovar and international students through teaching, lifelong learning, applied research and partnership building, aiming to help students become thoughtful, responsible and successful. In 2023, the College formed a strategic partnership with Arizona State University (ASU), becoming part of the Cintana Alliance. This membership opens up exchange opportunities for both students and academic staff across the alliance's institutes. Some study programs even offer the opportunity to obtain double degrees in collaboration with foreign universities.

The management of the College is overseen by the Board of Trustees, which is in charge of developing and implementing the overall strategy. In terms of academic affairs, decisions are controlled by the Academic Council, which is responsible for delivering and implementing academic policies and monitoring performances, among several other roles. High-ranking executive positions within the College consist of President, Executive Vice-President, Vice-President, Rector, Vice-President for Operations, and Branch Manager. Since the beginning of 2024, the College has been divided into three faculties.

The Computer Science BSc study program was accredited in 2021 for a three-year term and was confirmed as being substantially compliant with the standards, with a number of 250 students to be enrolled in the program.

Upon completion of the study program, students are expected to achieve the following aims and learning outcomes:

- Understand and apply core concepts in computer science, including data structures, algorithms, and computer organization.
- Develop proficiency in mathematical concepts relevant to computer science.
- Understand the fundamentals of computer networks and telecommunications.
- Understand the principles of operating systems and system-level programming.
- Understand the principles of information security and data protection.
- Understand software development methodologies and practices.
- Analyze the ethical and societal implications of AI.
- Apply programming concepts to real-world projects.
- Utilize software development methodologies for efficient project management.
- Design and implement databases for data storage and retrieval.
- Analyze and interpret data using statistical and data analysis techniques.
- Configure and troubleshoot basic network setups.
- Learn and implement AI concepts and techniques, including machine learning and neural networks.
- Address ethical dilemmas related to technology and data privacy.
- Communicate technical concepts effectively to both technical and non-technical audiences.
- Collaborate in multidisciplinary teams to solve complex problems.
- Conduct an in-depth research project and present a thesis.

The learning outcomes are much more elaborated and adequate compared to the learning outcomes of the 2021 version of the study program.

2. PROGRAM EVALUATION

2.1. Mission, Objectives and Administration

The mission of the College is “to support our students to become good citizens, successful & broad-minded leaders and thrive in the Revolution 4.0, the digital and globalised era. We do this by providing one-on-one academic & life coaching, putting our students and learning at the centre in an innovative, digitally enhanced environment that fosters creativity, inquiry, teamwork, innovation and entrepreneurial mindsets. Our commitment with quality, teacher excellence and applied research builds the bases for a strong and vigorous nation and region.”

The mission is built upon the following strategic pillars:

- I. Student and Learning at the Center
- II. Quality Improvement
- III. Innovation and Entrepreneurship
- IV. Digital Transformation
- V. Internationalisation.

Therefore, the mission of the College does not specify any study fields. Although the mission of the study program is not explicitly defined, and the meaning of *Revolution 4.0* is unclear (probably meaning *Industrial Revolution 4.0* or *Industry 4.0* instead of the more recent *Industrial Revolution 5.0*), the study program should be considered as being consistent with the overall mission statement of the College.

Expected learning outcomes were developed in cooperation with Arizona State University and are adequate. About 60% of courses are aligned with the corresponding study program available at ASU. They are consistent with the National Qualifications Framework and the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

The study program has an applied research focus: students have the opportunity to be engaged in research projects, current research findings are included in the course materials, and an emphasis is put on the development of research skills. Student centricity and market orientation were stated as the overarching principle, and the practice and experience of ASU is taken as an example.

The experts were provided only with the *Staff Manual* and the *Code of Ethics* (both in Albanian) as documents describing formal policies, guidelines and regulations; there may have been also some more, but only in Albanian. The experts were also unable to find English

translations of the main documents – *Statute of the College, Development Plan, Studies Regulation*, etc. – on the website of the College. For a higher education institution with the word “international” in its name, such a small number of documents in English was somewhat unexpected. The fact that important documents were only in Albanian did not allow the ET members to have a full overview of some important aspects. For example, the document *Computer Science Curriculum Comprehensive Analysis Report and Action Plan* assesses the values of key performance indicators, but it is unclear which policy or strategy document - if any - of the College defines these as key performance indicators. At the request of the ET, English summaries of some documents were provided.

The wording of the standard, “All staff and students comply with the internal regulations relating to ethical conduct in research, teaching, assessment in all academic and administrative activities”, was transferred into the SER, without any evidence or even explanation. However, the College has adopted a *Code of Conduct* which also contains articles *Ethical and Professional Responsibilities of Academic Staff* and *Ethical Obligations and Conduct of Students*.

Some of the documents presented to the experts were from 2013, one even from 2009. For example, RREGULLORE PËR TRANSFERIMIN E STUDENTËVE NGA BARTËSIT E TJERË TË ARSIMIT TË LARTË TË AKREDITUAR. Several other documents were older than 5 years. For example, a document that fixed some tariffs was implemented in 2016. Some documents did not have the date of confirmation at all. All these documents had naturally the name *Universum College* as the name of the College. Even though there is a desire to adjust documents to the Cintana Alliance, it is still expected to implement transparent procedures of revising documents.

Compliance level: *Substantially compliant*

ET recommendations:

1. *Establish Key Performance Indicators which will assist in guiding the growth and regularly monitor the progressive evolution of the study program.*
2. *The most important College regulations must be translated into English and made publicly available through the College website.*
3. *Revise the official documents of the College, updating, among other, also the name of the College. Moreover, implement a transparent procedure of updating documents.*

2.2. Quality Management

The quality system of the College is exposed in the *Guidelines for Quality Assurance at Uni – Universum International College*. Separate chapters are on academic matters, on domestic and international cooperation, and on student operations and services. Each chapter is divided into two-level subchapters. For example, 3.1. *Internal evaluation of the program* and 3.1.1. *Implementation of recommendations from KAA accreditation reports*. The College has also implemented a peer-to-peer evaluation for academic staff where academic staff share experiences with each other.

The College has implemented regular quality assurance instruments; some are adopted from ASU. These instruments include: students satisfaction surveys, focus group reviews, evaluations of academic staff, alumni surveys, exit surveys, training of academic staff, etc. The results of students' surveys are analyzed and discussed in relevant departments.

According to the Guidelines for Quality Assurance, program evaluation is based on the following data: student retention rate, graduation rate, student satisfaction rate, student withdrawal rate, pass rate of students.

While there are instruments in place for quality assurance of courses, there is no continuous and consistent quality system implemented for the entire study program. No one is assigned the responsibility for the quality of the study program. A group of staff called "Head of the study program" is formed, but the personal responsibility of the heads of study programs is not established (although responsibilities should be personal and not collective). A program committee or council of the study program is not formed, which would include representatives of all major stakeholders (professors, students, graduates, employers, professional unions, etc.).

The fact that the Self-Evaluation Report and other documents provided to the experts contained virtually no information that would enable the experts to make an informed assessment about quality processes at the College indicates that not all quality assurance processes – this case composing an adequate and comprehensive self-evaluation report – are carried out at a satisfactory level. The SER did not even include such fundamental statistical indicators as the number of students, the dropout rate and the number of graduates, and they had to be asked additionally.

Student survey data are collected at the end of each semester. Additionally, focus groups of students are formed to discuss various issues. To assess the employability of its graduates, the College conducts regular online surveys each semester. As recommended by the 2021 Accreditation Report, a *Graduate Exit Survey* is developed about graduates' overall satisfaction with their academic experience, student services and their readiness for the job market. Another survey is for employers to assess graduates' readiness (what skills graduates

have, what skills they can easily learn, what skills they are lacking, and about the study programs). However, the results of these assessments are available only on the College intranet and not on a public website, despite the recommendations of the 2021 Accreditation Report.

Students confirmed that their recommendations on course content and even on the introduction of new topics were considered and sometimes taken into account. On the other hand, they – as well as graduates and employers of graduates – suggested a number of improvements in discussions with experts. This means that the feedback system from students, graduates and employers has room for improvement. Some concrete examples of suggestions of students, graduates and employers:

- electives should be possible also in semesters 1 to 3;
- there should be more extracurricular professional activities such as boot camps or hackathons;
- more real-life examples and case analyses;
- more practical usage of hand-on tools;
- in the subjects, deal more with various tools and methodologies used in companies;
- pay more attention to developing students' soft skills;
- invite more top experts from the industry to discuss the latest achievements.

Study program internal reports are conducted annually. The ET was provided with two reports: 1) *External Review Report*, which assessed the study program and proposed recommendations for improvement and 2) *Comprehensive Analysis Report and Action Plan for the study program Computer Science*, that identifies opportunities for improvement in the curriculum by analyzing student and faculty comments, program data, and existing teaching methods. External reviews are conducted according to the schedule of the accreditation conducted by KAA (the last accreditation was conducted in May 2021).

The *Guidelines for Quality Assurance* was revised in 2023.

Compliance level: *Substantially compliant*

ET recommendations:

1. *Nominate **one** academic member of the Faculty as a responsible head/curator of the study program who has the full responsibility on the quality of the study program.*
2. *Determine authority and responsibilities of the curator explicitly in the university regulations.*

3. *Form a permanent council of the study program, that includes representatives of employers, partners, students, graduates and some key academic staff including other heads of the study program. The task of the council will be to propose recommendations for further improvements of the study program based on surveys of all stakeholders, international development trends of the academic area and the needs of society.*
4. *Develop and implement mechanisms that ensure the quality of the documents of the College, including self-evaluation reports of study programs.*

2.3. Academic Staff

Recruitment of new staff is conducted in seven stages. At the request of an academic department, the President decides on the opening of the academic position. Staff recruitment is carried out through public announcements via different information channels (job portals, College website, social networking sites, newsletters). Information in a required amount about necessary competences is provided. Candidates are provided with a full job description along with specific KPIs. The final step consists of orientation and integration of the elected staff member.

Legal requirements set for teaching staff are met: the employment of academic staff is done in full compliance with the *Law on Labour*, the *Statute of the College* and the *Administrative Instruction on Accreditation of HEIs*: at least about 61% of staff has full-time positions and all staff announced for the study program have at least a master's degree. Six staff members have PhD degree.

The requirement for the academic staff not to have more than 1,5 positions in total is included in the employment contract of each academic staff.

The program overview lists 18 academic staff of whom 11 (61%) have full-time position. They account for about 65% of the classes of the study program. It is appropriate to note that the vast majority of academic staff have been employed at the College for a relatively short time – out of 22 academic staff, only two (U. Rraci and A. Zejnullahu) have been working at the College since 2016.

Five full-time staff teaching in the study program hold PhD.

The College is very active in using Erasmus+ mobility options: more than 200 bilateral agreements are signed and academic staff has participated in staff exchanges more than 500 times. The College has also participated in several capacity building projects (REBUS, CONSUS,

ITEM, E-VIVA, STEPS, INTERBA, DRIVE, KALCEA, STEMedu, IDEA). Teaching staff have additional opportunities for professional development through collaboration with partner institutions, especially with Arizona State University. The College also provides to its staff a variety of on-site training options (on teaching methodology, curriculum and syllabus development, online teaching, using digital tools in teaching, online assessment methodologies, academic writing, etc.); special on-boarding courses are offered for newly employed staff. However, all this is not enough: most of the staff do not have a single publication and do not participate in the activities of the international research community. Interviews revealed that staff needs more support to expand their professional network, and that newly hired staff need more advice from senior academics.

The responsibilities of all teaching staff are thoroughly described in the *Faculty Handbook*. However, the CVs submitted to experts had a different structure, were sometimes very scarce and did not cover all areas of work intended for academic staff (for example, descriptions of services provided to the community). Some CVs were in Albanian. The CVs of a large number of employees were not among the documents initially submitted to the experts, so they had to be requested additionally. Therefore, it was difficult to assess the quality of the entire teaching staff, since only a part of the teaching staff participated in the interviews. The uneven quality of the CVs is unexpected as a proposal to harmonize them was also contained in the 2021 Accreditation Report.

There are three types of academic staff evaluations: 1) Mid-semester and semester evaluation, conducted by students who fill out a questionnaire on teachers' accuracy, pedagogical methodology, evaluation methodology, promotion of classroom debate, etc; 2) Evaluation by professional parties (ASU and Pearson institute were mentioned), 3) Regular evaluation by the Head of Department on an ongoing basis. However, no regular development discussions are conducted – face-to-face discussion only takes place if the head of department finds it necessary to discuss some aspects presented in the self-evaluation report. The results of evaluations are not made public.

The College has established a Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT), which trains teachers on various topics. Another instrument is the Committee for Evaluation of Teaching Methodology, which serves mainly for sharing experience. The responsibilities of this committee, as well as of CELT, are described in the *Guidelines for quality Assurance at Universum International College*.

The average age of the teaching staff is about 36 years.

Compliance level: *Substantially compliant*

ET recommendations:

1. *Develop a policy and implement this policy for forming a permanent academic staff in computer science.*
2. *Introduce mandatory yearly individual development discussions of the academic and non-academic staff by their superiors that would be based on the annual self-evaluation reports by the staff. The main purpose of development discussions will be to identify problems that are hindering the employee's professional growth and plan measures to solve them.*
3. *Supplement the CV template established in the College so that it includes all work parts intended for teaching staff and make the use of these templates mandatory.*

2.4. Educational Process Content

The general goal, expected learning outcomes and the content of the study program are in harmony with each other. The first three semesters consist of five 6 ECTS courses each, all mandatory, and an additional 2 ECTS course *Study Skills* on the first semester. The fourth and fifth semesters consist of four mandatory courses and one elective course; and the sixth semester two mandatory courses, one elective course and the *Thesis*. However, there are several opportunities for improvement:

- The SER states that “we are actively integrating Arizona State University's (ASU) advanced content into our curriculum” and that the decision has been made to adopt 5-7 ASU courses each semester. However, no details are provided. There is no mention of taking into account broader international experience, in particular the ACM's *Curricula Guidelines for Computer Science* (<https://www.acm.org/education/curricula-recommendations>).
- The study program as a whole (compulsory and elective courses) covers the field of computer science relatively well: the main areas – algorithms and complexity, discrete structures, software engineering – are presented in the necessary amount. On the other hand, the principles of dividing courses into mandatory and elective ones were not clarified, which is sometimes problematic. For example, the course *Circuit Theory and Basic Electronics* is mandatory, but an extremely important course *Application Security and Cryptography* is an elective?
- There was some confusion between the study program and the text describing it. For example, it is written in the SER, that *Academic Writing and Research Methodology*

courses are obligatory in every study program. However, the study program *Computer Science* BSc does not contain an *Academic Writing* course, although the syllabus for that course was provided.

- Study programs *Computer Science* and *Cyber Security* are 100% different from each other. Even the courses that have the same title and size are taught by different teachers (*Operating Systems*, for example). This is not the most effective use of teaching staff's working time, which can also be one of the reasons for the sometimes extremely low - in fact non-existent - effectiveness of their research work.
- Although the learning outcomes of the study program are adequate, practical implementation is problematic. For example, development of software engineering skills is stated in several learning outcomes. However, the developed skills actually only partially meet the needs of the industry. For example, "C#" appears in the SER 14 times, while "Scrum", for example, is completely absent! This is despite the recommendation to "Introduce a course on Agile Software Development Methods" in the Accreditation Report from 2021.
- The study program includes a series of programming courses. However, the ratio of lectures to exercises is 2:1, so it is questionable to what extent students acquire the ability to plan and execute the full software development cycle, from problem definition and analysis to the creation of a working prototype.

Although analysis of the compliance of the study program with the *National Qualifications Framework (NQF)* and the *Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (EQF)* is not carried out in the SER, the study program and its expected learning outcomes comply with the EQF level 6.

The study program has 17 learning outcomes. Subjects are in general in a logical order and have relatively detailed lists of learning outcomes (usually 5-6 learning outcomes for each subject). However, the fact that the number of hours allocated to exercises is always 50% of lecture hours, regardless of the practicality of the subject, raises the question of students' acquisition of the necessary skills. This is even the case for subjects where the proportion between lectures and exercises should be reversed – less lectures and more exercises (for example, courses in programming/software engineering). The ratio of lectures and exercises largely determines the ratio of knowledge and skills acquired by students. While it is possible to acquire knowledge largely through independent study, skill development occurs primarily through guided practice - exercises in a college setting. The need for better skills was also emphasized by employers of graduates.

Syllabi do not contain all required components. The course descriptions and aims are in general detailed enough to get an adequate understanding of the course content. On the

other hand, it was sometimes unclear which subject described in the SER corresponds to the subject in the syllabi file (for example, "Introduction to Programming with Python"). The syllabi in the SER are identical to the syllabi presented in a separate syllabi file. In fact short versions of the syllabi were presented, without dividing topics into lessons. While this is acceptable in the case of SER, it is unacceptable in the case of complete versions of syllabi. Moreover, mapping of the learning outcomes of the courses against the learning outcomes of the study program is not carried out.

The language in which the study program will be offered is Albanian.

The relationship between students and teachers at the College seems to be very good. The staff of the College emphasized its student-centred approach several times in interviews. Students also noted the helpfulness of the lecturers and the promptness in answering questions.

Students are supposed to be engaged in an interactive way of learning where they have small projects and periodic presentations, discussions and other interactive methods. Teaching and assessment methods are described in sufficient detail in the SER and syllabi.

The principles and methods of assessment as well as criteria for grades for different types of assessment (examinations, coursework, oral presentations) are described extremely thoroughly in the SER. Each syllabus specifies the means of assessment for a concrete subject.

The grading system used is that used in all Balkan countries. The grades are 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 where 5 marks failing and 6 -10 are positive. The passing level is 50% as widely used in Europe. After the end of semester, students' success rate for each course is presented in the form of a report. The criteria for each grade are described in detail. For example, criteria for "10" of oral presentation has the following description: **"An outstanding presentation.** This presentation is excellent in all respects and entirely relevant to the assignment proposal. Student is within the imposed time limits. Shows full knowledge and understanding of the subject, including proposal and discussion of new ideas. Student has clearly done thorough research and spent ample time on preparation. The oral presentation is organized and well structured, with arguments set out in a concise and persuasive manner and key points emphasized. A confident and engaging presentation, which is appropriately paced, clearly audible and delivered with enthusiasm. Positive body language and eye contact maintained with little or no reliance on prompts. Creative use of visual aids. Questions responded to with courtesy and authority. Little scope for improvement."

Rules for revision of grades occupy a separate section in the *Student Handbook*. Another section presents the College's appeals policy.

The study program includes a *Career Orientation and Internship* course (8 ECTS). In-class work and internship will be carried out simultaneously – 36 hours lectures and 18 hours of exercises are assigned to this course. like all other courses. During the classes, students learn how to write a CV and how to prepare an application form. If students are unable to secure an internship, the Career and Welfare Office will assist them in their search. The College has signed numerous agreements to enable students to meet with potential employers with whom they can reach agreements for internships and employment. The number of internships is among the KPI's of the College.

The SER lists 22 public, private sector and third sector institutions with which the College has signed agreements on internship and practical work for students. Among them are several international partners.

Compliance level: *Substantially compliant*

ET recommendations:

1. *Revise the study program, focusing especially on the following aspects:*
 - a. *Determine the fundamental competences of computer science that are relevant also to other study programs and use this in optimizing the course offering.*
 - b. *Revise programming/software engineering courses to ensure graduates have the skills to use modern software development methodologies.*
 - c. *Revise the division of the contact hours of the courses into lectures and exercises, taking into account the specifics of the subject - theoretical, practical - and the availability of study material necessary for independent study.*
 - d. *Add a subject to the study program that covers the full cycle of software development on a group basis, from problem definition and analysis to the creation of a working prototype.*
2. *Update the syllabi, including also weekly plans (distribution of the topics).*

2.5. Students

General principles of admission are stated in the *Statute* of the College, and the general procedures are stated in the *Regulation of Undergraduate Studies*. Admission to studies is

based on public call, and admission criteria and procedures for new students will be applied to all students regardless of their background.

Enrolled students must submit a birth certificate, high school diploma, transcript of records and Matura test certificate. Those who have completed their education outside of the Republic of Kosovo must provide legalized documents issued by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology of the Republic of Kosovo. Applicants must also complete the application procedures at the College and sign a contract to enroll in the study program if they meet eligibility criteria.

During the site-visit, 3 computer laboratory rooms were presented to the RT, each having 15-20 computerized work-places. The rooms also have enough space for those who will use their own personal laptop computer. According to the explanation in the *Annual Laboratory Hours* document, the average student group size is 47, which is too large for lab work. On the other hand, students said that usually there are not more than 15 students in the laboratory.

In terms of student feedback, the College follows the *FIDeLity Feedback* principles, which require that feedback be provided frequently, immediately, in a discriminating and loving way. According to graduates, the College' representatives implement all important matters indicated by students.

The results obtained by the students can be accessed through the DMIS information system or *Moodle* learning management system. Grading is done electronically for each course and a transcript of records can be generated at any time.

According to the SER, exams can be held on an individual basis at the request of students (taking into account their work schedule), as well as any other request inquired by a formal request by students is also considered.

The College uses a DMIS information system, which stores and processes comprehensive academic information: student background data and personal information, grades, financial reports and passing/failure rate per courses. Students can check their scores, grades, and financial status online. They also can reject, accept, or request clarification of their scores.

The College uses an integrated software *Platforma Akademia* which checks the plagiarism and authenticity of the work submitted. It also prevents multiple submissions of the same or similar texts. Use in the submission of assignments and research papers is mandatory for all staff and students.

Students are informed about their rights, resources and facilities as well as their obligations and issues of non-academic conduct already on the orientation day. Rights and regulations are stated in the *Statute* of the College as well as in the *Student Handbook*, which are publicly available documents. Obligations are also provided under the contract which the student

signs upon enrollment in the College. The procedure for possible appeals is also described in the *Student Handbook*. All students' rights and obligations are made publicly available.

The students' transfer is regulated in the *Regulations for the Transfer of Students from Other Accredited Higher Education Providers*. Transfer of students from another higher educational institution is enabled only if a previous academic program is relevant, includes courses of similar nature and the relevant courses are acknowledged by the respective academic staff. Transfer candidates to other educational institutions must spend at least one academic year at the College prior to their graduation.

The College is well known in Kosovo for its extensive involvement in the Erasmus Plus program. Students expressed their satisfaction with not only the services provided, but also with the wide range of partners associated with the College. Overall, the institution enables students to actively engage in international higher education, thereby promoting their academic growth.

While meeting with students, they did not complain about the availability and guidance of the academic staff. On the contrary, lecturers mentioned at the meeting that they spend relatively more time on student guidance than is customary in universities.

Moreover, students and graduates noticed that there is still room for improvement in terms of start-up incubation as well as additional lectures or materials based on cutting edge solutions like AI. This interest might be profitable for many study programs so it is recommended to further expand learning support mechanisms.

Compliance level: *Fully compliant*

ET recommendations:

1. *Expand the support mechanisms offered by the College, including start-up incubators and additional activities about cutting edge solutions.*

2.6. Research

One of the guiding principles of the College is “Designing student oriented and learning centred courses that include student friendly methodology, practices, projects and researches”. It is claimed that the study program has a clear plan for integrating research into the study program, meaning that students have opportunity to be engaged in research projects, the inclusion of current research findings in course materials, and an emphasis on developing research skills and methodologies. It also entails a clear understanding of how

research contributes to the field of study and how students are expected to engage with and contribute to research. This is also reflected in the learning outcomes “Collaborate in multidisciplinary teams to solve complex problems” and “Conduct an in-depth research project and present a thesis”. The College has established a *Research and Innovation Hub* whose tasks include, among others, incorporating research in curricula and teaching methodology as well as improving research skills of students.

Expectations for teaching staff involvement in research and scholarly activities and performance in relation to these expectations are specified in job descriptions and employment contracts. Research and related activities include the following: conducting research, publishing scientific papers, initiating and participating in research projects, implementing research-based teaching methodology, incorporating research into course projects, involving students in research. The SER states that “The research department has in place mechanisms to ensure that our staff complies with requirements by the institution” and that “Engagement in research activities of teaching staff will be taken into consideration in staff evaluation processes”. The fact that about 2/3 of the academic staff does not meet the requirements for academic staff shows that in fact the majority of the teaching staff does not meet expectations. At the same time, the potential of the College and its partners could be used more widely. For example, employers were willing to contribute to the development of elective courses. Employers also claimed that they have many research challenges that could be addressed in cooperation with the College. Employers also found it very promising to create a business incubator that would support the creation of start-ups and spin-offs, and also act as an innovation hub.

The College had a *Strategic Research Action Plan* which sets five main principles (called “directions” in the *Strategic Research Action Plan*): 1) Broadening, Innovation and Impact, 2) Research and Funding, 3) Inclusive Excellence, 4) Partnership and Collaboration, 5) Efficiency, Effectiveness and Evaluation. For implementing these principles, a strategic objective, outcomes and activities are determined for each principle. No document defines explicitly what activities are considered as research. However, this can be understood from the College documents indirectly, especially from the description of the planned Research and Innovation Hub.

Some CV-s of academic staff do not contain any information about their research activities. According to *Google Scholar*, less than one third (7 out of 22) of teaching staff have scientific publications.

Some of the full-time teaching staff – especially L. Halilaj, G. Sejdiu and A. Salihu – have a relatively good track record of scientific publications in scientific magazines. However, no one of them is listed in the Academic Staff section of the College website. On the other hand,

some academic staff have not provided any evidence about their involvement in R&D projects or participation in scientific conferences.

As mentioned above, research is validated through publishing scientific papers, initiating and participating in research projects, implementing research-based teaching methodology, incorporating research into course projects, etc.

According to the employment contract, each academic staff is obliged to produce at least one publication per year. However, most of the staff did not fulfill this obligation. Therefore, more than two-thirds of academic staff do not meet Standard 6.7.

The experts checked about ten most recent articles (from years 2022 and 2023) of the academic staff. The College was not listed as an affiliated institution in any of these articles. Therefore, the recommendation of the 2021 Accreditation Report “Make sure that all the full time employed academic staff publishes under the name of the Universum” was not implemented.

It has been argued that since teachers are professionals, it is common practice to share their professional experience with students during the teaching. The general principle that academic staff are encouraged to include in their teaching information about their research and research development trends is stated in the relevant documents of the College: Research Strategy, Statute of the Research and Innovation Hub, job descriptions and employment contracts.

In response to the request of the ET to provide documents regulating the ownership of intellectual property and procedures on commercialization of ideas developed by staff and students, two documents were submitted: 1) *Policy Handbook of Data Protection Policy* and 2) *Technology Policy*. None of these documents mention anything about the commercialisation of ideas developed by staff and students. Regarding intellectual property, *Technology Policy* contains only three sentences of general type like “users may not violate any copyright, patent or other intellectual property law, including restricted software laws”. Again, the recommendation of the 2021 Accreditation Report “Define procedures for the commercialization of ideas developed by staff and students (Intellectual Property Policy)” has not been implemented.

Students' research activities take place primarily as part of the preparation of their thesis, where students demonstrate the practical application of knowledge and skills in a real-world setting.

Compliance level: *Partially compliant*

ET recommendations:

- 1. Develop and implement a system for supporting the professional development of academic staff, which would ensure compliance with the requirements of their qualifications.*
- 2. Develop a motivation system for the full time employed academic staff to publish under the name of the College.*
- 3. Define procedures for the commercialization of ideas developed by staff and students.*

2.7. Infrastructure and Resources

The College admitted annually 250 students to the study program. The total number of students was 604 in 2023. Experts were provided a budget plan until the 2025/2026 academic year. With only three computer classes, providing high-quality education to such a large number of undergraduate IT students is a real challenge. All the more so because these computer classes have to be divided between the three study programs of the IT field. This turned out to be possible mainly due to the fact that the proportion of exercises (workshops in classroom learning) is very small. In terms of infrastructure, the College has concrete plans for improvements: 2,1M€ and 2,75M€ are planned in the budget for academic years 2024/2025 and 2025/2026, respectively, of the College to be spent for the construction of a new building. Five new computer labs are planned. Concerning human resources, the situation is much less favorable. The College currently employs around 15 full-time equivalent academic staff, which is relatively small given the total number of students (about 40 students per one teacher). The ET has not provided a concrete and realistic plan of increasing the number of academic staff.

The study program has no dedicated facilities or budget, the budget is integrated with the general budget of the College, with the majority of expenses shared among departments. However, the College has the capability to cover the costs incurred through construction of the new building – the total net income during years 2021-2023 was about 6M€. Considering that the College's IT studies infrastructure and teaching staff coverage is ensured at the minimum required level, the fact that the net income is projected to grow in the coming years seriously undermines the College's ambition to become a leading institution in the region (SER p. 12).

With the available space resources (lecture rooms and labs) and the number of academic staff, we consider it possible to realize the proposals presented in this report if the current annual admission of 250 students is maintained. At the same time, we believe that to achieve its ambitions, the College will need to improve both its laboratory facilities and increase the

number of teaching staff, even if current enrollment is maintained. Otherwise, lecturers would be so overloaded with teaching that there would be no time for research and development activities and other activities that accompany academic work.

The number of lecture halls, seminar rooms and laboratories, as well as the number of seats/working places in these rooms is not provided. The SER states that the Computer Science program has a “Modern Campus with adequate number of rooms and seats to host large number of students”, without providing any concrete evidence. Nevertheless, it appears that the number and size of lecture halls are satisfactory, the number of laboratories is barely satisfactory, even with the current relatively small proportion of exercises. An increase in the proportion of laboratory work inevitably requires the installation of additional computer classrooms.

Although the number of seats in the reading rooms and in the group work rooms is not provided, it is evident that it is less than 10% of the total number of students. The books on the open access shelves of the library are not systematized, books from different fields are mixed. At the same time, students have access to the ASU electronic library, which ensures the possibility of using the necessary study materials. Note that although this assessment covers the last three years (i.e. from 2021), the SER describes the library's acquisitions only from 2011-2016, not acquisitions over the last three years.

The buildings do not have elevators.

Compliance level: *Substantially compliant*

ET recommendations:

1. *Plan for a realistic increase in the number of teaching staff and an adequate academic work environment for them.*
2. *When equipping a new building, plan not only for the needs that arise in connection with an possible increase in enrollment in the future, but also for the needs that arise in connection with an increase in the quality of educational activities (especially the need to increase the proportion of laboratory work).*
3. *Create access opportunities for students with special needs also in existing buildings.*

3. FINAL RECOMMENDATION OF THE ET

The general opinion on the College is mixed – some very positive achievements are accompanied by some problems and challenges.

The following should definitely be highlighted as positive:

1. The College has a clear and ambitious vision for the future and a clear strategy for its realization, especially through the Cintana Alliance, which is managed by Arizona State University.
2. The College actively supports students to gain international experience – the total number of students who participated in international student exchange is by far the largest compared to other higher education institutions in Kosovo.
3. According to employers of graduates, the College is the fastest growing higher education institution in Kosovo and is well positioned to become a benchmark for other higher education institutions in terms of cooperation with companies.

Speaking about problems and challenges, the following should be especially noted:

1. Due to the high turnover of academic staff, it is problematic to ensure the sustainability and quality of academic activities – both teaching and research.
2. Research in the modern sense of computer science is practically non-existent in the College, there are no clearly defined research areas in which internationally competitive research groups are created.
3. The extremely general, information-poor and sometimes inadequate SER indicates that the College still has serious deficiencies in terms of quality assurance of some processes.

In conclusion, the Expert Team considers that the *Computer Science* bachelor study program offered by the Universum International College is *Substantially compliant* with the standards included in the KAA Accreditation manual and, therefore, recommends *to accredit* the study program for a duration of *3 years* with a number of *250* students to be enrolled in the program.

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