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Agjencia e Kosovës për Akreditim
Agencija Kosova za Akreditaciju
Kosovo Accreditation Agency



Thematic Analysis of Processes Involved in Accreditation / Reaccreditation of Study Programs

**AN EXAMINATION OF THREE-YEARS OF ACCREDITATION
PROCESSES OF ONE STUDY PROGRAM (AT BOTH
BACHELOR'S AND MASTER'S LEVELS) AT THREE PUBLIC
AND THREE PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF
KOSOVO**

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Agjencia e Akreditimit e Kosovës
Kosovo Accreditation Agency
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Thematic Analysis of Processes Involved in Accreditation/Reaccreditation of Study Programs:

An examination of three-years of accreditation processes of one study program (at both bachelor's and master's levels) at three public and three private institutions in the Republic of Kosovo

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Overview of the Project

In December 2023, Dr. Christine Austin, director of Assessment and Accreditation at Arkansas Tech University, as well as a peer reviewer and member of the Institutional Actions Council with the Higher Learning Commission (one of the six institutional accrediting bodies in the United States of America) was selected as a Fulbright Specialist to perform a thematic analysis on the accreditation of study programs at higher education institutions in Kosovo by the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA). Joint discussions with Senior Officers of the Evaluation and Monitoring department led to a design that examined completed program reviews conducted by six different institutions—divided equally among public and private institutions at both the bachelor’s and master’s levels—in a single study program during a consecutive three-year period.

While conceptualizing the scope of this project, the researcher consulted several Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) documents in positioning the work. One of these, the *Kosovo Accreditation Agency and Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Kosovo* pamphlet identified placement of the project within the strategic objectives of KAA. This thematic analysis contributes to the KAA strategic objective 4 - “improv[ing] quality in the higher education sector through efficient and effective accreditation and monitoring procedures.”

It is with this spirit of continuous improvement that the following analysis was conducted with the intent of providing valuable information for the ongoing monitoring of accredited study programs in institutions of higher education in the Republic of Kosovo.

Project Concept

Review self-study and final reports for 6 institutions (3 public/ 3 private) over timespan of 3 years. Examine similar bachelor’s and master’s programs to look for items of difference and agreement, areas of improvement, areas of challenge, and identify any trends.

Table 1 - Institutions of Higher Education Identified for Analysis

	PUBLIC	PRIVATE
2020	University A (MSc)	A College (MA)
2021	University B (MSc)	B College (BA)
2022	University C (BSc)	C College (BA)

Methodology

In total there were twelve reports used to analyze the process of program review of management study programs. Six self-evaluation reports (SERs) created by the study programs of the institutions and six reports created by the external expert teams (ETs) brought in to review and confirm the SERs during a site visit to examine the operation of each institution's study program at either master's or bachelor's level comprised the data of this analysis.

Each institution is guided in preparation of the SER by information provided in the *KAA Accreditation Manual* "Recommendations for the elaboration of the self-evaluation documentation: In order to draft its self-evaluation documentation, the institution must:" (p. 28). The re/accreditation of study programs through KAA covers the following general areas with accompanying detailed standards for each:

1. Mission, objectives and administration (6 standards)
2. Quality management (9 standards)
3. Academic staff (10 standards)
4. Educational process content (12 standards)
5. Students (11 standards)
6. Research (10 standards)
7. Infrastructure and resources (6 standards)

KAA offers both an accreditation manual and a template to institutions to guide their work in creating the SERs. While there is specific information requested regarding the study program, there is considerable latitude given to programs to "tell their story." According to the *KAA Accreditation Manual - Updated 2022*¹, criteria used to evaluate SERs must be:

- Honest and relevant;
- Concise and supported by the attached documents;
- Public on the institution's website;
- Present an adequate balance between description and self-critical evaluation

The researcher used these criteria when examining the six SERs to determine if they were consistent with KAA requirements. While the researcher is not able to assess the first bullet, the following table helped to examine the study program SER characteristics in aggregate. Common characteristics extracted from the individual institution's SERs included the typical page length of the evaluation report; the number and type of supporting documents that were provided by the program, either in an appendix or as hyperlinks embedded within the report and the number of documents requested by the ETs; whether this information discoverable on the program's institutional website; whether there was a balance between description and self-critical evaluation in the narrative; whether past accreditation ET recommendations were addressed in the current SER; and finally if the program explicitly included program learning outcomes.

¹ KAA has revised the Standards for Evaluation and Re-accreditation of Study Programs for 2024 - 2025. This revision will cover the same seven areas, but has removed some redundancy in the standards, as well as giving performance indicators for individual standards. This report uses the previous standards that were used in the analyzed study programs' reports and evaluations.

Further discussion about performance of the six study programs on individual standards appears in the Breakdown by Area and Standard section

Table 2 - SER Characteristics

Review Year	SER of MSc/MA/BA/BSc and final outcome	# of pages in SER	# of Supporting documents provided/requested	Accreditation information available on web	Balance between description & self-evaluation	Addresses past ET recommendations
2020	University A (MSc) _ Public. Reaccredited	83	20 provided/8 requested	Not found	Mostly descriptive	Yes
	College A (MA) _ Private Reaccredited	44	14 provided/8 requested	Not found	Mostly descriptive	Yes
2021	University B (MSc)_ Public. Not accredited	65	9 provided, plus multiple web links/	Yes, some QA reports	Mostly descriptive	Had none from previous report.
	College B (BA)_ Private Reaccredited	83	11 provided/0 requested	Yes, some information	Mostly descriptive	No
2022	University C (BSc) _ Public Reaccredited	84	Many footnoted sources	Yes, some information	Mostly descriptive	No
	College C (BA) _ Private Reaccredited	251	Supplied access to Google Drive (>2000 pp./ 10 additional requested)	Not found	Mostly descriptive	No

The length of SERs varied from a low of 44 pages of information to a high of 251 pages, although some of the reports incorporated evidence documents within the report, and some reports included hyperlinks to web-based documents.

All of the SERs included supporting documentation, although the provision of this additional evidence varied by institution. Some institutions included the information as part of their SER, while others included hyperlinks to documentation or footnotes, while still another provided a google site with folders of documentary evidence for each standard. From a low of 9 additional documents to a high

of more than 2000 additional pages, the range was large. The types of documents ranged from syllabi and curriculum vitae to written policies. External teams requested specific additional documentation to support half of the study programs. The number of additional documents requested was usually between eight - ten. Inclusion of accreditation material regarding the study program was only available for half of the institutions. This deficiency forms one of the more often read recommendations from the ETs.

While all but one private institution provided a SWOT analysis of the study program that included weaknesses and challenges, as well as strengths and opportunities, there was no discussion about how the program planned to capitalize on the strengths or address the weaknesses. Since the above table shows that the majority of information provided in the SERs was mainly descriptive, a discussion of weaknesses and threats would provide an easy way for study programs to meet the KAA requirement of presenting a balance of description and self-critical evaluation.

Finally, only two study programs addressed recommendations from past re/accreditations. One reported not having had any prior recommendations, and three made no mention of past recommendations whatsoever. This might be an addition to the KAA template as a requirement that all programs need to include in their future SERs.

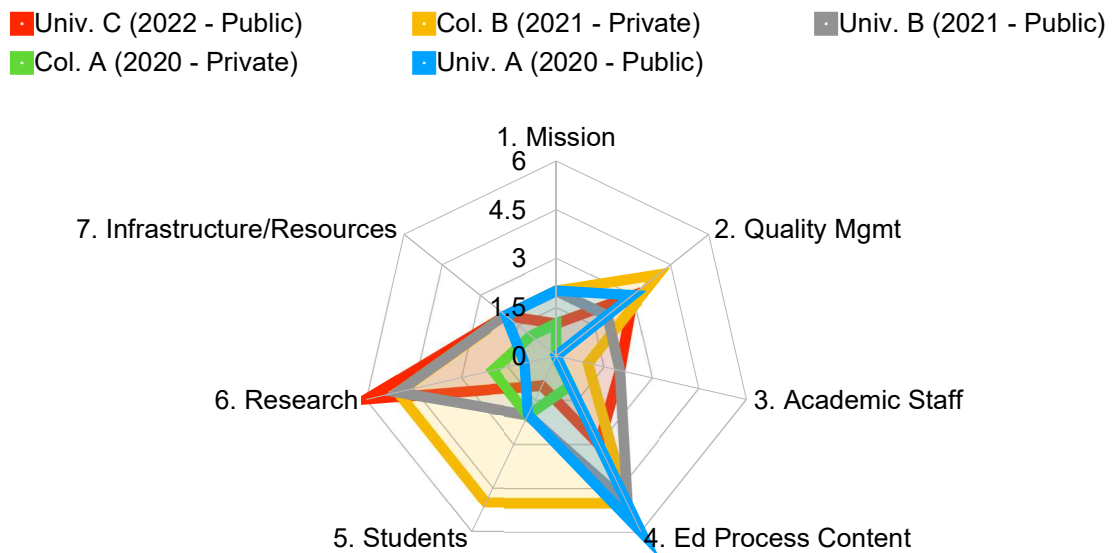
Recommendations for Self-Evaluation Reports

- While there is generally a SWOT analysis done in each SER, there is very little critical discussion of this analysis or evidence to support claims. I recommend requesting a discussion of actionable strategies for capitalizing on the items identified as strengths and opportunities and actions to ameliorate the effects of the weakness and threats. A SWOT analysis is of little use unless it informs ongoing activities.
- Additionally, any claims made by the institution regarding their programs provided scant evidence to back up those claims. Requesting that institutions provide more evidence of claims, particularly those in the SWOT analysis would be useful to the expert teams in confirming the analysis.
- Add a section to the SER template requiring an examination of previous program study accreditation recommendations.

Compliance breakdown by area and standard

The following radial chart shows the areas of most non-compliance as evaluated by expert teams assigned to examine the study programs. As shown below the areas of consistent concern occur most often in the areas of Quality Management, Educational Process Content, and Research.

Figure 1. Accreditation Standards Areas of Non-compliance



On aggregate, institutions were compliant with most requirements from the KAA Accreditation Manual. The succeeding discussion breaks out the different criteria by standard. Specific areas and standards where more than three study programs had difficulties with compliance have been marked in yellow. While several standards seemed particularly problematic for public institutions, all areas that were marked non-compliant were highlighted.

Analysis of the non-compliance information is only partial because one ET did not use the same grid-based format used by the other five institutions' study programs. While they offered an overall assessment level for each area, they did not breakdown compliance by standard and therefore make consistent analysis difficult. It might be a consideration that such a grid or reporting structure is required of future ETs in order to facilitate an easier comparison of data on individual standards. The following section examines the individual instances of non-compliance in the detailed standards. Where more than two occurrences of non-compliance were noted, the standard was highlighted in yellow.

2. Objectives and administration:

Standard 1.1. The study program mission is compliant with the overall mission statement of the institution.

Standard 1.2. Relevant academic and professional advice is considered when defining the intended learning outcomes which are consistent with the National Qualifications Framework and the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

Standard 1.3. The study program has a well-defined overarching didactic and research concept.

Standard 1.4. There are formal policies, guidelines and regulations dealing with recurring procedural or academic issues. These are made publicly available to all staff and students.

Standard 1.5. All staff and students comply with the internal regulations relating to ethical conduct in research, teaching, assessment in all academic and administrative activities.

Standard 1.6. All policies, regulations, terms of reference and statements of responsibility relating to the management and delivery of the program are reviewed at least once every two years and amended as required in the light of changing circumstances.

Table 3 - Non-Compliant Standards Area 1

	Public			Private		
	2020	2021	2022	2020	2021	2022
1. Mission, Objectives, and Administration						
1.1	X			X		
1.2		X				
1.3	X	X	X			
1.4						
1.5						
1.6						

In the area of Mission, objectives, and administration, Standard 1.3 appeared to be a problem for public institutions with each of the three study programs being found non-compliant on this standard throughout the years under study. Additionally, standards 1.1 had one non-compliant public and one non-compliant private institution in 2020.

In this limited study private institutions seemed to have the least difficulty in the area of mission, objectives and administration with only one institution being non-compliant in standard 1.1 in the 2020.

2. Quality management:

Standard 2.1. All staff participate in self-evaluations and cooperate with reporting and improvement processes in their sphere of activity.

Standard 2.2. Evaluation processes and planning for improvement are integrated into normal planning processes.

Standard 2.3. Quality assurance processes deal with all aspects of program planning and delivery, including services and resources provided by other parts of the institution.

Standard 2.4. Quality evaluations provide an overview of quality issues for the overall program as well as of different components within it; the evaluations consider inputs, processes, and outputs, with particular attention given to learning outcomes for students.

Standard 2.5. Quality assurance processes ensure both that required standards are met and that there is continuing improvement in performance.

Standard 2.6. Survey data is being collected from students, graduates, and employers; the results of these evaluations are made publicly available.

Standard 2.7. Results of the internal quality assurance system are taken into account for further development of the study program. This includes evaluation results, investigation of the student workload, academic success, and employment of graduates.

Standard 2.8. The institution ensures that reports on the overall quality of the program are prepared periodically (eg. every three years) for consideration within the institution indicating its strengths and weaknesses.

Standard 2.9. The quality assurance arrangements for the program are themselves regularly evaluated and improved.

Table 4 - Non-Compliant Standards Area 2

	Public			Private		
	2020	2021	2022	2020	2021	2022
2. Quality Management						
2.1						
2.2						
2.3						
2.4	X		X			
2.5	X					
2.6	X	X	X			
2.7		X			X	
2.8			X		X	
2.9						

In the area of Quality Management, public HEIs again seemed to be non-compliant more often than the private HEIs with five standard having areas of non-compliance, while private HEIs scored non-compliant on just two.

In particular, standard 2.6, dealing with publicly available survey data requested from students, was scored non-compliant by all three institutions. It was either missing or inadequate as evaluated by ETs.

Standard 2.4 was marked as non-compliant for two of the public institutions, while Standards, 2.5, 2.7, and 2.8 all had one mark from one of the institutions.

3. Academic staff:

Standard 3.1. Candidates for employment are provided with full position descriptions and conditions of employment. To be presented in tabular form data about full time (FT) and part time (PT) academic/ artistic staff, such as: name, qualification, academic title, duration of official (valid) contract, workload for teaching, exams, consulting, administrative activities, research, etc. for the study program under evaluation.

Standard 3.2. The teaching staff must comply with the legal requirements concerning the occupation of teaching positions included in the Administrative Instruction on Accreditation.

Standard 3.3. Academic staff do not cover, within an academic year, more than two teaching positions (one full-time, one part-time), regardless of the educational institution where they carry out their activity.

Standard 3.4. At least 50% of the academic staff in the study program are full time employees, and account for at least 50% of the classes of the study program.

Standard 3.5. For each student group (defined by the statute of the institution) and for every 60 ECTS credits in the study program, the institution has employed at least one full time staff with PhD title or equivalent title in the case of artistic/applied science institutions.

Standard 3.6. Opportunities are provided for additional professional development of teaching staff, with special assistance given to any who are facing difficulties.

Standard 3.7. The responsibilities of all teaching staff, especially full-time, include the engagement in the academic community, availability for consultations with students and community service.

Standard 3.8. Academic staff evaluation is conducted regularly at least through self- evaluation, students, peer, and superiors 'evaluations, and occur on a formal basis at least once each year. The results of the evaluation are made publicly available.

Table 5 - Non-Compliant Standards Area 3

	Public			Private		
	2020	2021	2022	2020	2021	2022
3. Academic Staff						
3.1			X		X	
3.2						
3.3						
3.4						
3.5						
3.6		X				
3.7						
3.8			X			
3.9		X				
3.10						

Standard 3.9. Strategies for quality enhancement include improving the teaching strategies and quality of learning materials.

Standard 3.10. Teachers retired at age limit or for other reasons lose the status of full-time teachers and are considered part-time teachers

While there are scattered problems at different institutions, Area 3 did not have any major obvious trends from the areas of non-compliance. Non-compliance was observed in various standards at both public and private institutions with public institutions again having significantly more non-compliant marks than the private.

4. Educational process content:

Standard 4.1. The study program is modeled on qualification objectives. These include subject-related and interdisciplinary aspects as well as the acquisition of disciplinary, methodological, and generic skills and competencies. The aspects refer especially to academic or artistic competencies, to the capability of taking up adequate employment, contributing to the civil society and of developing the students' personality.

Standard 4.2. The study program complies with the National Qualifications Framework and the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. The individual components of the program are combined in a way to best achieve the specified qualification objectives and provide for adequate forms of teaching and learning.

Standard 4.3. The disciplines within the curriculum are provided in a logical flow and meet the definition and precise determination of the general and specific competencies, as well as the compatibility with the study programs and

Table 6 - Non-Compliant Standards Area 4

	Public			Private		
	2020	2021	2022	2020	2021	2022
4. Educational Process Content						
4.1	X	X			X	
4.2	X	X	X		X	
4.3		X	X		X	
4.4	X					
4.5	N/a	N/a		N/a	N/a	
4.6					N/a	
4.7		X				
4.8						
4.9	X			X		
4.10	X					
4.11	X	X	X		X	
4.12						

curricula delivered in the EHEA. To be listed at least 7 learning outcomes for the study program under evaluation.

Standard 4.4. The disciplines within the curriculum have analytical syllabuses which comprise at least the following: the discipline's objectives, the basic thematic content, learning outcomes, the distribution of classes, seminars and applicative activities, students' assessment system, the minimal bibliography, etc. The full course description/ syllabuses of each subject/ module should be attached only in electronic form to the self-assessment report for the study program under evaluation.

Standard 4.5. If the language of instruction is other than Albanian, actions are taken to ensure that language skills of both students and academic staff are adequate for instruction in that language when students begin their studies. This may be done through language training prior to the commencement of the program.

Standard 4.6. The student-teacher relationship is a partnership in which each assumes the responsibility of reaching the learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are explained and discussed with students from the perspective of their relevance to the students' development.

Standard 4.7. Teaching strategies are fit for the different types of learning outcomes programs are intended to develop. Strategies of teaching and assessment set out in program and course specifications are followed with flexibility to meet the needs of different groups of students.

Standard 4.8. Student assessment mechanisms are conducted fairly and objectively, are appropriate for the different forms of learning sought and are clearly communicated to students at the beginning of courses.

Standard 4.9. Appropriate, valid, and reliable mechanisms are used for verifying standards of student achievement. The standard of work required for different grades is consistent over time, comparable in courses offered within a program, and in comparison, with other study programs at highly regarded institutions.

Standard 4.10. Policies and procedures include actions to be taken in to dealing with situations where standards of student achievement are inadequate or inconsistently assessed.

Standard 4.11. If the study program includes practice stages, the intended student learning outcomes are clearly specified, and effective processes are followed to ensure that those learning outcomes and the strategies to develop that learning are understood by students. The practice stages are allocated ETCS credits and the work of the students at the practical training organizations is monitored through activity reports; students during practice stages have assigned tutors among the academic staff in the study program.

Standard 4.12. In order to facilitate the practice stages, the higher education institution signs cooperation agreements, contracts or other documents with institutions/organizations/practical training units.

Standard 4.5 was consistently marked as N/A, presumably meaning that the program's primary language of instruction is Albanian with no need of assessment of instructor or student language skills.

Several standards in this area were scored as non-compliant in many of the study programs examined. In particular, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, and 4.11 had multiple instances of non-compliance. Non-compliance in any standard is problematic, but area 4 is particularly concerning because it addresses the qualifications that students need to be able to achieve in order to exhibit appropriate levels of learning and to be job

ready. It is clear that, at least for in this discipline, there is a great need to examine the curriculum being provided is current. Furthermore, teaching strategies and assessment of student learning need to be appropriately aligned to ensure that students are achieving the necessary instruction and feedback on their own performance.

External team comments found further on in this report reinforce the need for updating the curriculum, at least in the discipline that was a part of this study. It will be interesting to examine whether other disciplines (study programs) show this kind of evaluation.

5. Students:

Standard 5.1. There is a clear and formally adopted admission procedure at institutional level that the study program respects when organizing students' recruitment. Admission requirements are consistently and fairly applied for all students.

Standard 5.2. All students enrolled in the study program possess a high school graduation diploma or other equivalent document of study, according to MEST requirements.

Standard 5.3. The study groups are dimensioned so as to ensure an effective and interactive teaching and learning process.

Standard 5.4. Feedback to students on their performance and results of assessments is given promptly and accompanied by mechanisms for assistance if needed.

Standard 5.5. The results obtained by the students throughout the study cycles are certified by the academic record.

Standard 5.6. Flexible treatment of students in special situations is ensured with respect to deadlines and formal requirements in the program and to all examinations.

Standard 5.7. Records of student completion rates are kept for all courses and for the program as a whole and included among quality indicators.

Table 7 - Non-Compliant Standards Area 5

	Public			Private		
	2020	2021	2022	2020	2021	2022
5. Students						
5.1						
5.2						
5.3				X		
5.4	X	N/A			N/A	
5.5		N/A				
5.6					X	
5.7						
5.8				X	X	
5.9			X		X	
5.10						
5.11					X	

Standard 5.8. Effective procedures are being used to ensure that work submitted by students is original.

Standard 5.9. Students' rights and obligations are made publicly available, promoted to all those concerned and enforced equitably; these will include the right to academic appeals.

Standard 5.10. The students' transfer between higher education institutions, faculties and study programs are clearly regulated in formal internal documents.

Standard 5.11. Academic staff is available at sufficient scheduled times for consultation and advice to students. Adequate tutorial assistance is provided to ensure understanding and ability to apply learning.

Area five was among the least likely to receive a mark of non-compliance. Standard 5.8 that deals with academic integrity and 5.9 that addresses the public availability of student rights and responsibilities were the two most often cited as non-compliant. This finding echoes ET comments in area one and the overall recommendations that recommend increased regulation of plagiarism, good scientific practice, data fabrication and falsification. One other item of note is that for two of the institutions (one public and one private) a grade of not applicable was given. Standard 5.4 was marked as n/a for private B College

6. Research:

Standard 6.1. The study program has defined scientific/applied research objectives (on its own or as part of a research center or interdisciplinary program), which are also reflected in the research development plan of the institution; sufficient financial, logistic and human resources are allocated for achieving the proposed research objectives.

Standard 6.2. Expectations for teaching staff involvement in research and scholarly activities are clearly specified, and performance in relation to these expectations is considered in staff evaluation and promotion criteria.

Standard 6.3. Clear policies are established for defining what is recognized as research, consistent with international standards and established norms in the field of study of the program.

Standard 6.4. The academic staff has a proven track record of research results on the same topics as their teaching activity.

Standard 6.5. The academic and research staff publish their work in specialty magazines or publishing houses, scientific/applied/artistic products are presented at conferences, sessions, symposiums, seminars etc. and contracts, expertise, consultancy, conventions, etc. are provided to partners inside the country and/or abroad.

Standard 6.6. Research is validated through: scientific and applied research publications, artistic products, technological transfer through consultancy centers, scientific parks and other structures for validation.

Standard 6.7. Each academic staff member and researcher has produced at least an average of one scientific/applied research publication or artistic outcome/product per year for the past three years.

Standard 6.8. Academic and research staff publish under the name of the institution in Kosovo they are affiliated to as full-time staff.

Standard 6.8. Academic staff are encouraged to include in their teaching information about their research and scholarly activities that are relevant to courses they teach, together with other significant research developments in the field.

Standard 6.9. Policies are established for ownership of intellectual property and clear procedures set out for commercialization of ideas developed by staff and students.

Standard 6.10. Students are engaged in research projects and other activities.

Standard 6 has an error in numbering that was addressed in different ways by different institutions.

The area of Research had significant areas of non-compliance by both public and private institutions' study programs. Standard 6.9 had the most non-compliance marks with 4 of the 6 institutions being found non-compliant. Standards 6.1, 6.4, and 6.8(b) had 3 of six and 2 of

Table 8 - Non-Compliant Standards Area 6

	Public			Private		
	2020	2021	2022	2020	2021	2022
6. Research						
6.1		X	X		X	
6.2		X			X	
6.3		X				
6.4		X	X			
6.5						
6.6			X			
6.7		X			X	
6.8						
6.8			X	X	X	
6.9	X		X	X	X	
6.10			X			

7. Infrastructure and resources:

Standard 7.1. The adequate long-term implementation of the study program is ensured in quantitative terms as regards premises, human resources and equipment. At the same time, it is guaranteed that qualitative aspects are also taken into account.

Standard 7.2. There is a financial plan at the level of the study program that would demonstrate the sustainability of the study program for the next minimum three years.

Standard 7.3. The higher education institution must demonstrate with adequate documents (property deeds, lease contracts, inventories, invoices etc.) that, for the study program submitted for evaluation it possesses the following, for the next at least three years:

- a) owned or rented spaces adequate for the educational process;
- b) owned or rented laboratories, with the adequate equipment for all the compulsory disciplines within the curriculum, wherever the analytical syllabus includes such activities;
- c) adequate software for the disciplines of study included in the curriculum, with utilization license;
- d) library equipped with reading rooms, group work rooms and its own book stock according to the disciplines included in the curricula.

Standard 7.4. The number of seats in the lecture rooms, seminar rooms and laboratories must be related to the study groups 'size (series, groups, subgroups); the applicative activities for the specialty disciplines included in the curricula are carried out in laboratories equipped with IT equipment.

Standard 7.5. The education institution's libraries must ensure, for each of the study programs:

- a) a number of seats in the reading rooms corresponding to at least 10% of the total number of students in the study program;
- b) a number of seats in the group work rooms corresponding to at least 10% of the total number of students in the study program;
- c) their own book stock from Albanian and foreign specialty literature, enough to cover the disciplines within the curricula, out of which at least 50% should represent book titles or specialty courses of recognized publishers, from the last 10 years;
- d) a book stock within its own library with a sufficient number of books so as to cover the needs of all students in the cycle and year of study the respective discipline is provided for; and
- e) a sufficient number of subscriptions to Albanian and foreign publications and periodicals, according to the stated mission.

Standard 7.6. The infrastructure and facilities dedicated to the implementation of the program is adapted to students with special needs.

Table 9 - Non-Compliant Standards Area 7

	Public			Private		
	2020	2021	2022	2020	2021	2022
7. Infrastructure and Resources						
7.1		X				
7.2	X		X	X		
7.3						
7.4						
7.5		X	X		X	
7.6	X				X	

While individual differences between study programs and institutions may account for some of the areas of non-compliance, it is clear from the previous examination of areas and standards that certain items cause fairly consistent trouble.

Summary: Non-Compliance Standards

An examination of areas of non-compliance in study program accreditation reports is a useful exercise and should be automated in future so that trends and areas of concern are easily discernible. Further, having them immediately recorded would assist in confirming that all external teams had reported on each detailed standard individually rather than as an aggregate of the standards in an area. The 2022 private institution external team review only offered aggregate area information and keeps the agency from identifying full trend data, perhaps erroneously making it appear that private institutions have less concerns than the public HEIs.

ET Recommendations in Final Reports by Area and Standard

The Expert Team (ET) member(s) receive ample instruction from the KAA Accreditation Manual on how to evaluate and compose a Final Report for the study program.

The first pages of each report contain introductory material such as the names of the expert team members, the KAA coordinator for the visit, the information sources used in the report as well as any additional material that was requested from the study program that the ET deemed missing but required to make a full evaluation. This information is generally followed by a copy of the site visit schedule with names of all individuals contacted or consulted during the site visit.

From this point the ET wrote their own overview of the institution and program under review followed by a full assessment of each of the seven (7) standards for study program accreditation. In all but one of the Final Report, a table detailing the program's level of compliance with each of the standards.

Study programs are evaluated by ETs according to the following compliance scale (KAA Accreditation Manual, p. 9)

Fully Compliant	90 - 100%
Substantially Compliant	70 - 90%
Partially Compliant	30 - 70%
Non- Compliant	< 30%

In the area of recommendations from the Expert Teams, areas 1 (Mission), 4 (Academic content), and 6 (Research) received the most comments. Accordingly, the institution that was not reaccredited received the most recommendations for improvement in all 7 areas, except for area 5 (Students).

I am finding Expert Reports that just give impressions but do not provide any evidence of how that impression was formed. Difficult to know on what they are basing recommendations on when no evidence is given.

Many of the Expert Reports just give impressions but do not provide any evidence of how that impression was formed. It is difficult to know on what criteria they are basing their recommendations when no evidence (or standard) is given.

Findings by Standards

1. Mission
2. Quality Management
3. Academic Staff
4. Educational Process Content
5. Students
6. Research
7. Infrastructure and Resources

In the following section a brief discussion of the major themes from the expert recommendations in the Final Reports is followed by the actual recommendations. At the end of each recommendation is the theme in brackets to which it seemed to apply best.

1. Mission, objectives, and administration

Main themes: Mission, Stakeholder involvement, QA process, Academic integrity, Communication, and Online learning

External team recommendations in the area of Mission focused overwhelmingly on revising the program mission to align it with the aims of the university mission; and identifying benchmarks for quality in objectives/outcomes in study program.

Other themes that appeared more than once included the involvement of stakeholders in the study program decision-making, more transparency of study program policy and objectives through website transparency, more training in online education for academic staff, and strengthening processes of academic integrity.

ET Recommendations

1. Revise the mission of the MA management program to capture all the aspects of the overall university mission. [Mission]
2. Revise the content of program benchmarking to clearly show where the programme has similarities and in which aspects. [QA process]
3. Standardise the meaning and the structure of the faculty mission statement [Mission]
4. Design the mission statement of the program and make sure that it is aligned with the overall mission of the university. [Mission]
5. Rethink the programmes' aims and objectives to capture its position on the higher education market fully; [QA process]
6. Adjust the programmes' objectives to capture all the aspects of the college's mission [Mission]
7. Formalise the involvement of stakeholders in the programme development process; [Stakeholder involvement]
8. Purify the analytical approaches to facilitate the future decision-making process. [Stakeholder involvement]
9. Elaborate and define the learning outcomes at the program level following rigorously the information of the National Qualification Framework and the European Qualification Framework on knowledge, skill, and responsibility/autonomy [QA process]
10. Develop a detailed overarching didactic concept which provides teachers and students with information which teaching concepts will be used to support achievement of the learning outcomes both at the program level and at the course level. [Mission]
11. Derive quality criteria for teaching and learning progress and implement these criteria in the QA framework. [QA process]

12. Put the results of recommendations [9, 10, and 11] together in a „program profile“, publish it at the website and distribute it to teachers, students, QA team members and all relevant academic units. [QA process]
13. Develop a concise and rigorous regulation which defines the cases of violation of good scientific practices with emphasis on plagiarism, data fabrication and data falsification. [Academic integrity]
14. Make plagiarism check a standard routine for all seminar papers, research proposals and master theses. [Academic integrity]
15. Integrate e-learning and digital media in teaching processes and describe in the syllabi how it will be used in the courses. [Online learning]
16. Set up a training program on [e-learning] procedures and the software processes which is compulsory for every academic staff member. [Online learning]
17. Consider reviewing the institution’s mission and show how this institution differs from the others. [Mission]
18. Emphasize what students are prepared for (e.g., entrepreneurship, start-up development). [Mission]
19. Create a programme level mechanism to work together with the stakeholders on a well-defined overarching research concept; [Stakeholder involvement]
20. Create a special website area and include all the relevant documents for staff and students (in addition to the Moodle communication of regulations). [Communication]

2. Quality Management

Main themes: QA process, Stakeholder involvement, Communication

Recommendations in the area of Quality Management overwhelmingly revolved around the development or modification of some sort of ongoing and consistent quality assurance procedure, the involvement of all interested parties in the assessment process, and the public communication of the results. More emphasis and education on quality assurance procedure is clearly needed at the study program level. Many ETs called for the development of a formal process at the program level.

ET Recommendations

1. Develop a formal procedure of assessment of the scientific achievements of the academic personnel. This should include not only teaching but also scientific engagements. [QA process]
2. Develop and implement formal procedures for checking the works of students on originality. [QA process]
3. Elaborate a simple annual programme overview as internal evaluation of the programme considering inputs, processes and outputs, with particular attention given to learning outcomes for students; this can be done by the Head of the department and presented to the dean, with few indicators as performance; [QA process]

4. Include in the quality assurance processes, not only teaching but also criteria related to teaching and learning; research; service to society; student support services; governance and administration of the Faculty; [QA process]
5. Include all interested parties in the assessment process like alumni and employers. [Stakeholder involvement]
6. Develop a 360-degree evaluation system to make sure that all interested parties are involved in the process and reasonably evaluated. [Stakeholder involvement]
7. Differentiate the role of the QA department from those responsible for performing particular tasks. [Stakeholder involvement]
8. Develop tools and procedures to make sure that the survey sample is relevant and the information harvested is high quality. [QA process]
9. Discussion of the course evaluation results with the students. The results of the course evaluation could be discussed with the students. The lecturer can discuss the results with the students and present them during the course. This should promote the dialogue between the students and the lecturer. [Stakeholder involvement]
10. Feedback from employers is already secured through the IAB. However, a survey of employers should be institutionalized alongside this exchange body. [Stakeholder involvement]
11. The survey of graduates should not only take place through individual interviews with them, but should be placed on an institutionalized basis. For this purpose, graduate surveys could be conducted, for example, after one year, after three years and after five years after leaving the university. [QA process]
12. Make the survey results publicly available. [Communication]
13. Plan more and better measurable activities to assess the achievement of the ILOs. [QA process]
14. Move towards higher engagement of students in their academic life at the HEI. [Stakeholder involvement]
15. It would be advisable periodically (annually) to prepare one self-assessment report on the programme's overall quality for consideration within the institution indicating its strengths and weaknesses. [QA process]
16. In addition, a comprehensive reassessment of the programme conducted at least once every five years would be advisable. Policies and procedures for running this reassessment should be published; the programme assessment should involve external stakeholders (e.g., experienced people from relevant industries and professions and experienced faculty from other institutions). [QA process]
17. Create a formal survey for collection of feedback and inputs from the industry sector as part of the internal quality system; [QA process]
18. Consider inputs, processes, and outputs, with particular attention given to learning outcomes for students in the internal quality assurance, especially in the tools for requesting feedback from the students. [QA process]

3. Academic Staff

Main themes: Faculty performance, Professional development, Communication

The recommendations for the Academic Staff area include clarifying the expectations for faculty performance and providing professional development to faculty to meet those expectations. Another common theme that occurred often in ET recommendations included making information on faculty and their evaluation publicly available.

ET Recommendations

1. Develop a faculty performance expectation model and related performance indicators not only for teaching but also for research and society/community involvement. [Faculty performance]
2. Develop a faculty performance expectation model and related performance indicators acknowledging that Faculty may contribute to the University/Faculty/Programme mission in multiple ways, not only by teaching but also by research and society/community involvement. [Faculty performance]
3. Optimize the teaching hours of academic staff and make sure that at other HEI FT academic personnel does not cover too many teaching hours. [Faculty performance]
4. Make academic personnel aware of the allowance they are entitled, to better plan their research and scientific activities. [Faculty performance]
5. Make sure to cover more specific areas of professional training to boost faculty's performance. [Professional development]
6. More active use could be made of further training opportunities for staff. [Professional development]
7. On the one hand, the university has excellent opportunities to provide the rewards for publishing, on the other hand, the Institution has no concept to promote the further training of professors and staff. Therefore the introduction of those stimulus in training could create appropriate incentives for professors and staff. [Professional development]
8. Provide complete information about academic staff. [Communication]
9. Greater involvement of the academic staff in the study programme development would be advisable. [Faculty performance]
10. Make academic staff evaluation results publicly available. [Communication]
11. Review all the staff opportunities and make sure you do not include opportunities that are no longer available; [Professional development]
12. Create a statistical report to be published on the website regarding the results of the evaluation of the academic staff, following the requirement of the personal data protection; this would be an important promotional message to attract candidates; [Faculty performance]
13. Include in the evaluation of the academic staff done by the head of department a section for the self-evaluation considering the same indicators (KPI); the head will then adjust the value of each indicator or will confirm it through its evaluation; [Communication]
14. Check the CVs of staff and encourage them to use the same template. [Communication]

4. Educational Process Content

Main themes: Curriculum currency, Student learning, Professional development

Many of the recommendations in the area of Educational Process Content had to do with keeping the programme curriculum and faculty expertise current and in compliance with disciplinary best practice. Incorporating specific software programmes, revising systems of evaluation, updating literature used in the programme and incorporating experiential practical learning were just some of the suggestions made to update the curriculum in the study programme. Several recommendations echoed themes from other areas, particularly in the area of student learning. Reviewers called for guidelines for assessment standards and ensuring that student performance is appropriately monitored

Recommendations seen in other areas were also reiterated in this area which stressed their importance in the view of the ETs, for instance making sure that learning outcomes are appropriate and publicly disseminated, making students and faculty more aware of academic integrity standards,

ET Recommendations

1. Revise programme aims and learning outcomes matrix and make sure that they are aligned at the completion stage of the programme. [Curriculum currency]
2. Include software programmes like SPSS, STATA, etc. in the programme or integrate them into the study courses. [Curriculum currency]
3. Develop guidelines for monitoring students achievement for individual courses (how many A, B or C grades are at the end of each course). [Student learning]
4. To monitor the academic performance of students at teaching course levels. [Student learning]
5. To match the program learning outcomes in the compatibility form and in the program. [Student learning]
6. To include professional practice course in the program (elective). [Curriculum currency]
7. To remove all the mistakes, form the syllabi and give them a standardised form. [Communication]
8. To develop learning objectives matrix linking the learning objective on the programme level with the learning objectives on the course level to monitor and manage learning competencies delivered in the programme. [Student learning]
9. To revise the learning objectives on the course level to clearly distinguish between (1) knowledge and understanding, (2) skills and (3) social/communication skills [Curriculum currency]
10. To revise the system of evaluation on the course level to correspond to the expected types of learning objectives. [Student learning]
11. Dedicate a topic (in appropriate courses) on raising awareness of plagiarism and how to avoid it. [Academic integrity/Student learning]
12. Amend the curricula for both programmes to make sure they logically flow towards successful graduation; [Curriculum currency]
13. Update literature for those study courses where it is older than ten years; [Curriculum currency]
14. Develop a systematic curriculum which ensures that entrepreneurship as a key term of the program name is implemented with all its connections and in all contemporary manifestations throughout the curriculum; [Curriculum currency]

15. Explain in detail how the learning outcomes of the program are related to NQF and EQF level 7.3. Integrate digitalization skills as a horizontal issue throughout the curriculum. [QA process]
16. Make e-learning and online teaching as well as online formats for examinations fundamental elements of an overarching didactic concept; [Curriculum currency/Online education]
17. Develop a training program to implement these improvements in the practices of teaching and quality assurance within one study year. [Professional development]
18. Make participation in this training program within one year compulsory for all teachers. [Professional development]
19. Ensure that internships and other opportunities to exchange with real life business are regular parts of the curriculum and reflecting on these experiences is fully integrated and credited with ECTS in the curriculum; [Curriculum currency/Student learning]
20. Improve the system for updating study course descriptions (develop and apply the requirements for updating study course descriptions); [Curriculum currency]
21. Include the necessary prior knowledge in the descriptions of study courses and restructure the sequence of study courses accordingly. [Curriculum currency]
22. Include the development of a bachelor's thesis to comply with the EHEA; [Curriculum currency]
23. Consider the allocation of ECTS for all the subjects according to the real effort / student workload as the current allocation include 6 ECTS for almost all subjects; ECTS must reflect the effective volume of learning based on the defined learning outcomes and their associated workload; [Curriculum currency]
24. Create a programme level mechanism to benchmark the programme development in relationship to national, regional, and international similar programmes; [Curriculum currency]
25. Create a mechanism to review the agreements in order to adapt to the changing educational needs (as that with the Coco Cola was signed in 2007). [Curriculum currency]

5. Students

Main themes: Academic integrity, Student learning, QA process, Communication

The Students area had the fewest recommendations from external teams; however, many of them were mentioned in other areas. In particular, academic integrity was a major concern for working with students and was echoed here again. Ensuring that information pertinent to student success is readily and that information is publicly available to students was again recommended. External teams again reiterated the need for appropriate quality assurance procedures at the program level to be sure that student evaluation was taking place in an unbiased and appropriate manner.

ET Recommendations

1. More emphasis on involving students in the research; [Student learning]

2. When university gets a license for plagiarism detector, it is highly recommended to check previously submitted all master theses for at least last three years; [Academic integrity]
3. Monitor the academic performance of students at course as well as at program levels. [Student learning]
4. It is recommended to have plagiarism detecting software to make sure that students work submitted is original and plagiarism free. [Academic integrity]
5. To establish an examination centre. That will guarantee the quality of knowledge assessment and eliminate any bias for the lecturer side towards favorite students. [QA process]
6. Make sure that the college has proper communication with the students regarding; [Communication]
7. Make sure that consultation hours' timetable is formalized and available to all students, indicating course, lecturers name, time, and place of consultations. [Communication]
8. None
9. Promote students' rights and obligations among them. [Communication]
10. Ensure that there is a permanent anti-plagiarism software acquired and used. [Academic integrity]
11. None

6. Research

Main themes: Faculty scholarship, Intellectual property, Curriculum currency, Student learning and Communication

The area of Research received a lot of scrutiny from the ETs which makes sense after the poor showing in the area of Educational Process Content. If the faculty are not strong in the area of research, their scholarship, which should feed the curriculum, will be lacking and result in sub-par performance by students as measured by their abilities once they begin working.

Concerns expressed by the external teams included how faculty present their achievements to the public and specifically to students. While much of the recommendations were meant for the programs themselves, they are important for the institutions at large as well. The public and students tend to look at the quality of an institution in terms of the productivity of its faculty. If the achievements of the faculty are not easily available, or (even worse) non-existent, the quality of the institution itself could be in question.

Because faculty productivity and scholarship are directly related to the curriculum and to student learning, there are several recommendations that demonstrate that connection. In particular, the inclusion of students in faculty research opportunities is a great way to both improve the curriculum and encourage student involvement and interest in their study program. Applied learning like this offers students the opportunity to gain practical experience in their future careers. Increased faculty and student collaboration also increases the possibilities for commercialization and involvement with the private sector.

ET Recommendations

1. Include publications of academic staff in their teaching materials [Faculty scholarship]
2. Develop policies for intellectual property and set out procedures for commercialization of ideas. [Intellectual property]
3. Develop the policies and procedures for ownership of the intellectual property for commercialization of ideas developed by staff and students [Intellectual property]
4. Engage with the private sector in terms of mutual research projects.
5. Create a document regulating and protecting the intellectual property of internal stakeholders to avoid information (video, audio, visual etc.) misuse and uncontrollable dissemination; [Intellectual property]
6. Make sure that teaching personnel includes their scientific publications in the relevant syllabi; [Faculty scholarship]
7. Encourage, promote, and maintain continuity in scientific publications. [faculty scholarship]
8. Define basic and applied research objectives based on the priority areas of research for the program and for the faculty. [Faculty scholarship]
9. Integrate application of research methodologies in several courses in each semester throughout the curriculum. [Curriculum currency]
10. Develop assessment methods which can assess the research skills of students accurately. [Student learning]
11. Develop a regulation for master theses which defines high-quality scientific approaches, methodologies, and requirements in terms of good scientific practices. [Student learning]
12. Provide clear policies for defining what is recognized as high-quality research, consistent with international standards and established norms in the field of study of the program. [Faculty scholarship]
13. Define clear expectations regarding the quality of scientific publications in terms of high-quality peer reviewing and in terms of standards of good scientific practice. [Faculty scholarship]
14. Define and implement operational measures to build up research capacities in terms of financial and human resources (e.g. writing proposals, knowledge of funding schemes, marketing for contract research). [Faculty scholarship]
15. Integrate research, teaching and learning in the didactic concept of the master program. [Curriculum currency]
16. Define scientific/applied research objectives for the study program. While defining objectives, sufficient financial, logistic, and human resources should be allocated to achieve the proposed research objectives; the SMART framework is recommended. [Curriculum currency]
17. Providing a differentiated bonus system for publications of a certain quality level is recommended. [Faculty scholarship]
18. Besides publications and conferences, other research validation instruments should be considered (e.g., technology transfer) as well as the involvement of students. [Faculty scholarship]
19. Academic staff should be encouraged to include in their teaching information about their research and scholarly activities relevant to the courses they teach and other significant research developments in the field. [Faculty scholarship]
20. There should be procedures set out to commercialize ideas developed by staff and students. [Intellectual property]

21. A greater emphasis on internationalization would be recommended for the research activities. [Faculty scholarship]
22. Define 3-5 scientific or applied research objectives that can be achieved through the existing resources at the programme level; [Curriculum currency]
23. Develop a regulation at the programme level defining what is recognized as research, consistent with international standards and established norms in the field of study of the business and management; [Curriculum currency]
24. Update the list of staff publication on the website; create a mechanism to update the list annually; [Communication]
25. Monitor the research productivity of the academic staff involved in the programme. [Faculty scholarship]

7. Infrastructure and Resources

Main themes: Internal financial plan, Library/student information, Library, Facilities

In this area, the primary concerns were in the development and use of an internal financial plan, the expansion of resources for students, particularly through the library, physical and online, as well as in the appropriate language. Finally, there were concerns about ensuring the availability of facilities that are accessible for all students.

ET Recommendations

1. Development of an internal financial plan on the use of resources allocated to the Faculty of Economics. [Internal financial plan]
2. To have a budget for the program which comprises finances for internationalization, student activities, library funds, professional development for the academic staff. [Internal financial plan]
3. Development of an internal financial plan on the use of resources allocated to the Faculty of Economics for each program. [Internal financial plan]
4. Make sure that enough and updated literature is available for students in the reading rooms and for rent. [Library/student information]
5. Update the literature in the native language (support academic staff to publish books or course notes). [Library/student information]
6. Expand and update the study materials to capture the latest knowledge in the field. [Library/student information]
7. Provide appropriate literature in the subject area of entrepreneurship, including English language literature. [Library/student information]
8. Access to relevant journals for the field of entrepreneurship. [Library]
9. Establishment of a digital library - Greater provision of eBooks. [Library]
10. Develop a more detailed plan that shows if and how the development of the program considers the needs of stakeholders and the results of quality measurements to ensure sustainability. [Internal financial plan]

11. Ensure enough seats in the reading rooms and the number of seats in the group work rooms (45 seats for each type of room). [Facilities]
12. The programme, faculty and the institution management should fully take into consideration the needs of the students with special needs and physically adjust the campuses for their needs. [Facilities]

Summary: External Team Final Report Recommendations

While many of the main themes for each of the seven areas were specific to that area, there were several themes that appeared under the ET comments for more than one area. Communication to the public and students appeared in five of the seven standards, whether it was communication of the programme mission to students and the public, communication of faculty credentials and scholarship, communication of academic integrity expectations, etc., external teams were concerned with the lack of consistent communication of many of the processes involved in the programmes that were reviewed.

Having a consistent and well-communicated Quality assurance process and using that to improve Student learning comprised the next two most often appearing themes (in three distinct areas each). Stakeholder involvement in programme processes, Academic integrity, and Curriculum currency each appeared in at least two separate standards. The overlap of standards in multiple areas may have been addressed with the recent revision of the *Standards for Evaluation and Re/accreditation*, but an examination of the recommendations does suggest that these areas in particular might be priorities for any future educational/training opportunities provided for higher education institutions.

Final Observations

The Kosovo Accreditation Agency provides strong guidance and instruction to institutions of higher education in the area of re/accreditation of study programs at both public and private institutions. The availability of a self-evaluation template for use in study program accreditation preparation as well as a recent revision of the Standards for Evaluation of Study Programs is an example that continuous improvement is a value modeled by this agency. Any review of self-evaluations or completed study program accreditation reports has not previously been a priority for KAA, mainly due to staffing. It is expected that with the changes to the organizational chart that are upcoming, this will change with staff dedicated to analysis and review. Many of the trends identified through this report will likely be uncovered on a regular basis and addressed expeditiously. Increased staffing of KAA will allow the agency to monitor both the SERs more closely, as well as Final Reports, to maintain institutional and programmatic quality.

Additionally, the use of digitalization and automation will help to identify commonalities in both the strengths and weaknesses that might be uncovered through study program accreditation. Inclusion of specific performance indicators in the digitalization project can allow for benchmarking and trendspotting on specific data points by aggregating the data received through individual reports. This will allow the agency to more quickly target deficiencies that are noted in study program evaluation.

Having the personnel to review both SERs and Final Reports on a timelier basis will allow for problems of consistency in the writing of these reports that was noted in the small sample examined in this analysis. The final report of the 2022 private institution lacked the individual scoring of the standards which hampered a true representation of how well this institution performed. Once problems like this can be corrected quickly, the agency will gather more accurate data and the institution will have a better idea of the exact they need to bring up to standards.

This thematic analysis only examined a single study program, albeit through the reports of six different institutions. While this small sample shows some common areas where study programs might work towards improvement. It is very likely that once a larger scale examination of all incoming study program reports begins, similar deficiencies will surface. Once those commonalities in weakness are documented, the agency can begin to create a plan for addressing them in an educational format.

References

Kosovo Accreditation Agency and Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Kosovo

KAA Accreditation Manual

Programme Self-Evaluation Reports (6), provided by KAA

External Team Final Reports (6), provided by KA