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***AAB COLLEGE, FERIZAJ BRANCH***

***CHILD CARE AND WELFARE, BACHELOR PROGRAM***

***RE-ACCREDITATION***

**FINAL REPORT OF THE EXPERT TEAM**

*April 22, 2021*



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### Contents

TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	2
1. INTRODUCTION.....	3
1.1. Context.....	3
1.2. Site visit schedule .....	4
1.3. A brief overview of the institution and program under evaluation.....	5
2. PROGRAM EVALUATION .....	5
2.1. Mission, objectives and administration.....	5
2.2. Quality management .....	7
2.3. Academic staff .....	8
2.4. Educational process content.....	10
2.5. Students.....	13
2.6. Research.....	14
2.7. Infrastructure and resources .....	16
3. OVERALL EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATION OF THE ET.....	17
4. APPENDICES ( <i>if available</i> ) .....	18



## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Context

**Date of site visit: March 29, 2021**

**Expert Team (ET) members:**

- *Prof. Milan Pol, Masaryk University*

**Coordinators from Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA):**

- *Naim Gashi, Executive Director of KAA*
- *Shkelzen Gerxhaliu, Senior Officer for Evaluation and Monitoring*
- *Arianit Krasniqi, Senior Officer for Evaluation and Accreditation*
- *Leona Kovaci, Senior Officer for Evaluation and Monitoring*
- *Ilijane Ademaj, Senior Officer for Evaluation and Monitoring*

**Sources of information for the Report:**

- *Self-evaluation report and other documents provided by AAB College*
- *Site visit interviews*

**Criteria used for program evaluation:**

- *KAA Accreditation Manual*



## 1.2. Site visit schedule

09.00 – 09.40	Meeting with the management of the faculty where the programme is integrated
09.45 – 10:45	Meeting with the heads of the study programme 1: Child Care and Welfare/ BA - Prishtina
10:50 – 11.50	Meeting with the heads of the study programme 2: Child Care and Welfare/ BA – Ferizaj
11:50 – 12:30	Lunch break
12.30 – 13:10	Meeting with quality assurance representatives and administrative staff
13.15 – 14.05	Meeting with teaching staff
14.10 – 14.40	Meeting with students
14:45 – 15:25	Meeting with graduates
15:30 – 16:10	Meeting with employers of graduates
16:10 – 16:20	Internal meeting of KAA staff and experts
16:20 – 16:30	Closing meeting with the management of the faculty and program

No	Study programs	Experts	Responsible persons of study programs			
1	Child Care and Welfare/ BA - (Reaccreditation) Prishtina	Prof. Dr. Milan Pol	Saranda Shatri Bujar Thaqi	Violeta Buza Gentiana Shahini	Arbona Xhemajli Nazyktere Hasani	Arberore Bicaj
2	Child Care and Welfare/ BA - (Reaccreditation)	Prof. Dr. Milan Pol	Hysen Kasumi Fadil Latifi	Fatmir Agaj	Arif Shala	Sevim Mustafa



	Ferizaj			Xhevat Sylja		
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### 1.3. A brief overview of the institution and program under evaluation

AAB College is the largest private HE institution in Kosovo. It was established in 2002. Currently there are 14 faculties operating within AAB College that offer a number of study programs on bachelor and master levels. AAB College operates in its main campus in Pristina, and in two branches – in Gjakova and Ferizaj. The bachelor program Child Care and Welfare is provided in Pristina as well as in Ferizaj. The study program under the evaluation was first time accredited in 2010. This report relates to the program realised in Ferizaj.

## 2. PROGRAM EVALUATION

### 2.1. Mission, objectives and administration

The mission of the program Child Care and Welfare is formulated as follows: “Encourage innovation within the program as well as support for research, in order to assist students in developing the knowledge, skills and competencies needed to become effective and caring educators in an evolving society”. (SER, p. 9) This mission statement can be seen in a positive relation with AAB College vision which emphasises innovative approaches in teaching, research, and stresses also a third role of the College (promotion of social and economic development in the country). The same can be said about the program mission and its relation to AAB College mission- it stresses quality programs, research, improvement of well-being and health of the population, as well as cultural, social and economic development (SER, p. 9-10) – again, there is a positive compliance.



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Kosovo Accreditation Agency

---

The intended learning outcomes of the program are defined with a consideration to relevant academic and professional advice. It seems evident, the data from evaluation processes and the expertise of external stakeholders are used in this context. This was indicated in the documentation as well as during the interviews. The learning outcomes are consistent with the National Qualifications Framework and the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

The whole program (curriculum) is designed with a certain gradation, with the effort to provide fundamental disciplines (propaedeutics) and build on this the portfolio of applied disciplines. These applied disciplines are often realised with the effort to integrate the subject matter and teaching methodology which proves to be a potentially effective approach. Also, the tendency to interlink theory and practice, and to induce students in the basics of research methods is to be found in the curriculum and appreciated. This way, an implicit overarching didactic and research concept can be identified, although it is not explicitly formulated in the program documentation.

The program is realised with respect to formal policies and guidelines, namely the Regulation of Studies of AAB College, and this document is made publicly available to those concerned, the staff and students. The Code of Ethics, the Code of Conduct, the Policy on Academic Conduct, and the Rules on Disciplinary Procedure seem to be main internal documents related to all key academic as well as administrative activities. These documents are accessible at e-platforms to students as well as to AAB College's staff.

The revision of policies and regulations takes place "at least once every three years" at AAB College, according to the SER. Some reviewing processes (for instance those directly related to the program) take place more often.

**Compliance level:** Substantially compliant

**ET recommendations:**

1. *Make sure an overarching didactic concept is explicitly defined and justified, and those involved in the program are familiar with it.*
2. *Make sure policies, regulations, terms of reference and statements of responsibility regarding program management and distribution are reviewed at least once in two years, as required by the KAA Accreditation standards (1.6).*



## 2.2. Quality management

AAB College has developed a number of QA processes that also relate to the program under the evaluation. And within them, a visible tendency to establish clear links between central level, faculties, academic staff, students, and administration, but also alumni and employers can be seen. The SER indicates and interviews proved that the staff participate in self-evaluation processes via questionnaires administered by QA Office and co-operate in reporting and possible improvement processes of their work. But students, alumni and employers are involved in this process, too, in different ways.

In AAB College, branch Ferizaj, there is a Quality Assurance Coordinator's position established to deal directly with QA issues there.

This can be said the evaluation processes and planning for improvement are a part of a normal planning processes at AAB College. The SER as well as interviews brought clear indications of such a practice.

The QA processes, as developed in AAB College, deal with all main aspects of planning of the program as well as its delivery. This relates to the services and resources provided by other parts of AAB College, too (with the focus at administrative services). Last year, the Faculty of Social Sciences used the questionnaire to collect the information from the employers and graduates – this was focused on the experience of respondents with the program, their perceived needs for possible improvements. Apart from questionnaires, there are occasionally organized formal meetings with these stakeholders, with the same purpose – to get the feedback about the program and on this basis to have a chance to develop it further.

This can be said then, the QA Office is conducting periodic reviews either comprehensive, or with a special focus. This way, not only an overall picture can become more complete and up to date, but also specific parts of the program can get into the focus with a chance of a deeper insight into the issue. Most recently, such a specific focus was on online learning at AAB College.



This way, this seems ensured that minimum quality standards can be met and a good basis for continuous improvement is built.

Overall, it seems to be evident, survey data are being collected by AAB College from all key internal as well as external stakeholder, result of these evaluations are worked with and in some extent made publicly available.

Examples of the practice when results of the internal quality assurance activities are considered for further development of the program were presented during the interviews.

The Faculty of Social Sciences where the program Child Care and Welfare belongs to is thoroughly drafting the general quality report related to the program. And since accreditation processes take place practically every three years there, the self-evaluation process which goes prior the external evaluation also seems to be serving as a more substantial review of the program.

The QA arrangements themselves are regularly reviewed with the effort to improve them. Recent examples relate to the review and redesign student learning questionnaires (with the effort to engage students into it, too), as stated in the SER and confirmed during the interviews.

**Compliance level:** Fully compliant

**ET recommendations:**

1. *Since a low interest of students in evaluation of the academic staff and administration is perceived (SER), consider possibilities not only to redesign the student feedback, but also to review ways students are informed about what happens with their feedback.*

**2.3. Academic staff**

Those employed at AAB College are provided with the job description indicating expectations/duties related to the job. In case of academic staff, these expectations/duties include not only teaching but also involvement in organisational work and in research and





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development project planning, drafting and realisation as well as in other relevant activities, such as social events and the like. Consultations with the students (two hours a week) are a part of it. Staff responsibilities are formulated in the Regulation on Systematization of Jobs of AAB College.

The teaching staff involved in the program under the evaluation complies with the legal requirements, in this case it means for 240 ECTS there is a sufficient number of teaching staff members with PhD degree full-time employed. The SER claims six professors are fully employed in the branch.

AAB College's SER indicates that "none of the academic staff is engaged more than in another institution" (SER, p. 21); consequently, the AAB College meets the requirement on academics not to have more than a total of two teaching positions (one full-time, one part-time).

According to the documentation provided, the Faculty of Social Science is employing 43 academic staff members, out of them 34 are full-time employed. AAB College reports a total number of the staff related to the program has been increased since last evaluation (this was one of the recommendations of the panel). During the interviews, it appeared some staff members are working parallel in Pristina and in Ferizaj within the program(s) Child Care and Welfare. The program has about 1.600 students now, the plan is to enrol annually 500 students in Pristina and 250 in Ferizaj. I find this plan extreme and endangering the very quality of education.

AAB College is providing its staff with opportunities of further professional development, by offering teaching methodology courses, training in QA and curriculum development, academic writing and publishing, online learning technology, student assessment in online teaching, academic integrity, and more. Examples of such trainings, including their providers are stated in the SER and were confirmed during the interviews. These professional development/training opportunities do not seem to be focused on supervision skills development (for those who supervise diploma thesis – while the number of supervised thesis per academic is quite high), neither on leadership training (for those who have leadership role within the faculty/program).

As already indicated in the section on QA, the evaluation of the academic staff performance is done by students, too. This occurs at the end of each semester in an anonymous way, and results



are then submitted to the teaching staff members individually. It is not clear what is the peer evaluation and superior evaluation looking like if it is in place.

As already indicated above, the ways to improve/enhance quality at AAB College include improving teaching strategies.

Teaching staff older than 65 years of age changes the status of engagement, from full-time to part-time one.

**Compliance level:** Substantially compliant

**ET recommendations:**

1. *Make sure those who supervise diploma thesis are sufficiently trained for this role.*
2. *Make sure the supervisors do not have too many diploma thesis to supervise so that they can pay sufficient attention to each case.*
3. *Make sure those who take up leadership responsibility (faculty/program levels) have a chance to be sufficiently trained for this role.*
4. *Make sure peer evaluation and superior evaluation are clearly defined and in place.*

## **2.4. Educational process content**

The study program Child Care and Welfare, as designed at AAB College, responds positively to qualification objectives. As already mentioned in the previous text, the program consists of theoretical, practical as well methodological subjects, starting with fundamentals (propaedeutics) relevant to the program, and then offering specific disciplines, often in integration with methodology of their teaching/realisation in educational context(s). This integrative approach is to be appreciated. In a certain extent, interdisciplinarity is naturally present in the program. It can be said, the program has a potential to respond to employment needs and opportunities, and thus contribute to the civil society and develop student personality.

The program complies with National Qualifications Framework and the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area, as already indicated earlier in this



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report. The combination of individual disciplines is done in an acceptable way, and this creates a good possibility to achieve specific qualification objectives of the program. The forms of teaching/learning are adequate, although the number of students for the group work/exercise is rather high.

The program is logically built and as such has a certain inner gradation. This way the students can get both basic competences, and more advanced competences and knowledge. The way of crediting is in agreement of how it is used in the whole European Higher Education Area. As for the learning outcomes, they are formulated in a meaningful way and there is a sufficient number of them enlisted. They relate to main aspects of the program as well as labour market requirements, as usually formulated.

The syllabi of individual disciplines are elaborated in detail, with proper attention to main aspects of the disciplines, including objectives, content, forms, assessment rules, bibliography, proportions between theory and practice and more. Most of the study literature is in Albanian, with few cases when Albanian and English written literature are mixed in the list. Being aware of the situation with Albanian written literature in the field, I can see this challenge has been dealt with in a good way by the program providers.

Learning outcomes of the program seem to be discussed at the beginning of the term and there is a chance for students to consult learning issues throughout the whole term, since there are student-teacher consultancy arrangements established at AAB College. This was proven during the interviews.

Teaching strategies seem to be chosen well, although – as already mentioned – a high number of students makes it a real challenge and raises a question of viability of some of the forms/methods. The same can affect a flexibility to meet the needs of different groups of students/individuals. This was not critically viewed by the students during the interviews, but some questions related to this remain.

Student assessment is described clearly, and it seems to be organized and communicated in a clear and transparent way; the described system seems to be acceptable and during the interviews no concerns were raised.



Student workload corresponds to understanding of the workload in most other HEIs in different countries. The standards of work required for different grades/marks seem to be adequate.

In case of students learning achievement problems, measures are taken to deal with the situation, typically additional hours of lectures/exercises, lowering number of students in the groups, additional support before the exam. The dropout rate is relatively high, and this has many causes – some of them are external.

The internship is a part of the Child Care and Welfare curriculum, in the third year it is “Practical Learning” course (4-week internship), and in the fourth year a 5-week internship “Pedagogical Practice”. There is a supervision/mentoring of the internship on the side of the faculty, and communication with the hosting organisation. The internship is monitored and evaluated thoroughly.

AAB College has a number of cooperation agreements with different relevant (preschool) institutions in Kosovo to organize student internship there. The list of these institutions is a part of the SER. During the interviews, representatives of some of these institutions were appreciative about the cooperation with the program providers, incl. the internship arrangements.

**Compliance level:** Substantially compliant

**ET recommendations:**

- 1. Regarding a total number of students, make sure student groups are composed in such a way that effective teaching is possible during seminars/exercises.*
- 2. Regarding a total number of students in the program, make sure students can be worked with in a sufficiently individualized way.*
- 3. Consider a possibility to make internships the mean for (1) the development of the student learning, (2) development/use of applied research possibility, and (3) the organisational development both on the side of AAB College, and on the site of hosting organisation.*



## 2.5. Students

As for the student admission rules and procedures, they seem to be clear and transparent. The criteria for admission of new students are set with regard to internal rules and external legislation. They seem to be consistent and applied fairly. For those interested in enrolment, AAB College organizes information events, such as open days.

Those enrolled to bachelor programs must have secondary school leaving certificate (graduation diploma) or equivalent, as requested by the MEST.

As already indicated, a total number of students enrolled for the program is high and out of this total number, study groups are created. The SER states the study group does not exceed 80 students in lectures and 40 students in practical exercise. Although a number of students for a lecture is easy to accept, a size of the group for exercise seems hardly enabling the exercise-type of work. This is not an aspect that can be appreciated, as already mentioned earlier.

The teaching staff is providing feedback on students' performance no later than seven days from the date of the exam, students then can reject the result in 48 hours through the e-system, and to pass the exam in the next deadline. There is a procedure even for cases when the student is dissatisfied with the mark for the second time in row.

The results which students obtain are certified by the academic record (in this case vice-rector for teaching, vice-rector for administration, dean of the faculty and the QA office sign exam reports) and they are archived.

The extension of deadlines or change of the exam dates are possible and enabled to students by the central administration, within the provision of the existing regulation.

The success report is generated after the exam session for each subject; the data are summed up and analysed at the central levels and used for possible further action.

Since recently, AAB College has an antiplagiarism software (Turnitin) to detect frauds in student works. Academic staff participated in trainings to use the software. AAB College has the Code of Ethics and the Regulation of Good Academic Conduct which stipulate that the faculty (dean) can report students to the Disciplinary Commission in cases of plagiarism.



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Students are informed about a required practice during the first year of their studies (obligatory subject Academic Writing).

Students' rights and obligations are stated in the Statute of AAB College and in the Regulations on Bachelor Studies, these documents are publicly available. Students are informed about these documents and their rights and obligations at the beginning of their studies. The Statute includes the right to academic appeals, too.

The transfer of the students between HEIs, faculties and programs is clearly regulated by formal documents of AAB College. Transfer Office is the unit to deal with such cases at AAB College.

Consultations are a part of the provision for the students, a minimum norm is two hours per week/teacher for counselling hours, either in physical presence, or online.

**Compliance level:** Fully compliant

**ET recommendations:**

1. *None*

## 2.6. Research

The Strategic Plan of AAB College includes one of the objectives focused on “support development and research projects of staff and students...” (SER, p. 38). According to the SER, “through this objective the Faculty of Social Sciences aims to organize scientific conferences, increase the number of staff involved in scientific publications with international impact factor and increase cooperation with regional and international universities in the field of scientific research” (SER, p. 38). Further, intentions to finance participation at conference and other forums, publications etc. is mentioned. This tendency can be viewed positively, but the measures of support seem to be prevailing (if not exclusively) related to a later stage in the research process cycle: the dissemination of research results. The support to earlier stages (the very initiation and development of research idea, its planning, search for funding,



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realization, working with the data, preparing the publication) is not in the focus, yet this is exactly where research results can be generated.

Similarly, it can be appreciated that each academic staff member “is obliged to engage in research work and make publications in internationally recognized journals” (SER, p. 39), but, again, the question is what kind of working conditions are available to get the publishable research results.

It can be said AAB College has relatively clear policies established for defining what is recognized as research, and these are consistent with international standards.

And this can be said the academic staff related to the program under the evaluation has publications in the field as their teaching activity and this activity is mostly on an acceptable level and quantity. As already indicated in policies of AAB College, research is validated through research publications mainly.

Academic staff of AAB College is expected to publish under the name of AAB College once they are employed full-time there.

The information about academic staff’s research outcomes is a part of the syllabi of the disciplines within the study program. AAB College has policies in place for ownership of intellectual property.

As for the students’ involvement in research, the program offers two courses directly related to research, Academic Writing, Research Methods. And at the end of the program Diploma Thesis needs to be written and defended by the student. According to the information gained during the interview, there are usually 20+ diploma thesis per one supervisor.

There is some indication about involvement of some students in some staff research activity. International Student Research conference was organized at AAB College in 2018, and College student conferences are organized, too (organized by the Faculty of Social Science). Research Club and the Debate Club are also the forms of student involvement in research-related activities. Examples of two currently realised projects focused on students (which can have some research-related potential) are stated in the SER. It is not clear how intensive participation



of the students from the program under evaluation is, and during the interviews there was not much of response to it from the side of students.

**Compliance level:** Substantially compliant

**ET recommendations:**

1. *Consider possibilities to support research in a more complex way (focusing on all main stages of its cycle), ideally encouraging the set-up of research teams.*
2. *Make sure the load on supervisors is decreased, as for the number of diploma thesis per supervisor.*
3. *Consider a possibility to introduce small research-driven grants for the students.*

## 2.7. Infrastructure and resources

AAB College has well developed infrastructure which provides students and staff good conditions for their study and work. The main campus is in Pristina, there are also campuses in Ferizaj and Gjakova. These campuses seem to be sufficiently equipped. Support units are in place, such as central administration, office for software development, office for IT support, transfer office, career office, and the like. E-Student platform is developed for the communication with students, too.

It appears, AAB College has financial resources generated from several resources, among them tuition fees, administrative fees and other payments made by students; payment from commercial and other services; funds from the ministry for teaching and research; donations, gifts, grants; from the use of AAB property; from contracts with national, international, public or private organizations in the field of teaching and research; from other sources allowed by the law of Kosovo. (SER, p. 43)

The finance is centralized at AAB College, but the Faculty of Social Sciences (providing the program under the evaluation as one of two programs in its portfolio) has its own annual Financial Plan as well as Work Plan which are in line with Strategic Plan of AAB College. It can be assumed the institution demonstrates financial sustainability of the study program.





Since the premises of AAB College are the investment and property of the founders of the College, the institution does not seem to have obligations towards third parties – all seems to be owned by AAB College, not rented.

Due to pandemic restrictions, I could not visit AAB College site directly; from the information available it appears the College has sufficient number of lecture halls, seminar rooms, equipped with the IT equipment. As for the library, it seems it meets required parameters, as of seats, learning resources, incl. accessible e-resources.

It seems the infrastructure and facilities are arranged in a way that suits to students with special needs.

**Compliance level:** Fully compliant

**ET recommendations:**

1. *None*

**3. OVERALL EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATION OF THE ET**

4.

<b>Standard</b>	<b>Compliance Level</b>
Mission, objectives and administration	Substantially compliant
Quality management	Fully compliant
Academic Staff	Substantially compliant
Educational Process Content	Substantially compliant
Students	Fully compliant
Research	Substantially compliant



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Infrastructure and resources	Fully compliant
<b>Overall Compliance</b>	<b>Substantially compliant</b>

5.

In conclusion, the Expert Team considers that the study program Child Care and Welfare (BA) offered by AAB College, branch Ferizaj 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 **75** students to be enrolled in the program.

#### 6. APPENDICES (if available)

N/A

#### Expert Team

Chair

(Signature)

**Milan Pol**

(Print Name)

(Date)

18



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**Member**

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