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AAB COLLEGE

Civil Law/LLM

PROGRAM ACCREDITATION

REPORT OF THE EXPERT TEAM

Pristina, 09.06.2019



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Context

Date of site visit:

Expert Team (ET) members:

- Prof. Dr. Milan Pol
- Prof. Dr. Alan Brickwood
- Prof. Dr. Peter Parycek
- Prof. Dr. Zdravko Lackovic
- Prof. Dr. Ulrike Beier

Coordinators from Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA):

- Avni Gashi, Acting Director of KAA
- Shkelzen Gerxhaliu, Senior Officer for Evaluation and Monitoring
- Arianit Krasniqi, Senior Officer for Evaluation and Accreditation

Sources of information for the Report:

- SER
- CV
- Syllabus of courses

Criteria used for program evaluation:

- KAA Standards



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1.2. Site visit schedule

31 May

08.30	Meeting at the reception of the hotel
09.00 – 10.30	Meeting with the management of the institution
10.40 – 11.50	Meeting with quality assurance representatives and administrative services
12.00 – 13.00	Meeting with the heads of study programs
13.00 – 13.50	Lunch break
13.50 – 14.50	Visiting tour of the facilities and infrastructure
14.50 – 15.40	Meeting with teaching staff
15.50 – 16.40	Meeting with students
16.50 – 17.40	Meeting with graduates
17.50 – 18.40	Meeting with employers of graduates and external stakeholders
18.45 – 19.00	Internal meeting – Expert Team and KAA
19.00 – 19.15	Closing meeting with the management of the institution



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A brief overview of the institution and program under evaluation

Recording to the SER of AAB, AAB College was established in 2002 as one of the first non-public institutions of higher education in Kosovo. Currently, AAB has a total of 14 faculties that offer BA and MA degree programs, 15 729 students, and over 500 full-time and part-time academic staff. AAB College currently operates in 3 cities of Kosovo, that in Pristina, Gjakova and Ferizaj all accredited branches by KAA decision. AAB campuses occupy a space of more than 61.269.24m². The AAB campus in Pristina was very lively and prospering during the SV. The majority of academic and administrative services seem to be digitized. AAB College actively supports the academic life of students, which was verified by the students during the SV. All in all, it was great to see and feel the progress of AAB.

1.3. Mission, objectives and administration

The study program mission is in line with the overall mission statement of the institution; nevertheless, the institutional mission statement itself is too generic and could be the mission statement of other similar institutions in Kosovo. In addition, the link between the program mission and the institution's mission is weak; during the discussion it was almost not possible to find specific elements of the program which support the achievement of the institutional mission; one discussed positive element is the goal of providing equal opportunities through lecturing all course in Albanian and Serbian language, the current ratio in the law bachelor programs is 90% Albanian and 10% Serbian; for the future, courses in English language are planned.

For defining the learning outcome AAB corporates with several institutions of the private and public sector to cover needs and requirements of the justice system in Kosovo. (p 167)

The study program has a traditional overarching didactic concept, which is quite usual in all other law faculties in private and public institutions. The research activities focus at a single master thesis but do not deliver a research framework, e.g. a combination of master thesis for answering complex issues or analyzing specific domains. These kinds of methods would provide the opportunity to increase the overall weak research activities of the faculty.



The formal policies, guidelines and regulations are well established and have been mentioned during all SV meetings and described in detail in the SER.

AAB developed a “Code of Conduct of AAB College“ which is referred to in the program description (p 174). It is mentioned that Code of Conduct is the fundament of professional behaviour. During the SV, no contradictory positions or complaints have been stated, so overall, it seems ethical code of conduct is not just defined but also part of daily practice.

The law faculty has established an ongoing learning process through recurring meetings, which include general discussions, learning from students' feedback, incorporating changes in the institutions etc.

The establishment of performance indicator is an ongoing process. KPIs are well established in the teaching evaluation of the study programs; after the semester results are reviewed, discussed and measures are established like personal coaching of academic staff members, training for the whole faculty or changes in the curriculum.

The following performance indicators have been discussed:

- overall program: established as a recurring semester report (1.1)
- course completion, program progression, completion rates and program evaluations: established, as an indicator and as policies and procedures (1.2, 1.3)
- grade distributions, progress and completion rates: data is available, but it seems not established as one of the performance indicators which is analyzed and leads to measures; could be part of the semester report (1.4)
- gender and equal opportunities: data is available, but it seems not established as one of the main indicators which is analyzed and leads to measures; could be part of in the semester report (1.5)

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *Mission needs be more concrete linked to the overall AAB mission.*
2. *Master thesis as an opportunity to increase research.*



3. *Performance indicator data is available, use the opportunity to gain insights beside teaching performance and define also processes and measures for the mentioned areas and ensure proper analysis for semester report.*

1.4. Quality management

AAB has established an electronic evaluation system which is mandatory for all staff members; they also have clear policies and processes defined for all faculties. During the SV, the management stated that it is well established and used for improving and driving quality. The law faculty confirmed that they use the data for improving the quality after each semester. The SER describes the activity plan on page 175, like standardization of syllabi, preparation of semester reports, which include recommendations and learning based on the analyzed data. (p. 177) ET had the expression the evaluation process is highly integrated into the ongoing planning process.

The quality assurance processes seem to be comprehensive and to cover all aspects of program planning; during all meetings, the main processes were mentioned from different perspectives, like management, faculty, staff or student meeting. The SER offers insights about the comprehensive quality regulation and guidelines of AAB: 1) *Quality Assurance Structures, Part 2) Validation of Study Programs, Part 3) Internal Evaluation Processes, Part 4) External Evaluation Processes and Part 5) Quality Improvement Procedures.* (p. 32)

Based on the standardized electronic evaluation processes numerous data is collected mandatory and periodically (p. 36, p. 175) from students (3729 Bachelor students and 574 Master level students), which is documented in the SER (p. 227, 369); faculty and graduates confirmed these activities during the SV. Faculty member feedback is arranged qualitatively by weekly meetings, organized by the dean. (p. 176) The overall results of questionnaires and qualitative data through meetings and interviews are used for ongoing improvements through quality management for the whole college and specifically by the law faculties for personal improvements and team development through training. (p 35, 176)

The SER offers an overview of the improvement since the last evaluation by KAA, which reflects the quality commitment. Objectives and key indicators have been established for each academic unit and *assessments are made for the purpose of comparing the achievement of quality assurance objectives.* SER states the *Quality Assurance Office is involved in policy*



making and, in the institution's, overall development (p. 105). The quality assurance management has established KPIs for themselves, for further improvement of their activities.

These developments reflect that in addition to monitor and ensure the quality of the programs, quality management becomes an innovation tool, which should be strengthened in the future.

The governance and strategy chapter (p. 16f) describes in detail the development process and six strategic objectives (p.17) AAB quality management developed for each unit appropriate indicators, which are not well documented in the SER and it is not in detail described how these indicators are used for improvement. The question, how the institution, with its 14 decentralized faculties could be well governed, was not clearly answered by the management during the SV. Based on the growth and the size of the organization, KPIs become crucial for ensuring the execution of measures and strategic alignment of the faculties. AAB documented the goal that all units and faculties should develop their own framework and define their indicators, but this has not been implemented by the law faculty. (p. 38) Establishing highly linked KPI frameworks for monitoring strategy alignment and monitoring the execution of the strategy becomes a crucial factor for further development.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *Fostering all parts of AAB to establish objectives and KPI frameworks.*
2. *Alignment of all faculties becomes a crucial element for the leading management, therefore linked KPI frameworks become essential.*
3. *Establishing a critical process of evaluating KPIs – wrong KPIs or not well managed KPIs could become misleading and threat for management decisions.*
4. *Based on the high maturity level, which is comparable with similar institutions in European member states of EU, it is necessary making the next development step and transform from quality management to quality and innovation management.*
5. *If not established yet, establishing questionnaires for staff members, graduates and stakeholders.*



1.5. Academic staff

The faculty of law has planned to teach the program with experienced and existing staff members, which is for a two-semester program possible, but still, the workload is higher. During the SV ET asked how they will handle the additional workload, they responded that they plan to promote exiting colleagues (3 current members will finish their doctoral studies, p. 178) in the BA program and hire new young people, who can support the existing staff members and take over courses in the BA program. The establishment of the staff development process is a good sign for a fruitful development, and it seems the shortage of scientific researchers and lectures has been almost overcome in Kosovo. The positive impression of staff development has been confirmed in the meeting with staff members.

Responsible faculty member for the study program are:

- Dr. Sc. Skender Gojani; full time; for the new program he would have to teach one more course, this is in line with KAA regulations; he is also head of the program; based on his CV, formal qualification and research he is qualified and can fully cover the program and course responsibility.
- Dr. Sc. Hajdin Abazi, full time, would teach one additional course, which is in line with KAA regulations; he brings in practical experience, political experience and research capabilities; the course “Methodology of scientific research” fits with his competences and publications; if the course syllabus is suitable without specific legal analysis methodology is questionable.
- Dr. Sc. Bedri Bahtiri, part-time and one more course should be in line with KAA regulations.

Critical are the following faculty positions:

- Dr. Sc. Mentor Lecaj, full time; two more courses are planned for the new curriculum; Dr. Lecaj teaches already 8-16 hours a week in the bachelor program, and he is vice dean of the faculty; and in the case of accreditation of both master programs with the full capacity of 80 students per master programme, workload would become a critical issue. So, for this case it’s questionable if this is in line with KAA regulations
- Dr. Sc. Avdullah Alia, is not in the faculty list and he has already two positions, regular Professor at Law Faculty of the University of Prishtina and South-East European University (SEEU), he may be part-time, if this is possible, needs to be checked by KAA.



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Faculty member for elective courses, Dr. Sc. Majlinda Belegu (full time) and Dr. Sc. Hamdi Podvorica (part-time), are fully eligible to cover content and workload.

Based on the planned curriculum, the faculty should be in line with KAA regulations; KAA needs to check if Dr. Sc. Avdullah Alia is eligible to teach, because of his two full-time positions. More than 50% of the academic staff in the study program are full-time employees (Abazi, Lecaj, Gojani, Belegu, Lecaj), and they account for at least 50% of the classes of the study program. (3.1,3.2,3.3)

One of the open discussions was the number of students for the program, AAB submitted their proposal for 80 master students, which is teaching wise no problem in the field of law, could be done in one or two groups, as was also stated in SER, p. 171; but mentoring 80 master theses with the current faculty could become an issue. During the discussion it became evident that they have not designed a process handling 80 master theses, or how they could streamline a process, or create a support process of group teaching in regard to ensure the progress of master thesis writing, which could improve the ratio of study finishing and reduce the one to one mentoring.

Based on the information, they could have two study groups with 30 to 50 students each. In regard to KAA regulations, 60 credits program and two groups they would need at least 2 PhDs, which is the case, so the formal regulation is fulfilled. (3.4)

Quality management and academic staff evaluation is one of the strengths at AAB, based on the mandatory evaluation process, internal meetings and semester reports with recommendations, teaching staff is continuously developed. The continuous development process was also mentioned during SV several times. (3.6, 3.8,3.9)

All staff members of the program provide activities in practice and scientific communities through publications and active participation in conferences. (3.7)

Based on the information, retired teachers lose their status, p. 116. (3.10)



Performance indicators are developed in the field of teaching evaluation, and they are used for improving teaching capabilities of academic staff members; ET presumes that data is not used intensively for promotion, strategy development or management decisions.

Compliance level: Partially compliant

ET recommendations:

- 1. Improve and define performance indicators for the faculty for better guidance for management and staff members and combine indicators for different (strategy) processes like staff promotion, improving teaching on personal and faculty level. Data could become a crucial element for decision making.*
- 2. Establishing a Master thesis process and cooperation between the staff members for handling high numbers of students.*

1.6. Educational process content

The study program in civil law is in line with comparable international and national programs; typical courses like Property Law, European Private Law, Disputes Procedure, Property Law or European Contract Law are planned in the program. The flow arrangement of courses and their objectives ensure competencies and capabilities for typical job profiles. Course descriptions are state of the art, are well documented and include all standard elements like course purpose, learning outcomes, content, teaching methods, exam framework and literature. The discussion if more or less European and International Law aspects should be part of the program is often based on opinions and not on evidence, so all in all a coherent program, which follows a middle ground of mixing national and international civil law.

The course “Methodology of Scientific Research” is primarily a social science methodology course, which is not common in traditional courses. In principle a positive development, but it needs to be ensured that law methodology is thought, because it is needed for law focused master thesis; the current syllabus does not cover this element, which is a highly critical issue, because it is the fundament for selecting master thesis topic and methodology. If this is changed, profile of the planned faculty needs to be checked, if they or he/she can cover the topics.



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Overall description of the program and courses are in line with the National Qualifications Framework and the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. (4.1, 4.2, 4.3 4.4, 4.7)

A different discussion point was, how graduates are capable handling contracts and cases the area of civil law could be increased; organizations complain that graduates, in general, are not capable of handling typical tasks like preparing a contract etc.; this is a common problem, which needs certainly different strategies. One opportunity could be to focus more on practice than theory or use different teaching approaches, e.g. problem orientated teaching in law in the master program.

A second aspect which could be strengthened is developing cross-faculty courses which ensure an interdisciplinary understanding and could lead to comprehensive problem-solving capabilities.

Third main discussion issue during the SV was increasing the graduation rate of students; most of the students drop out at the beginning and at the end of the program; for dropping out at the end of the process, the main reason is not finalizing the master thesis. In a one-year master program, this is even more critical, because the time for finishing is just two semesters in the best case and in practice one semester because students often need the whole first semester for finding the topic and research question. Study groups are a motivating factor which disappears after finishing courses, so they open items are: how to ensure fast finding of research questions, therefore a group deadline with abstracts and presentations could be one element, or to continue group discussions and presentations after the second semester and offer a course for students in the “third” semester who did not manage to finish in time. Another measure, which needs to be done is decreasing credits for the master thesis from 20 (which is too/quite high) to 10 or 15 credits; the credits could be used for group mentoring in the course “Preparatory seminar for drafting the master thesis course” which could start in the first semester. In this area, the process and the strategy for ensuring a high number of graduates could or should be improved. (4.7)

The student-teacher relationship seems to be well established; staff members are described by students as very responsive and open-minded. (4.6)



Student assessment are well described and suitable for the different courses and comparable with international programs; no complaints from students were mentioned during SV. (4.8, 4.9) SER describes the process for exam/evaluation complaints, p. 189.

Policies and actions are defined for dealing with conflicts on institutional level student described concrete cases, which are line with KAA regulation and AAB policies; typically, students have to do the exam another time for improving their grades. (4.10)

AAB has signed a high number of cooperation contracts with different institutions at the institutional level and faculty level. The integration into a course and program development could be increased; founding an official advising council could be a concrete measure. (4.12)

Use of IT tools is established, and different electrotonic communication channels are used by the whole organizations and the academic staff members. (P 4.2) The study design is as mentioned, quite common; inappropriately designed courses should be detected at latest within one semester. (4.1) Furthermore, sophisticated indicators should be developed, especially for measuring the teaching strategies in achieving different types of learning outcomes.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

- 1. The main issue is the allocation of 20 credits for the master thesis, which is for a two-semester master program too high and should be adapted. The 5 to 8 credits could be used for increasing the seminar and designing a group mentoring process.*
- 2. The second issue is the course “Methodology of Scientific Research” one the hand it is a positive sign of being innovative and teaching law students social science methodology, but it needs to be ensured that legal methodology is thought in the first semester for establishing the skill set for creating a law research question and defining a methodology framework. Therefor it needs to be checked if this requirement is covered by the current faculty.*
- 3. An opportunity could be a more practice-oriented master program, which builds the capability for writing and analysing contracts.*
- 4. An opportunity could be a cross-faculty course for interdisciplinary discourse and creating problem-solving capacity.*



5. *An opportunity could be the integration of partner in developing the program by a formalized advising council for the program and/or the faculty.*
6. *Developing further performance indicators should be done for data-based decision making and covering KAA standards.*

1.7. Students

The student enrolment on institutional enrolment is described in chapter 2.9 (p. 75 f) and is in line with KAA regulations. The master program is primarily designed for law bachelor graduates; law bachelor programs in Kosovo are 4-year duration, eight semester and graduates have typically accumulated 240 credits. The program is also open for graduates from other programs; they must undergo five differential exams in basic subjects of civil law. The open approach is positive and not common in conservative institutions. The additional mandatory five courses for non-law graduates are a necessary requirement to guarantee quality in the specialised law master program. In summary, the general processes are clearly described, and the specific law requirements are state of the art and offer possibilities for students with different academic background. The open question is, how students are selected if demand gets too high; scenario and processes are not described in the general part of SER nor in the chapter of law faculty. (5.1, 5.2, 5.10)

Faculty of Law currently counts over 1,200 students, 900 are in Bachelor level and roughly 220 at Master level. (p. 188); which leads to staff and student ratio of 1:30, or measured in full-time equivalent 1:40, which is for the field of teaching law acceptable. The study group are between 30 and 50 students, which is for law studies quite usual. As mentioned in the previous chapter, mentoring master theses could become a critical issue and lead to a lack of resources. Another opportunity to focus on practice relevance through increasing the interactive part and homework part (drafting contracts, analysing contracts, etc.) could also lead to higher demand and workload. During the meetings, students and graduates stated that academic staff members were highly responsive for common questions, but also for specific problems. (5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 5.11)

Student completion rates are monitored through the electronic evaluation processes, but ET got the impression that the data is hardly used for strategic decisions; during the discussion management and academic staff members were not able to describe in detail how and what



for data is used; all in all, positive awareness and willingness to use the data for specific strategic decisions. (5.7)

Actions for anti-plagiarism have started, they evaluated the service software “Turnitin”, but at the moment, especially for the field of law, the software is ineffective, because it does not support Albania language. A well-designed mentoring process and critical reading are needed. This fact increases the already mentioned issue of the mentoring process for a potentially high number of master theses.

During the discussion with the student, the ET got the impression, that students know about their rights in the hierarchical system, but have no need to use them; they didn't complain about any issues during the discussion. Their biggest wish is higher student mobility. At the moment, Erasmus Plus programs are open for students; students are selected based on grads and on volunteer work, like supporting first semester students, or tutoring. The results of the semester evaluation are open and transparent, and they also get informed about changes and measures by the dean. Students are active and organize, research club, student conference and a women day.

Performance indicators are available and established for: support services; lecturing material (part of the questionnaire); staff member performance; studying workload; the results are incorporated into the semester report, which also includes recommendations and measures.

Compliance level: Fully compliant

ET recommendations:

- 1. Continue with data collection and build KPIs frameworks, at the moment ET got the impression, some of the data points are used for improvement, but they could be used in a more extensive way for better decision making on all levels of the organization.*
- 2. Include graduates qualitative and quantitative; offer them updates; learn from them about new needs for curriculum development; think of partnering in research; in the competing market, successful graduates are one of the best communication activities;*

1.8. Research



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Traditional research in the field of law is limited to publications in national journals; only view scholars are part of the international community publish in the field of social science – which is quite similar to Germany or Austria. In general, establishing research is a long-term and challenging process, especially in private institutions. And it is an ongoing discussion process on how academic institutions should have different profiles in teaching and research. Nevertheless, under the current circumstances, AAB established internal policies to ensure a minimum level of research; one regulation, is that faculty members need to publish a least one per year. The provided CVs reflect this policy; all member have a least one paper a year. In addition, AAB provides 2% of the overall budget for research projects to improve educational and scientific services at AAB. (p. 191) Faculty of law supports at the moment five small research projects, organizes every year a scientific conference of regional character. Faculty of Law cooperates currently in a project with, Faculty of Security Studies, the University of Skopje funded by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation Pristina - Skopje. (6.3, 6.4, 6.5, 6.6, 6.7) It is not possible for the ET to check the affiliation of the publications and intellectual property rights; therefore, all publications and publishing contracts would be needed to be included. (6.8, 6.9)

Master program, in general, offer the opportunity to combine research and teaching, but therefore a clear concept and research objectives need to be developed; Either the SER nor the SV discussion offered elements for an overall framework; master theses are one to one mentoring, based on the research question of students. Faculty of law has not established objectives nor a research development plan for the program nor for the faculty; for example, research questions could be collected together with partners, focus areas within civil law could be chosen, and research question combinations could be analysed by the student as a group; still with the goal of finishing their master theses. Staff members could be highly integrated and facilitate the research process. (6.1, 6.2, 6.10)

Performance indicators in the field of research need to be developed, at the moment only the area of regularly publishing is measured; overall research agenda, a research development plan for faculty and staff members are missing. Most of the activities are individually driven and do not follow a research development plan.

Compliance level: Partially compliant

ET recommendations:

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1. *Developing a research development plan for the faculty, program and on the personal level is needed.*
2. *Design student centered courses for joint research activities for enabling students and fostering research activities of the faculty.*

1.9. Infrastructure and resources

Based on the delivered information, the financial situation is stable and ensures the necessary resources. Law programs do not need special infrastructure resources; for the master program, the existing infrastructure, teaching rooms, library, electronic platforms, software and processes can be. In general, the investment of the last years is impressive and fulfils European standards; the three libraries offer online journals (contract with J-STOR) and adequate books for the program. (7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4) The building offers accessibility for students with special needs partly. (7.6)

Students are very satisfied with the campus infrastructure is part of semester evaluation. (P7.3). Further, plans were mentioned during the SV, but no formal plans are provided in the SER and not monitored. (P 7.1, 7.2)

Compliance level: Fully compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *Developing formal plans and define KPIs for infrastructure.*

2. OVERALL EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATION OF THE ET

Overall the program and the faculty fulfil the standard criteria. The curriculum is quite traditional and includes innovation partly. The main issues are the high numbers of students AAB applied for and the quite high number of 20 credits allocated to the master thesis for a two-semester master program. The ET recommends using the innovation potential for the mentoring process, which should be designed for the whole law faculty. AAB is collecting numerous data points, which could be used for better decision making – ET recommends developing performance indicator frameworks for the different areas. Based on this issue it is necessary to redesign processes and courses, for higher numbers of students. The overall view about these two programs, ET recommends starting with small group of students of

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maximum 30 students, designing a process for master-thesis, adapting the relevant courses and finally re-design the curriculum and start the re-accreditation after the first year.

In conclusion, the Expert Team considers that the study program Civil Law offered by AAB is *substantially compliant* with the standards included in the *KAA Accreditation manual* and, therefore, recommends *accrediting* the study program for a duration of *3 years* with a number of *30* students to be enrolled in the program. After one year the recommendations should be evaluated.

Based on the comment of AAB: ET would follow the extensive and clear argumentation support the increase the number of students to 50.

Expert

(Signature)

(Prof. Dr. Peter Parycek)

(Date)