

AAB COLLEGE

BA CHOREOGRAPHY PROGRAMME

ACCREDITATION

REPORT OF THE EXPERT TEAM

30 May 2019

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. CONTEXT

This Programme Accreditation took place as part of a wider evaluation of the institution and other study programmes during the course of one day.

Date of site visit:

30 May 2019

External Expert (EE) member:

Professor Alan Brickwood.

Coordinators from Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA):

Avni Gashi, Acting Director of KAA.

Shkelzen Gerxhaliu, Senior Officer for Evaluation and Accreditation.

Arianit Kreasniqi, Senior Officer for Evaluation and Accreditation.

Leona Kovaci, Senior Officer for Evaluation and Accreditation.

Sources of information for the Report:

The EE was provided, in advance, with a comprehensive Self Evaluation Report (SER) comprising an Institutional Evaluation; a summary of developments recorded since the previous institutional evaluation and, within the SER, an individual detailed proposal for the new BA Choreography programme.

Meetings were held with the management of the institution, quality assurance representatives and administrative services, heads of study programmes, teaching staff, employers and external stakeholders. The initial meetings with management, quality assurance and administrative service were common to institutional evaluation and a total of seven programmes being evaluated on the day. Due to time constraints most of the meetings concerned with the evaluation of this BA Choreography, and a MA Production proposal, were also coincident.

A brief guided tour of facilities, relevant to the proposed study programmes, was undertaken.

Other sources of information included the KAA's revised and recently published Accreditation Manual (2018) together with formats for the preparation of reporting by Expert Teams (ET).

1.2. SITE VISIT SCHEDULE

29 May

19.45	Meeting at the Reception of the Hotel
20.00	Working dinner

30 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 and Deans
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
19.0 – 19.15	Closing meeting with the management of the institution

1.3 A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE INSTITUTION AND PROGRAMME UNDER EVALUATION

AAB College describes itself as both the first and the largest non-public institution of higher education in Kosovo. It was established in 2002 and began with just 50 students studying on, what was then, a ‘unique programme’ in journalism and mass communication. At that time, it had 20 employees and occupied space totalling 400m². There was a significant expansion in 2007 to include a collaborative development in the field of criminology sciences with the University of Sarajevo. It has enjoyed a 20% annual rate of growth over the past five years and currently has just under 16,000 students enrolled across 14 faculties located across three cities and four sites in Kosovo. Overall student progression rates were not provided but the percentage of graduates employed in the labour market, or who have started their own businesses, is recorded at 78%. AAB’s full and part time staff now total over 500.

As a consequence of this growth the College has, in recent years, invested heavily in management information systems. This has, in turn, facilitated a process of decentralisation and devolvement of responsibilities from the Rectorate down to Deans of Faculties across a wide range of academic and administrative functions, including quality management. At present this does not include finance.

‘Innovation’ features large in AAB’s Vision and strategies. AAB values its positioning in networks of higher education institutions in Europe and internationally and considers

itself to be a leader in Kosovo's European integration processes and in its promotion of economic and societal development.

The proposed programme would be located within the Faculty of Arts which currently has a portfolio of five other programmes:

- BA Graphic Design and Visual Arts
- BA Interior Design
- BA Fashion Design
- BA Painting and Visual Arts
- BA Musicology

The proposal seeks accreditation for a 3-year (6 semester), full time BA Choreography programme with an intake of 70 students each year, to total 210.

2. PROGRAM EVALUATION

2.1 MISSION, OBJECTIVES AND ADMINISTRATION

The proposed three-year BA programme in Choreography is in response to a growing shortage of professionals in a country with a professional ballet troupe, a ballet school, more than 30 active ballet studios, three national television stations and around 50 TV channels.

The EE was entirely satisfied with the analysis of the current state of affairs, needs and rationale for the programme. These were wholly and passionately supported during discussions with teaching staff in the Faculty and similarly endorsed during the visit by a very powerful group of interested employers and stakeholders.

The programme aims to attract, discover and develop new talent, producing graduates capable of understanding and managing choreographic design complexities using traditional and new media. Graduates will be able to cooperate with other professions in the design and production of a variety of artistic projects in a field that typically requires combinations of mastery of body movement, emotional expression, crowning ideas in monologues and duet and teamwork including large scale dance coordination. They will be able to do this in situations that broadcast meaningful messages about coexistence in general and the challenges society has had to face in the past and will continue to have to face in modern times.

In particular, the programme is designed to prepare students academically and practically with learning outcomes upon completion to include critical awareness, interpersonal, social and communication skills with an ability to handle and employ information - all towards choreographic solutions for a marketplace that could also include sport, fitness and therapeutic applications. These outcomes being typical of the intellectual, practical

and transferable skills expected of a graduate from higher education embodied in the National Qualifications Framework and the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

Compliance level

The proposed study programme is entirely in tune with the overall mission of the institution. It has a well-defined overarching didactic and research content and its rationale is well founded on relevant external academic and professional best practice and advice. It is fully compliant with Standards 1.1 to 1.3)

There is a full and thorough range of formal policies, guidelines and regulations referred to in the SER dealing with responsibilities relating to the management and delivery of programmes, behaviour and to recurring procedural and academic issues. These include documents on academic integrity, responsibility and public accountability including a full range of documents requiring every person within AAB to conform to a set of moral and ethical principles and to the principles of scientific and artistic truth - including codes of practice and disciplinary procedures.

These are established at institutional level with local Faculty arrangements for administration and implementation and include some detailed descriptions of how a sample of them would work in practice at Faculty level. One example given described how feedback and ‘follow-through’ worked to ensure actions were taken where it had been deemed necessary.

The EE assumes that a summary of most of these would be included in the student handbook given to students at induction.

Compliance level

The EE is satisfied that these measures are fully embraced at Faculty level. They are fully compliant. (Standards 1.4 to 1.6)

ET recommendation:

1. It might prove useful to add a KPI that includes a count of the number of applications received from students so that comparisons can be drawn between ratios of application, intake and progression (survival) – if this is not already done.

2.2 QUALITY MANAGEMENT

AAB is a mature institution with quality assurance standards and principles established according to the Bologna Process and regulations by KAA. At institution level there is a comprehensive and thorough system of common requirements for the design of new programmes. This includes their rationale, what they are setting out to achieve, the

recruitment of students, what is taught when and how with learning outcomes, how assessment is applied for the purposes of monitoring, feedback to students and for progression and award. There are also requirements for programmes to have in place procedures for the retrieval of any failure by the institution or student, to include complaints and appeals, when things go wrong.

The EE found these to be appropriately applied at Faculty level with reasonable interpretation and discretion both in the design and intended operation of the programme. This includes the important need for students to understand what is required of them in initial briefings at induction and for this to be regularly refreshed and updated.

The EE is as confident as can be, with a new programme, that these highly appropriate standards will be applied satisfactorily to the programme.

Compliance level

The design of the programme is fully compliant. (Standards 2.1 to 2.9)

2.3 ACADEMIC STAFF

The full-time teaching staff team is highly competent and the overall position on staffing is stable.

The SER provides listings of the 11 full-time teaching staff dedicated to the programme by qualification, tenure and by the amount of time they will spend teaching, in consultations with students and in assessments. Similar information is provided for part-time and occasional visiting staff. All full-time teaching staff have contracts for between 1-3 years. There are legal requirements for the minimum number of teachers required and their workload. The latter being between 8-10 contact hours, depending upon their seniority, and includes the supervision of internships. Upper limits are also stipulated for tutorial contact conducted via AAB's electronic e-professor.

Sadly, the SWOT analysis identified a weakness in motivation by staff to engage in research. What this actually meant and what definition of research had been used in the analysis was unclear as the perceived weakness might seem different if an alternative definition of 'professional practice' was used instead of 'academic research'. There are plenty of references in the SER to research across all subjects at AAB which suggests arrangements at the institution should be sufficiently flexible and sensitive to accommodate the needs of staff teaching on this programme.

The Faculty provides opportunities for training on teaching methods, quality assurance, curriculum design and other professional and academic topics internally and through a number of collaborative arrangements it has with other higher education institutions in Europe. For the period 2018 to 2021, the Faculty has planned to deliver a number of

training activities specifically in support of this programme together with finance to support publications and participation in international conferences.

Compliance level

The EE is satisfied that the arrangements in place at Faculty level are appropriate to the programme and fully compliant. (Standards 3.1 to 3.10).

2.4 EDUCATIONAL PROCESS CONTENT

The BA programme in Choreography has drawn significantly upon the experience and curriculum of the University of Arts in Tirana, Albania, with adaptations to the labour market and other local conditions in Kosovo.

The general shape of the study programme is readily recognisable and designed to a pattern commonly found for programmes of this kind in institutions of higher education internationally. Teaching methods appear broad with an appropriate balance between practice and theory. Curriculum content seems well balanced and appropriate to the programme objectives. Overall objectives are achieved and demonstrated through progressive integration of theory and practice in well researched project work with appropriate technical, cultural and historical underpinning – as evidenced by the intended diploma project in the final semester.

The study programme is compliant with the National Qualifications Framework and the Framework Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

Of particular concern to the EE, however, was the relatively large intake of students sought upon commencement of the programme because this programme does not have a lecture-based curriculum.

For theoretical subjects delivered by lectures, a criterion needing to be satisfied is usually about having sufficiently large enough lecture theatres to accommodate the numbers of students in a group. For conventional laboratory or studio subjects it is often one of ensuring students have sufficient access to specialist facilities and equipment. For the creative and performing arts, the teaching methods often require significant amounts of one-to-one staff tuition. This BA programme in choreography comprises all three of these!

With an intended overall ratio between practice and theory of 70/30 respectively, this could create recurring difficulties not just with the requirement for large spaces but with the way teaching will have to be organised. The large number of students will need to be broken down into smaller group sizes. The institution stipulates limits on group sizes for lectures at 70 and for Laboratories (and studios) at between 20-40 but the latter could still be too high when one-to-one teaching occurs coincident with group studio work. In

some parts of the programme, the proposed 70 students intake would probably need to be broken down into groups of, say, 10. This would require a sevenfold increase in teaching staff time and much duplication. There would be a number of implications from such a large intake – not all of which can be identified reliably until the programme is in operation.

Very strong declarations of support and endorsements for the programme were provided in a meeting with a group of employers who described, in a very powerful and convincing manner, the necessity for graduates from this programme to enter their ‘industry’ as early as possible due to a current dire shortage of talent.

Compliance level

The EE is satisfied that the objectives, subject content and balance and assessment methods for monitoring, feedback to students, progression and award are generally thorough and substantially compliant. (Standards 4.1 to 4.12).

2.5 STUDENTS

The SER provides comprehensive information that demonstrates institution-wide thoroughness in the arrangements for student admissions, participation in decision-making, rights of representation, what students can expect, what is expected of them and what support can be provided if something goes wrong. This information is recognisable. It has drawn widely upon best practice from elsewhere and been subjected to continuous updating and improvement based upon many years of experience. In all instances these arrangements are delegated, mirrored and adapted at Faculty level to suit local circumstances and needs within prescribed limits.

The EE has reviewed the information in the SER to see if any of those centrally approved regulations and arrangements for student affairs and other matters could be inflexible and inappropriately hinder or adversely affect this new programme. Whether there are any areas specific to the Faculty that might not ‘fit’ and be problematic but, in the absence of any experience of operating the new program, no problems could be identified that could not be resolved by existing delegation and discretion.

This being an initial accreditation of a new program of study, there were no meetings with students and no specific samples of student work or student issues to examine. There was, however, a very positive meeting with alumni reflecting the programmes being evaluated during this visit. All spoke well of their experiences as students at AAB and, in particular, how well their studies had prepared them for the ‘world of work’.

An interesting discussion on the potential of AAB alumni facilitating business ‘start ups’ and incubators ensued.

Compliance level

The EE has reviewed the centrally arrangements for student affairs and is satisfied that, in the absence of operational experience they are fully compliant and appropriate for this new programme. (Standards 5.1 to 5.11).

2.6 RESEARCH

The SER refers to AAB having made significant progress over the past five years in the area of research. A number of international conferences have been organised with attendant staff collaboration and an internal publication house established for the publication of original scientific and artistic works and for the translation of important foreign articles. International awards have been received, honorary titles awarded and, each year, two to three editions of the institution's research journal 'Thesis' is now published.

On the other hand, the SER points to deficiencies generally and, in the Faculty, with references to lack of skills, lack of funds and a lack of student motivation.

As a consequence, the institution has made research a strategic priority in a new Development Plan. This envisages action to include a change in fundraising for staff research projects, a research fund for students and further integration of research into study programmes along with a strengthening of practical work.

During the period 2018 to 2023 the Faculty of Arts is planning to provide a number of training activities for both academic and administrative staff. This is being undertaken to stimulate and develop social research skills, enhance understanding of international standards in programme development and provide financial support for publications and participation in international conferences. The Faculty aims to secure agreements regionally and internationally for knowledge sharing via staff exchanges. This for staff to be exposed to different ways of planning, designing and delivering programmes. There are several other initiatives to specifically support this programme that comprise use of the Arts Research Centre, visiting national institutes of ballet, local theatres and state ensembles and master classes including different Albanian and foreign choreographers.

The EE is satisfied with the steps being taken to raise the profile of research, the level of activity and, in particular, its probable impact upon the new programme.

Compliance level

The EE is content with the level of research and staff development activity and especially with plans for improvement. The arrangements for research and staff development are substantially compliant in their support to the programme proposal. (Standards 6.1 to 6.10).

2.7 INFRASTRUCTURE AND RESOURCES

In the time available, the EE was able to undertake only a brief tour of facilities relevant to the proposed study programme. This included a theatre and performance studio and several specially equipped studios, laboratories and workshops.

The space and equipment looked good but it was unclear what other demands would be made upon these spaces. Other issues relating to space are referred to earlier in this report.

Compliance level

Infrastructure and resources available for the programme appeared substantially compliant. (Standards 7.1 to 7.6).

3 OVERALL EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EE

This proposed three-year BA programme in Choreography is a novel and exciting development for the performing arts - and some other related activities in Kosovo. It will provide professionals in fields where there are serious shortages of new talent and could, in time, turn out to be a new and colourful success story in AAB's portfolio. It promises to fulfil a 'need' that is wholly and unequivocally endorsed by the cultural and artistic communities it has been primarily designed to serve.

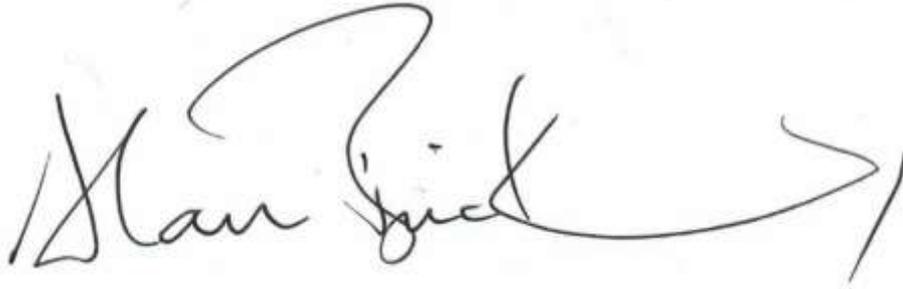
Whether it delivers that promise to the necessary high standard and how soon, will depend as usual upon the quality of students enrolled and teaching team but also how the programme works in practice. Despite any transferability of experience from the University of Arts in Tirana, there will undoubtedly need to be adjustments. These are more likely to centre upon how the teaching will be delivered taking into account the need for highly flexible mixes of individual and group learning of 'harmonised' practice and theory where the practical element is appropriate but high at 70%. It is in anticipation of these dynamics that the EE recommends a lower early intake of students to the programme until such time that there is sufficient experience to justify an increase.

The EE was impressed with the staff met. All had postgraduate qualifications, most had significant professional and teaching experience and had engaged in research. All were committed to the new programme.

In conclusion the External Expert considers the BA Choreography programme, proposed by AAB College, to be substantially compliant with the standards included in the KAA Accreditation Manual.

The External Expert therefore recommends the BA Choreography study programme be accredited for a duration of 3 years with no more than 50 students enrolled on the programme each year to a total of 150 students.

EXPERT TEAM

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alan Brickwood". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail that ends in a sharp hook.

Professor Alan Brickwood

24 June 2019 (Revised)