

AAB COLLEGE

MA PRODUCTION PROGRAMME

ACCREDITATION

REPORT OF THE EXPERT TEAM

30 May 2019

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1.

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 MA Production 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 MA Production, and a BA Choreography 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 making the Faculty of Mass Communication the oldest faculty with the longest tradition at the College. At that time, AAB 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 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%. The Faculty of Mass Communication claims almost 90% of their graduates to be in employment. 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 Mass Communication which currently has around 350 students and a portfolio of three other graduate programmes:

- BA Production
- BA Mass Communication and Journalism
- MA Mass Communication and Journalism

The proposal seeks accreditation for a 2-year (4 semester), full time taught MA Production programme with an intake of 100 students each year, to total 200.

2. PROGRAM EVALUATION

2.1 MISSION, OBJECTIVES AND ADMINISTRATION

The Faculty already offers a three-year BA programme in Production. The proposed two-year taught MA programme is designed for graduates from the BA and others wishing to work in media, digital and multidisciplinary environments.

The employment opportunities in the field of production were described as being large and highly rewarding following year-on-year growth of the industry in production art comprising areas such as video, audio, stage production, multimedia and its management. The SER points to a serious lack of specialised people able to work in the different aspects of production and of an industry in desperate need for professionals. This was forcibly endorsed during meetings with teaching staff and with a very powerful group of interested employers and stakeholders who spoke of their commercial disadvantage whilst they continue not to be able to recruit trained professionals locally. There are currently three national television stations and around 50 TV channels in Kosovo.

The development of the proposed programme was heavily based upon listening to stakeholders. This began with local experts directly involved in the industry, organisations with which the Faculty had collaborative arrangements, its own staff with experience in the industry and with graduates who had completed the BA programme and were seeking to further their competences via postgraduate study. There are no other comparable MA programmes available in Kosovo.

The EE was entirely satisfied with the analysis of the current state of affairs, needs and rationale for the programme.

The programme aims to attract graduates from BA programmes, those who are already employed in the industry but do not have the relevant qualifications and research ability to advance themselves and others from related fields wanting to re orientate and retrain. Students will develop knowledge and skills in production, critical thinking, persuasive and creative writing; research and analysis; business and budgeting; visual design; IT; and oral presentation. Through relationships with local industry, the programme will offer internships and courses that give students opportunities to work with production companies in Kosovo.

These outcomes are typical of the intellectual, practical and transferable skills expected from a taught post graduate programme as 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. The EE assumes that a summary of most of these would be provided to students on entering the programme.

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)

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 and 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 information 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 sound.

The SER provides listings of the 10 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 staff. 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 system.

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. So far, AAB has supported all those who have been seeking support with participation in local and international conferences and with sabbaticals whilst studying for a higher degree.

Compliance level

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

2.4 EDUCATIONAL PROCESS CONTENT

The general shape of the study programme is readily recognisable and designed to a pattern commonly found for programmes of this level and 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. It also appears very full. 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 practical part of the ‘diploma thesis’ in the final semester.

The EE was informed that the overall balance between practice and theory would be around 60/70 and 40/30% respectively. The EE was also pleased to see a simple summary of weighting for the study programme comprising a) essential subjects that provide general training and knowledge of media arts at 50%; b) general subjects to include core technologies and the development of artistic capability through those technologies at 25%, and; c) professional practice to include project, scenario and industrial training, 25%.

There is a clear statement in the proposal that this is not a programme that is intended to carry out scientific work and, using a narrow definition of scientific research this, the EE considers to be acceptable.

There is also an equally simple, succinct and clear summary of learning outcomes consistent with the stated mission, rationale and objectives for the programme.

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

The EE had just one concern about the relatively large intake of students sought upon commencement of the programme.

Whilst the Faculty has experience of operating a similar programme at BA level, this programme is at a higher level, has a very full and broad-based curriculum and will probably be very demanding of staff tuition with coursework. How that breadth might cluster over time from patterns of student intake, their interest and from industry demands is uncertain but is likely to require changes that would probably be more readily and smoothly accommodated with a smaller number of students in early intakes.

The institution's plans to offer foreign language tuition is sound - especially for postgraduate study in an area that is highly international in its operations and 'reach'. Without that, graduates could be disadvantaged in accessing foreign material, in undertaking collaborative work and in their ability to work internationally/

The programme has very full support from 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 such talent.

Compliance level

The EE is satisfied that the objectives, subject content and balance, delivery and assessment methods for monitoring, feedback to students, progression and award are generally thorough, well founded 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 all 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 central 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 publishing 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.

The institution has continued to make research a strategic priority in its new Development Plan. This envisages action to further improve the quality of research by supporting work by staff and students. It will include a positive move to 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. There are certainly 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.

Despite this supportive environment, the picture seems a bit muddled. The SER cites a Faculty SWOT analysis referring to the strength of having clear policies, strategies and strong financial support from the institution for research, whereas another SWOT analysis points to a weakness in motivation by staff to engage in research.

Overall the EE was impressed by the teaching team. The programme has clearly been compiled by highly experienced and competent staff. All have postgraduate qualifications and most are well connected to the industry. The EE is confident that the team will be able to provide a high quality and vital teaching and learning experience on the programme and is unperturbed by the apparent contrasting SWOT assessment. All have postgraduate qualifications.

Most have substantial professional experience in the production industry.

The EE suspects any conflict arising from the SER SWOT analysis to be unreal and simply the result of an unnecessary distinction having been made between 'academic' or 'scientific' research and 'professional practice'. The SER could, and should, have addressed this query by confirming the equivalence of these two different but complementary methods of academic staff development. Without this, the Faculty's strategies for complying with institutional requirements of staff and for ensuring the vitality and quality of teaching material and methods on the programme via 'research', or its equivalent, is less clear than it could be.

The EE is otherwise satisfied with the steps being taken to raise the profile of research, the level of staff development activity and, in particular, its 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 by other programmes.

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 two-year MA programme in Production is clearly much-needed and a welcome development for Kosovo and this was very forcibly endorsed by senior industry leaders who spoke of a severe commercial disadvantage, both within Kosovo and internationally, whilst they continue not to be able to recruit trained professionals locally. The programme is therefore entirely consistent with AAB's mission.

The teaching team is highly competent both from their experiences in working as professionals in the industry and in delivering a similar programme in the Faculty at undergraduate level. The Faculty does however need to look a little more closely at 'equivalents' in the definition of research applicable to this study area – as what is required is probably already happening but under a different heading. The EE found plenty of references in the SER, and in meetings at institutional level, to 'research' arrangements that should be sufficiently flexible and sensitive to accommodate the needs of staff teaching on this programme.

The institution's plans to offer foreign language tuition is sound – especially for a postgraduate study in an area that is unquestionably international in its operations and 'reach'.

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

The External Expert therefore recommends the MA Production study programme be accredited for a duration of 3 years with no more than 75 students enrolled on the programme each year, to a total of 150 students.

EXPERT TEAM

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alan Brickwood". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Professor Alan Brickwood

24 June 2019 (Revised)