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Republika Kosova - Republic of Kosovo



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Agencija Kosova za Akreditaciju
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RIT KOSOVO (A.U.K) COLLEGE

PROFESSIONAL STUDIES / MSc

ACCREDITATION

REPORT OF THE EXPERT TEAM

May 2019, Prishtina



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Context

Date of site visit: 15th – 16th of May 2019

Expert Team (ET) members:

- Prof. Dr. Magdalena Platis
- Prof. Dr. Kristiina Tonnison
- Mr. Mikus Dubickis (Student Expert)

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:

- Self-Evaluation Report (SER) submitted by AUK College;
- Information obtained during the site visit;
- Meetings conducted with the management of the institution, teaching staff, students, graduates, external stakeholders and employers of graduates;
- Supplementary documents requested by the ET (Appendix 1).

Criteria used for institutional and program evaluations

- KAA Accreditation Manual



1.2. Site visit schedule

15 May

19.45 Meeting at the Reception of the Hotel

20.00 Working dinner

16 May

08.30 Meeting at the reception of the hotel

09.00 – 10.20 Meeting with the management of the institution (*no slide presentation is allowed, the meeting is intended as a free discussion*)

10.20 – 11.20 Meeting with quality assurance representatives and administrative services

11.20 – 12.30 Lunch break

12.30 – 13.30 Meeting with the heads of study programs (Applied Arts and Sciences BSc)

13.30 – 14.30 Meeting with the heads of study programs (Professional Studies MSc)

14.30 – 15.10 Meeting with students

15.10 – 15.50 Meeting with graduates

15.50 – 16.30 Meeting with employers of graduates and external stakeholders

16.30 – 17.00 Visiting tour of the facilities and infrastructure

17.00 – 17.10 Internal meeting – Expert Team and KAA

17.10 – 17.20 Closing meeting with the management of the institution



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1.3. A brief overview of the institution and program under evaluation

RIT Kosovo College was founded in 2003, being supported in its actions and policies by the U.S. Organization, “The American University in Kosovo Foundation Inc,” registered in the County of New York, State of New York. Its Mission and Vision statement was adopted by the AUKF Board of Trustees on May 12, 2017 and include the following aspects, as stated at <https://kosovo.rit.edu/mission-and-vision.html>:

- *Vision: RIT Kosovo (A.U.K) will be a leading international university whose excellence in academic programs, educational outcomes, and research best supports the professional achievements and personal growth of its students and the advancement of society in Kosovo, the region, and the world.*
- *Mission: RIT Kosovo (A.U.K) will deliver an outstanding American education for students from Kosovo and the world through innovative curricular, experiential, and research programs in a student-centered culture. Our students acquire expertise, knowledge, and values that prepare them to contribute to the global society.*
- *Programs: The RIT Kosovo (A.U.K) was founded to support Kosovo and its neighbouring countries to develop their economies, societies and democratic institutions, by providing undergraduate, graduate and continuing education programs in the English language.*
- *Principles: RIT Kosovo (A.U.K) is a learning community of faculty, staff and students who are committed to core values of scholarship, integrity, service, and civility; fostering rigorous intellectual exploration, personal growth, and vigorous debate; commitment to diversity and the promotion of understanding and mutual respect, in an environment that welcomes people of all nationalities and communities; development of the critical thinking, entrepreneurship, and technological sophistication as critical to the development of the region and its integration into Europe; recruitment, development and support of excellent faculty, who are encouraged to conduct scholarship and service as well as teach. Our faculty and staff will be an important resource for the development of the region.*
- *Main goals of the institution: Academic Excellence; Research and Innovation; Resource Management; Strategic Enrollment Management.*

As stated in SER (page 185), RIT Kosovo has approximately 400 students coming from more than 22 different countries. RIT Kosovo, in cooperation with Rochester Institute of Technology in Rochester New York, offers academic programs looking for a positive impact on the



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economic, social, and cultural development of Kosovo and the region. A.U.K collaboration with Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), the eighth largest private institution in the US, is to deliver A.U.K's undergraduate and Master's degree programs - <https://kosovo.rit.edu/rochester-institute-of-technology.html>.

In SER (page 187) provides clear insight on the students' options regarding their studies:

- *RIT Kosovo primarily offers a program at a bachelor level. Students have also access to over 70 master's and 6 PhD programs at RIT.*
- *Students at RIT Kosovo undergo a four-year program, organized over two academic semesters per year, and upon completion are awarded Bachelor of Science degree in Applied Arts and Sciences. Within this framework, the first two years are of general education and in years three and four of the program, students have the options of two of the following seven concentrations:*
 - *Economics and Statistics*
 - *Management and Entrepreneurship*
 - *Graphic Design & Multimedia*
 - *Web & Mobile Computing (IT)*
 - *Public Policy & Governance*
 - *Peace and Conflict Studies*
 - *Energy Policy Studies*
- *In addition, students have the option of one of the following minors:*
 - *Economics*
 - *Public Policy*
 - *English*
 - *International Relations.*

In addition, the role of the Board of Trustees is clearly stated in all university policies - <https://kosovo.rit.edu/home/auk-policies.html> and in the AUK Statute. In these documents, there are also stipulated the responsibilities of the different governance bodies: Board of Trustees, the President, Managing Officials, Dean of Faculty, Finance Director, Chief Operational and Outreach Officer, Outreach, all structures reflected in the organizational chart.



2. PROGRAM EVALUATION

2.1. Mission, objectives and administration

SER (page 15) describes the university mission considering that:

- *RIT Kosovo will deliver an outstanding American education for students from Kosovo and the world through innovative curricular, experiential, and research programs in a student-centered culture;*
- *Students acquire expertise, knowledge, and values that prepare them to contribute to the global society.*

In addition, the declared mission of the new master program proposed for accreditation (first time), as written in SER (page 196) reflects that:

- *The study program's mission offers innovation, adaptability and creative pathways that prepare students with professional and life skills for a global world, thus is in compliance with the overall mission of the institution.*

Comparing this mission for the master program with the mission of the bachelor program called *Applied Arts and Sciences*, mentioned in SER (page 111), it is clear that there is no difference between the two programs' missions; in addition, this mission statement might be considered that includes only one of the three mission dimension: teaching, but no research and no social commitment.

Learning outcomes have been considered as they are defined in the US, with no relevant academic and professional advice from specialists in the labour market. During the meeting with the teaching staff (from the bachelor program), it was clear that nobody among the participants was consulted in the preparation of the documents. The same conclusion was generated from the stakeholder meeting, especially employers – they were not asked about the relevance of this new master program; at a first glance, they even said that this program would not work for the current context in Kosovo.



The study program does not have a well-defined overarching didactic and research concept. Although, from a teaching and learning experience, academic staff is very well trained and experienced, for this master program, there is no evidence on the academic community interest in particular focus on teaching or research; there is no difference in terms of teaching for the areas that are already covered in the bachelor program. The Capstone Project SER is referring to (page 197) is integrated in the curriculum of this master program, but there is no difference from the bachelor level. In fact, the entire description is a document prepared copy/paste from the bachelor program.

At the institutional level, there are formal policies, guidelines and regulations dealing with recurring procedural or academic issues. These are made publicly available to all staff and students:

- Employment opportunities: <https://kosovo.rit.edu/home/employment-opportunities.html>;
- Faculty Hiring Policy: <https://kosovo.rit.edu/doc/senate/Faculty%20Hiring%20Policy.pdf>;
- Students' admission: <https://kosovo.rit.edu/prospective-students.html>.

All staff and students comply with the internal regulations relating to ethical conduct in research, teaching, assessment in all academic and administrative activities, generated from institutional level.

Compliance level: Partially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *Define a clear mission of the program Professional Studies, even reconsidering its name which should reflect a competitive advantage in the higher education industry;*
2. *Look for relevant academic and professional advice in the process of defining the intended learning outcomes, by conducting a survey revealing the market need for such an academic program;*
3. *Differentiate the mission, and the objectives for the master program from those specific to the bachelor program.*



2.2. Quality management

Staff of the faculty participate in self-evaluations and cooperate with reporting and improvement processes in their sphere of activity. All teaching staff participation at the meeting during the site visit were aware of their evaluations and really confident that this is a useful tool to improve their activities; nevertheless, they agreed that huge changes after these evaluations have not been made, not being the case of replacing an academic, but only to reconsidering some of the teaching methods.

The master program is based on the regular aspects of planning and delivery, including resources provided by the institution. Quality evaluations provide an overview of quality issues for the overall program as well as of different components within it; the evaluations consider inputs, processes and outputs, with particular attention given to learning outcomes for students. At institutional level, there are policies and structures dedicated to continuing improvement in performance:

- Curriculum Development Policy: [https://kosovo.rit.edu/doc/senate/Curriculum%20Development%20Policy%20\(1\).pdf](https://kosovo.rit.edu/doc/senate/Curriculum%20Development%20Policy%20(1).pdf);
- Academic Program Profile: <https://kosovo.rit.edu/doc/senate/Academic%20Program%20Profile.pdf>;
- Faculty Portfolio: <https://kosovo.rit.edu/doc/senate/Faculty%20Portfolios.pdf>;
- Faculty Development Centre; <https://kosovo.rit.edu/home-fdc.html>.

There is a clear practice in collecting survey data from students (after each semester), but not from graduates or employers; the results of these evaluations are not made publicly available. Results of the internal quality assurance system are taken into account for further development of the study program, dean of the faculty being the receiver of the evaluation report.

The university offers wide educational activities that support student development: learning such as cooperative education; certificate programs; distance learning programs. the Academic Support Center; Study Abroad; service learning programs; programs at other sites around the world such as Main campus (NY), Croatia, Dubai, and the Dominican Republic; and the Honors Program.

As the program is submitted for the first time, all the evidence is based on the bachelor program.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant



ET recommendations:

1. *Extend the surveys at graduates and employers;*
2. *Conduct a research in the process of a program planning.*

2.3. Academic staff

SER does contain for the master program, the same list of staff as for the entire institution and for the bachelor program: 16 full-staff and 11 part-time, which means that 59% of the staff are full-time. At the time of visit, it was not clear who would be going to teach at the program, as teaching staff was not involved in the self-evaluation report; a clearer list was provided after the visit, with professors who will be teaching at the master program, including 11 teaching staff among which 8 were full-time and 3 part-time, meaning that 72% represent full-time faculty. In addition, for each student group and for every 60 ECTS credits in the study program, the institution has employed at least one full time staff with PhD title or equivalent title in the case of artistic/applied science institutions.

The teaching staff comply with the legal requirements concerning the occupation of teaching positions. Teaching staff is selected based on an open competition, the university providing clear rules and policies. Opportunities are provided for additional professional development of teaching staff, with special assistance given to any who are facing difficulties. As examples, the following documents are relevant in connection to the *Faculty Development Centre* - <https://kosovo.rit.edu/home-fdc.html>:

- The goal of the centre: to provide members of the broader campus community with resources to assist them in their work; to provide the faculty body at RIT Kosovo (A.U.K) with an ongoing opportunity to develop new teaching approaches for the purpose of meeting our students' learning needs; to consider the classroom as an ever-changing environment whose dynamics is overly dominated by the student learning culture so;
- Main activities: Collegial conversations; Lunch-time "collegial conversations"; Friday "professional development morning sessions"; Faculty "on-boarding"; Faculty recognition and awards; Profiles of Faculty scholarship.



From the discussion with the students, it was clear that the faculty staff has developed a very good relationship with the students, including availability for consultations.

Academic staff evaluation is conducted regularly at least through self-evaluation, students and superiors' evaluations, the dean being the receiver of the evaluation results. The results of the evaluation are not made publicly available. According to SER:

- *All faculty are required to undergo annual review, and re-appointment review at the end of contract;*
- *In addition, newly hired faculty are required to undergo a first-year review.*

A revised set of policies has been submitted to the Academic Senate for approval, which means the improvement mechanisms for quality assurance, especially in the area of faculty evaluation.

As the program is submitted for the first time, all the evidence is based on the bachelor program and on institutional development.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *Re-analyse the procedures for faculty evaluation, including the peer evaluation;*
2. *Make publicly available the results of the faculty evaluation, so students understand the importance of taking part to this process;*
3. *Increase the motivation of faculty staff to get involved in research and community service.*

2.4. Educational process content

The study program is described, in SER, as following:

- *Degree requirements – considering the approved Study Plan, based on at least two professional concentration areas, the importance of the seven years' graduation rule, the overall GPA of minimum 3.0 etc;*



- *Alternative and transfer credits - up to 6 graduate semester credit hours with a grade of minimum B earned at an accredited university can be transferred to a Plan of study.*

Students can obtain credit differently. Alternative forms of learning, including earning credit through independent exams, prior-learning experiences and experiential learning, into student's individualized degree curriculum is possible - <https://www.rit.edu/academicaffairs/sois/getting-started/earn-credit-differently>. In fact, credits can be individually differentiating among the following possibilities:

- Military credit;
- Credit by examination;
- Non-collegiate training;
- Credit for experience.

The study program is not clearly designed on qualification objectives. The program hasn't stated a clear and specific mission, therefore, no clear objectives can be generated from this one, as it is identical with the mission for the bachelor program. Generic skills and competencies are not formulated. The study program is 100% duplicate program that is offered at RIT main campus in Rochester, New York. Rochester Institute of Technology is accredited by United States Higher Education standard, which is recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). CHEA is a recognized accreditation body by the Law on Higher Education in Kosovo (Law no04/L-037; Article 3). According to the curriculum description integrated in SER (page 230), it is not clear that the ECTS number of credits is correct, or those numbers reflect the credits specific to American universities. During the site visit, at the discussion with the head of the program, this remained an unclear issue, without proper answers from the responsible persons.

The disciplines within the curriculum are provided in a clear flow and syllabuses include:

- Course description;
- Course structure and logistics;
- Course learning outcome;
- Assessment method;
- Required and optional text books;
- Required software;
- Activities – weekly readings and discussions;



- Guidelines for contributing to online discussion;
- Assignments;
- Overview of Grade Items;
- General grading for the course;
- Expectations;
- Additional policy.

The disciplines within the curriculum have analytical syllabuses which comprise at least the following: the discipline's objectives, the basic thematic content, learning outcomes, the distribution of classes, seminars and applicative activities, students' assessment system, the minimal bibliography, etc. Some syllabuses are professional filled in, while some others are superficial or missing, being provided only short descriptions of courses from the website (Design Thinking); a clear and detailed syllabus is provided for other disciplines, such as Advanced Project Management.

The student-teacher relationship is a wonderful partnership in which each assumes the responsibility of reaching the learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are explained and discussed with students from the perspective of their relevance to the students' development. All students appreciated the relationship with their teachers, mainly their availability for being there for them, as well as the role of the advisor. Many students appreciated their freedom in their career design and also, the students' services, especially the Student Government.

Teaching strategies adapt to the students' needs, as they have their own study development plan. Student assessment mechanisms are transparent to students, explained at the beginning of courses.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *Define the objectives of the program;*
2. *Adjust the curriculum according to correct ECTS;*
3. *Monitor the syllabuses and check that they follow the required template;*
4. *Revise the SWOT analysis, as it cannot be the same with that for the bachelor program, being dedicated to the content of the educational process.*



2.5. Students

The master program under the evaluation is a new submitted one for accreditation. What can be explained so far, in terms of the compliance with the standards is generated either from the institutional procedures and policies, or from the experience of the faculty in the educational process of teaching and learning at the bachelor program.

Therefore, there is a clear and formally adopted admission procedure at institutional level that the study program has to respect in the students' recruitment. Admission requirements are consistently and fairly applied for all students - <https://kosovo.rit.edu/enrollment-categories.html>

Feedback to students on their performance and results of assessments is based on two main online platforms used in order to monitor and coordinate student workload:

- Starfish - students are notified of their progress on an individual basis.
- SIS - which is used to monitor progress in a collective, comprehensive basis and extract progress rates and program completion rates.

The results obtained by the students throughout the study cycles are certified by the academic record. Flexible treatment of students in special situations is ensured with respect to deadlines and formal requirements in the program and to all examinations. Students can benefit from:

- Scholarships (clear eligibility criteria publicly available) - <https://kosovo.rit.edu/administration/scholarship-program.html>;
- Students' resources - <https://kosovo.rit.edu/administration/student-resources.html>;
- Students' loans - <https://kosovo.rit.edu/student-loans.html>.

Effective procedures are being used to ensure that work submitted by students is original. The most used soft is *Turnitin*, and both faculty and students confirmed during the site visit.

Students' rights and obligations are made publicly available, promoted to all those concerned and enforced equitably; these will include the right to academic appeals. In addition, the students' transfer between higher education institutions, faculties and study programs is clearly regulated in formal internal documents.

Compliance level: Fully compliant



ET recommendations:

1. *Involve students in many more activities, jointly organized with the faculty staff;*
2. *Stimulate students to participate to international contest/competitions.*

2.6. Research

The study program has not defined scientific/applied research objectives, and it is not part of any research centre. The entire institution is rather educational than research-oriented. In SER (page 240), the self-evaluation team reported that research objectives are related to the experiential learning and the Senior Capstone the students have to complete in the final year. In fact, this is not what the definition of the research objectives generated from the program means. It only proves that student teaching is applied oriented, but not that the program has defined research objectives and allocated clear financial (and not only) resources for that.

Nevertheless, there are expectations for teaching staff to become more involved in research and scholarly activities but no clear performance indicators have been specified in correlation with these expectations. Being a work on progress, internal policies need to be clearly formulated regarding what research is to be considered in the field of the program, in concordance with best international practices.

The academic staff has a proven track record of research results on the same topics as their teaching activity. They publish their work in specialty magazines or publishing houses. Research is validated through: scientific and applied research publications, artistic products. They publish under the name of the institution in Kosovo they are affiliated to as full time staff.

There is an interest that each academic staff member and researcher produce at least an average of one scientific/applied research publication or artistic outcome/product per year for the past three years, but it is still a lot of effort needed.

Academic staff are encouraged to include in their teaching information about their research and scholarly activities that are relevant to courses they teach, together with other significant research developments in the field. More than this, students are engaged in research projects and other activities. RIT Kosovo provides an *Honor Program* where students engage with faculty to conduct research. A list of few published honor projects can be found here: <http://kosovo.rit.edu/honor-projects.html>.



Policies are established for ownership of intellectual property and clear procedures set out for commercialization of ideas developed by staff and students. Being part of RIT community, RIT Kosovo adheres also to its policy on Intellectual Property. - <https://www.rit.edu/academicaffairs/policiesmanual/c030>.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *Identify clear research objectives for the study program;*
2. *Reconsider staff performance by integrating clear research indicators;*
3. *Develop an internal policy describing what type of research is relevant in the field of study (based on international best practices).*

2.7. Infrastructure and resources

As stated in the SER:

- *The campus facility has been ensured by a recently signed 50-year lease with Municipality of Prishtina;*
- *RIT guarantees that every student enrolled in the program will complete the program regardless of the circumstances that RIT Kosovo might go through, thus ensuring the necessary human capital to provide the service in long run;*
- *Library premises have 67 seats available to students of RIT Kosovo for studying and reading;*
- *Classrooms are kept open and available to students in order to study and work together 24/7;*
- *Every year, 60% of the acquisitions budget is at disposal to faculty to suggest the latest professional literature which cannot be obtained electronically;*
- *About 100 to 200 new titles are added each academic year to the physical collection;*
- *The physical library contains 11808 items, or 8818 bibliographic records;*
- *Subscriptions to the foreign publications and periodicals are covered through electronic databases. For example, full access to: JSTOR, EBSCO, ProQuest Complete, SAGE Journals online, Academic Search Elite, ACM Digital Library, Arts & Humanities Database, Business Source Elite, Business Economics and Theory Collection, Communication and Mass Media Complete, CQ Researcher Online, CQ Researcher Online, Emerald Fulltext, FASB Accounting Standards Codification,*

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Gartner, General OneFile (Gale), IEEE Xplore, Nexis Uni (formerly LexisNexis Academic), Project MUSE, SpringerLink, Wiley Online Library.

Financial statements are publicly available at <https://kosovo.rit.edu/home/financial-statements.html>, but it hasn't been developed a financial plan at the level of the study program. Under such circumstances, there is no evidence that the study program, without a clear mission and objective will prove sustainability for the next 3 years.

The capacity of all classrooms and the number of units are provided in SER (page 260); many of them have a capacity of 30 or 35, or 45 seats. The number of seats in the lecture rooms, seminar rooms and laboratories are related to the study groups' size (series, groups, subgroups). In addition, the infrastructure and facilities dedicated to the implementation of the program is adapted to students with special needs. The long term plans for RIT Kosovo is the expansion of campus buildings to include a new Multi_purpose building dedicated to students, an extended library, dormitory and entrepreneurship center in the long run. RIT Kosovo has recently published a call for Architecture Concept Design for its Multi-purpose building: http://kosovo.rit.edu/images/RFP_272019_BG_002.pdf.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. Create a relevant financial plan for the study program, for 3 years.

3. OVERALL EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATION OF THE ET

The program submitted might be a successful one in the case of clear messages to the potential candidates. As it is right now, the program described in the SER looks more like a copy/paste program of the bachelor one, already existing. This is not because several set of standards could not have been evidence-based on the program achievements, being submitted for the first time, but because very important elements have been neglected, like mission, objectives, plan. In other words, the overall result is simply explained by the institutional and bachelor program achievements, and not by the originality or competitive advantage of the master program. It is like most specific elements are missing for the evaluated program, but overall, as the university and the bachelor program are well organized and managed, the result is positive in favour of the accreditation. The main recommendations are:

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1. Define a clear mission statement for the program;
2. Create a financial plan for the study program;
3. Identify 3-5 research objectives generated from the mission statement;
4. Clarify the curriculum regarding the ECTS allocated to each discipline;
5. Conduct a survey in order to see the relevance of the program;
6. Elaborate a program-based SWOT analysis (the submitted one is identical to the bachelor program one);
7. Involve faculty staff and students in the design of the program.

In conclusion, the Expert Team considers that the study program *Professional Studies/MSc*, offered by RIT Kosovo is *Substantially compliant* with the standards included in the *KAA Accreditation manual* and, therefore, recommends *to accredit* the study program for a duration of 1 year with a number of 35 students to be enrolled in the program.

Expert Team

	Magdalena Platis	2nd of June 2019
(Signature)	(Print Name)	(Date)