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*Rinvest College*

## **INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION**

## **REPORT OF THE EXPERT TEAM**

*Brno, July 12, 2019*



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Context

**Date of site visit:** June 6, 2019

**Expert Team (ET) members:**

- *Prof. Milan Pol, Masaryk University, Czech Republic*
- *Ms Ketj Tsotniashvili, Student expert*



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#### **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) of Riinvest College and other submitted documents*
- *Site visit, interviews*

#### **Criteria used for institutional and program evaluations**

- *KAA Accreditation Manual*

### **1.2 Site visit schedule**

#### **6 June**

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| <b>08.30</b>         | Meeting at the reception of the hotel                                      |
| <b>09.00 – 10.30</b> | Meeting with the management of the institution                             |
| <b>10.30 – 11.30</b> | Meeting with quality assurance representatives and administrative services |



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|                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| <b>11.30 – 13.00</b> | Meeting with the heads of study programs                      |
| <b>13.00 – 13.50</b> | Lunch break   |
| <b>13.50 – 14.20</b> | Visiting tour of the facilities and infrastructure            |
| <b>14.20 – 15.00</b> | Meeting with teaching staff                                   |
| <b>15.00 – 15.50</b> | Meeting with students   |
| <b>15.50 – 16.30</b> | Meeting with graduates  |
| <b>16.30 – 17.10</b> | Meeting with employers of graduates and external stakeholders |
| <b>17.10 – 17.25</b> | Internal meeting – Expert Team and KAA                        |
| <b>17.25 – 17.40</b> | Closing meeting with the management of the institution        |



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## **1.2. A brief overview of the institution under evaluation**

Riinvest College was established in 2007 “upon the longstanding tradition of the Riinvest Research Institute and a group of Kosovar computer science experts working and living in Austria” (SER, p. 4). Currently, it offers several bachelor and master programs in the field of management and computer sciences. Riinvest College was several times accredited by the KAA, as a College it was last time in 2015.

## **2. INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION**

### **2.1. Public mission and institutional objectives**

The Riinvest College (RC) has a defined mission statement and this statements includes three main pillars of standard higher education institution and its activity: teaching, research, and public outreach (community service). In concrete, the mission of the Riinvest College is to “provide high-quality studies and research in order to provide experts on Kosovo’s development needs, with capacity to compete globally” (SER, p. 13).

There was a consultation process related to the development of mission, vision and strategic plan – mainly a series of workshop in which different groups of stakeholders participated. As a consequence, the vision was reformulated and at the moment it is covering the period of next 10 years. The vision of the Riinvest College is as follows: “in 10 years the Riinvest College will be an entrepreneurial institution of higher education and a model in Kosovo and in the region; it will combine qualitative education, research and practical work synergistically, creating a unique academic experience that fosters creativity, entrepreneurship and employment among students; there will be strategic partnership with local and international universities. Riinvest will be the leaders in shaping policies and economic decision-making and technological innovations and will play an active role in a social development” (SER, p. 14). This can be said the vision is ambitious, and it clearly relates to main directions indicated in the mission statement of the RC.

During the interviews we could acknowledge that the mission statement is recognized by most respondents across the RC community.



And the mission statement is also clearly linked to strategic plan and processes within the RC, serving as a solid guide for these.

Institutional goals can be considered as to be in line (consistent) with the mission and vision and support them.

**Compliance level: Fully compliant**

**ET recommendations:**

*None*

**2.2. Strategic planning, governance and administration**

The RC has a Strategic plan for the period 2018-2021 which consists of 4 strategic goals and 14 specific objectives. These goals and objectives are – within the strategic framework – accompanied with the set of expected results and performance indicators. AS such, strategic plan represents a document that covers the areas of function of the RC in a relatively complex way, focusing on academic achievements, resourcing, visibility/presence of the RC, and strategic partnerships.

Similarly to the process of vision and mission development, the strategic plan was, as we can read in the SER and also as it was shared during the interviews, developed in a consultative and participatory way, including the involvement of external stakeholders and private sector (a series of workshops was the main form in this case).

Strategic plan serves as a basis for action plan, business plan and also for the budget planning processes – one of the strategic aims concerns diversification of resources and their efficient use.

As such, it seems the strategic plan is taking into consideration realistically internal and external environment that affects the development of the RC.

Monitoring strategic plan is conducted on two levels – management of the RC (every three months) and College Board (once a year).

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Management and governance are clearly defined with responsibilities divided among the College Board, Academic Council and Management owners/stakeholder. Academic decision-making processes are developed in the line of rectors, Academic Council and Program Committees at the RC, and there is a clear line between responsibilities for overall policy/accountability, senior administration management, and the academic decisions. This also seems to be followed in practice. Election criteria and processes are clearly defined.

As for the students' involvement, they have their Riinvest College Union (RCU) and it has own resources for its activity. The RC is not involved in electing student representatives.

The student participation at the RC's bodies is elaborated as follows: most voted student representatives are becoming members of Academic Council (together with the President of RCU. Also, two most voted students are members of Program Councils. In the SWORT analysis, the quality of student involvement is mentioned as a weakness, no specific measures to change it were identified.

Administration of the RC seems to be functioning effectively, as for the organization, staffing levels and qualification. Their responsibilities are clearly defined.

### **Compliance level: Substantially compliant**

#### **ET recommendations:**

- 1. Consider possibilities to increase quality of student involvement.*

### **2.3. Financial planning and management**

The RC has approved budget for the period 2018-2022 and it seems to have sufficient financial resources to reach its mission and objectives. Main income of the RC is created by student fees, testing services, consultancy, grants, sponsorships and projects.

The RC has its budget broken down into annual budgets as well as 3-year budget can be seen from the figure at p. 18 of the SER. There are specific sums allocated to specific areas of RC operation. From the plan, as presented in the SER, it is not clear how much internal funding





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goes to research and what for, for instance. Also, public outreach is not clearly seen in the financial budget and a specific category of expenditures.

Internal auditor has been involved to make sure the oversight and management of institutional budgeting is in place. Monitoring is done by the RC management quarterly, and by the College Board annually.

Accounting system seems to comply with accepted professional accounting standards.

### **Compliance level: Substantially compliant**

#### **ET recommendations:**

1. *Consider introduction of explicit budget item for supporting research, public outreach activities.*

### **2.4. Academic integrity, responsibility and public accountability**

The RC has its Code of Ethics that is in agreements with College's regulations and also with Kosovo's law. It defines standards of conduct and integrity, and defends values of academic freedom, institutional autonomy and ethical integrity. The Code of Ethics of the RC also refers to the relevant recommendations of the European Community and Council of Europe.

The Code of Ethics requires from all members of the RC community ethical conduct in their activities, and it applies to all staff and units of the RC. After the site-visit ET has learnt that the RC has an antiplagiarism software "Platforma Akademia" which has the feature to check the text in Albanian language. However, during the site-visit teaching staff and students could not refer on the software and the ET has learnt from them that the staff is checking the student texts on google. Thus, the ET assumes that the system is not still implemented in teaching and research activities of the RC.

There are specific structures designed in relation to academic integrity issues at the RC: Disciplinary Committee, and Appeals Committee. The rules and procedures of their actions are described in the statute of the RC and they are made public to the RC community. Besides

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to it, rules and regulations related to the study programs are in place and made known to students.

Some regulations, procedures, and decisions of governing bodies are publicly available, some are not (SER, for instance).

But it can be said that the RC publishes sufficient information about its staff, research and academic activities, programs, students enrolled, alumni, student fees, scholarships and other relevant information.

### **Compliance level: Substantially compliant**

#### **ET recommendations:**

- 1. Ensure implementation of the antiplagiarism software in teaching and research activities through establishing the relevant regulations and instructions that are available for all staff and students.*
- 2. Consider possibilities to make publicly available all the reports (incl. SER).*

### **2.5. Quality management**

The RC has formally adopted a quality assurance policy and in its policy document (Regulation on Quality Assurance) it describes in a sufficient detail its own QA system processes, mechanism, instruments, ways of collecting the data, timeframes and other relevant procedures, also responsibility of those involved. It is a public document, and it is published on the website of the RC.

Quality Assurance office and Quality Assurance Committee are the main structures set up for these processes at the RC. They are responsible to the rector of the RC. Their roles and responsibilities are clearly defined.



It seems to be evident from the interviews and also from the documents of the RC that the College is trying regularly to collect the data about its performance and re-adjust activities, if such a need is identified.

The structure of QA-related processes and organogram of the RC with main roles and responsibilities indicate that QA functions are integrated into planning and development strategies of the RC, and they cover most areas of institutional activities.

A whole range of instruments related to students, teachers, administration staff are being used at different moments throughout the academic year(s), and also a variety of evaluation forms is used (surveys, peer evaluation, focus groups). This way, a relatively rich and complex information can be collected and possibly used for further improvements.

Regular evaluations take place on the level of institution (student questionnaires, academic staff as well as administration staff questionnaire), and on the level of study programs (annual reports). Also, module evaluation, focus groups, peer observation and student questionnaires are used (with a specifically defined focus on modules, teacher performance).

QA arrangements are themselves regularly evaluated and improved, as shown for instance on the example of the main policy document related to the QA at the RC.

### **Compliance level: Substantially compliant**

#### **ET recommendations:**

- 1. Consider possibilities to pay a specific attention to QA of research and of public outreach.*
- 2. Make sure students know what is happening with the feedback they provide about the teaching activities at the RC.*

## **2.6. Learning and teaching**

The organization of study programmes of the Riinvest College is regulated in the Statute of the College, the Regulations on BA and MA studies. The statute define the minimum preconditions for opening a new program or for closing the existing one. Currently the academic programs



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are implemented by three academic units: Department of Economics, Department of Computer Science and Department of Franchise Programmes. Each of the departments has a programme committee which is responsible to discuss and develop new programmes, propose changes in existing programmes, discuss student success, teaching and research performance, approve and change syllabi, propose research projects and approve the committees of diploma/master/doctoral theses. The committees consists of programs teaching and administrative staff and two students. During the site visit ET has learned about the recent decision of the college to integrate some of the concentrations of the programmes and the cancelation some, considering the number of student enrolment, adequacy of academic staff and consultations with the labour market representatives. ET has learnt that while working on the development of the study programmes and learning outcome the programme heads and teaching staff mostly rely on similar programmes in well know institutions and the demands from the labour market, however no training or instructions were given to them in this regard.

The institution has defined the performance indicators that are continuously monitored, such as progress, success and level of drop-out rates by students, students' satisfaction with programmes and resources, career paths, however the institution does not have the target indicators to measure whether the desired performance is achieved. It should be noted that the College considers the results of the monitoring in decision making. One of the examples that the ET has heart about during the site visit was the strategy to offer students part-time or tutoring jobs to tackle with the high drop outs from computer science programmes because of employment outside of the college.

The QA office compiles the annual quality report in cooperation with the program heads, which is discussed at the Quality Assurance Committee and the related recommendations and action plan is elaborated.

The expected learning outcomes for each program are in line with the National Qualifications Framework and the European Qualifications Framework for Higher Education. The institution has learnt and benefited from the experience of implementing the franchise programmes, to enhance the teaching practices on other programmes as well. Teaching staff are appropriately qualified and experienced for their particular teaching responsibilities.

During the interviews, the students and graduates had a very positive feedback related to the flexibility or organization of study process and provision of necessary academic counselling from teaching staff and tutors. The institutions conducts surveys for alumni and employers to learn about their feedback on competencies of their graduates. It was suggested that the

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institutions should include more practical training in its programmes and also to focus on development of transversal skills with special emphasis on interpersonal skills development.

### **Compliance level: Substantially compliant**

#### **ET recommendations:**

- 1. Instruct/train the programme heads and teaching staff in development of study programmes with special emphasis on the development of the programme learning outcomes.*
- 2. Develop the target indicators to monitor the quality of study programmes.*
- 3. Enhance the practical component of the study programmes and pay attention to the development of the transversal skills.*

### **2.7. Research**

The Riinvest College does not have research development plan, it is also not included in the overall College strategy as a strategic objective, but it is mentioned in the objectives of strategic goals (1) that the institution should provide and develop resources, services and quality environment to support teaching, learning and research at Riinvest. As the strategy for the development is not clearly defined, indicators to monitor and measure research performance reflected in the action plan are also not articulated.

It should be noted that under the Riinvest umbrella there is a research institute established, which carries out various research projects funded by the governmental, non-governmental or international donor organization. The College has provided the research work plan for 2019, however it does not describe the research development priorities and goals of the college, but it is a description of the ongoing projects implemented by the Riinvest Institute funded by the external donors. Observing the research projects implemented by the Riinvest Institute the research is mainly done in economics field. The institute has also a good experience of collecting and publishing the data and report that is frequently used in Kosovar media. In terms of the research budget, the college mostly relies on the Riinvest Institute's research budget financed by the donor organizations. The College itself does not have allocated a research funding. Although some of the academic staff and students of the Riinvest College participate in the research activities of the Riinvest Institute, the ET considers that it is not



sufficient to ensure that all academic staff and student have equal opportunities to conduct and participate in research activities. For example, the research institute mainly focuses on research in economics field, thus the staff and students from computer science have limited opportunities to conduct research as the institution does not have allocated its own budget for research activities.

Academic staff is aware and obliged to meet the requirement of publishing at least one research paper in every three years. The research performance still is not included in the academic staff performance evaluations system.

### **Compliance level: Partially compliant**

#### **ET recommendations:**

- 1. Develop a research development plan that articulates the research priorities and objectives of the Riinvest College and specify indicators and benchmarks for performance targets.*
- 2. Considering the research development plan of the Riinvest College, develop corresponding research budget that would include funding from both internal and external sources.*
- 3. Enhance the integration between the academic and research activities of the College and the Riinvest Institute.*
- 4. Ensure that the staff and students of different departments have similar opportunities to carry out and participate in research activities.*
- 5. Include the research performance as one of the criteria for staff performance evaluation system.*

### **2.8. Staff, employment processes and professional development**

The Riinvest College has developed an employment handbook “Guide on Job Orientation”. The handbook gives the key information and principles about the College and teaching approaches and describes the recruitment process. According to the Guide the recruitment process is based on public call on vacancy, where the announcement should include the title and description of the post, the criteria the applicants must meet, the required documents, the address details and deadline for the submission of the application. As for the selection procedure, it consists of the



written test and interview with selected candidates. However, during the interview the written test has not been mentioned as part of the selection procedure from the newly employed staff. ET has also learnt that the college has additionally used the “demonstration lecture” as part of the selection procedure, where even the students’ feedback was considered. ET considers this as a very positive practice, however it is important that the regulations fully describe the selection procedures and the application are aware about each step of the selection process in advance. The College provides the orientation for both new administrative and teaching staff. While in case of the administrative staff General Secretary is the main mentor of the new employee, in case of the teaching staff the head of the program takes this responsibility.

The College pays attention to maintain a reasonable ratio between teaching staff and students. According to the SER current full time academic staff/student ratio is 1/23, while the ration defined by the ministry is 1/40. The ET has paid attention to the fact that in the list of 60 academic staff, there is only 13 person that holds academic titles (one regular professor, one associate professor, one assistant professor, ten assistant), others are the lecturer. Among them many of the have Phd degrees and are employed on full time position. In the statute or in the code of conduct there is not given a clear qualification requirements and criteria to be hired on academic position. For example, the code of conduct defines that the regular professors, associate professors and assistant professors should hold PhD degree and be able to demonstrate a successful background of teaching, research and professional or artistic practice to be evaluated by at least three appraisers who have at least one title higher than the candidate's current call for advancement. However, there is not any difference given in terms of the requirements for regular professor or the assistant professor. Also it is not clear how the institution define i.e. successful background in research. There is not a procedure defined on promotion of the academic staff and consideration of the results of their performance evaluation.

Staff employed at the College hold relevant qualification to successful perform their administrative, teaching and research duties. The performance of the teaching staff is evaluated thought the student surveys and lecture observations. Results of the evaluations are discussed with the program heads and further steps for improvement of performance are planned.

The institution carries out various staff professional development activities, mostly in cooperation with international partners and Erasmus+ projects and usually the participants of the activities carry out dissemination session for the colleagues at the college, e.g. after participating in the curriculum development training the curriculum of the computer science programme has been significantly revised. However, in order to ensure provision of most relevant professional development interventions the institution does not have a formal procedure to identify the needs of its staff.

### **Compliance level: Partially compliant**



**ET recommendations:**

- A. *Revisit the Guide on Employment and ensure that it includes performance evaluation, promotion, support processes, and professional development opportunities for academic and administrative staff.*
- B. *Ensure that the recruitment process and criteria are fully described in relevant regulations and is available for possible candidates in advance.*
- C. *Define qualification requirements for different levels of academic titles and the procedure for their promotion.*
- D. *Develop a procedure for evaluation of procedure for administrative staff, and ensure that the performance evaluation system of academic staff among others includes self-assessment.*
- E. *Define the procedure to collect the professional development needs of staff and plan the professional development activities accordingly.*

## **2.9. Student administration and support services**

The admission requirements and procedure at Riinvest College are defined in the Regulation on Bachelor Studies and Master Studies. The college has published all the necessary information related to the admission procedure on the web site and also uses the online platform to receive the applications. Riinvest College has established a Recruitment Office, which carries out marketing campaign aiming at attracting high performance students at the institutions and also carries out the administrative work related to the admission procedure. According to the Riinvest regulation and student welfare policies, Riinvest College offers a scholarship scheme for students in a form of subsidy and/or payment deductions. For the academic year 2018-2019, Riinvest College has launched a STUDY FOR FREE Model, which provides a first free of charge study year for all excellent and special talented students. The Riinvest College also cooperates with businesses to attract the merit based scholarships for its students. To ensure transparency of the process to award scholarships the college has elaborated a form, which calculates the score for scholarship based on student's academic performance.

The College organizes orientation program for new students which covers information about programmes, teaching staff, services provided at the institution and the team building game. The College has established the integrated information management system, which allows tracking the student data, such as student profile, drop-out rates, results of the satisfaction surveys and alumni career path.





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The College has elaborated the student handbook, which includes all the necessary information related to the study process, students' rights and responsibilities of students, procedure for complaints and appeals.

The institution provides student support services such as providing guidance related to career development, international mobility, extracurricular activities and alumni support. According to the results of the surveys provided in SER and the results of the interviews students and graduates had a very positive feedback regarding the student support services at the Riinvest College.

**Compliance level: Fully compliant**

**ET recommendations:**

1. *None*

## **2.10. Learning resources and facilities**

The Riinvest College is located in the centre of Pristina. It operates in a building of 2,000 m<sup>2</sup>. During its tour of the facilities, the ET observed the seminar and lecture halls, offices for administrative staff where students can also receive consultations, offices for academic staff, library, computer lab, meeting rooms, business incubator.

The building offers modern facilities for teaching and research with well-equipped classrooms, library, and computer labs, which are adequate, clean and well maintained. The library is well equipped with books, journals and other materials and students have access to the Jstor international scientific database. The library has a librarian who records the loans and returns of the materials and instructs students on using the library resources.

The surveys conducted by the QA office among the students and staff of the college indicates questions related to the adequacy of the learning resources and facilities and so far the feedback is positive. The building has an elevator, thus the students with physical disabilities are able to easily navigate in the building. Observing the facilities ET recalled that the institution is planning to increase student enrolment. In this regard, ET suggests that the institution pay

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attention not only to the ration between students and academic staff, but also to the physical capacity of the college facility, including the lecture halls, library and computer labs.

**Compliance level: Fully compliant**

**ET recommendations:**

- 1. Ensure that in case of increased student enrolment the College facility remains sufficient to offer adequate environment to students and staff.*

**2.11. Institutional cooperation**

The strategic development plan of the Riinvest College for 2018-2021 includes the development of the strategic partnerships as one of the strategic goals (strategic goal 4). This includes development of partnerships on both national and international level. On international level the main emphasis is made on increased number of Erasmus+ projects and bilateral agreements to provide more mobility and exchange opportunities for the college students and staff. As for the cooperation on national level it focuses on cooperation with business sector to provide more internships and employment opportunities for students. The cooperation of the Riinvest College with business sector includes agreements on provision of internship and employment opportunities for Riinvest students and their participation in the development of the study programmes. The Riinvest College has cooperation agreements with the University of Dubrovnik, University of Ljubljana, University of Ancona, University of Korca, Polytechnic University De La Marche, Ancona, Staffordshire University, University of London and LSE. All responsibilities are clearly set for both sides in the inter-institutional agreements and the college staff and students benefit from the cooperation. The College also participate in Erasmus + projects and annually approximately 15 students participate in the Erasmus mobility programmes. To support staff and students to participate in the international exchanges and other professional development opportunities the college provides orientation program and consultations, English language courses and operates IELTS testing centre. At this point the staff performance evaluation system does not include engagement in the international cooperation as an evaluation criteria and an advantage for further promotion.



The College keeps close links with its alumni, tracks information on their career paths and organizes alumni meetings. The college graduates also keep communication with the College and professors and consider them as a key resources to support them in their career development and implementation of various projects.

**Compliance level: Fully compliant**

**ET recommendations:**

- 1. Include engagement in international cooperation as one of the criteria for staff performance evaluation and further promotion*

**1. OVERALL EVALUATION AND JUDGEMENTS OF THE ET**

|                     |                         |
|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Standard 2.1 .....  | Fully compliant         |
| Standard 2.2 .....  | Substantially compliant |
| Standard 2.3 .....  | Substantially compliant |
| Standard 2.4 .....  | Substantially compliant |
| Standard 2.5 .....  | Substantially compliant |
| Standard 2.6 .....  | Substantially compliant |
| Standard 2.7 .....  | Partially compliant     |
| Standard 2.8 .....  | Partially compliant     |
| Standard 2.9 .....  | Fully compliant         |
| Standard 2.10 ..... | Fully compliant         |
| Standard 2.11 ..... | Fully compliant         |

In conclusion, the Expert Team considers that:

**The Riinvest College is *substantially compliant* with the standards included in the *KAA Accreditation manual* and, therefore, recommends to *accredit it* for a duration of 3 years.**



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### Expert Team

#### Chair

**Prof. Milan Pol**

**July 12, 2019**

(Signature)

(Print Name)

(Date)

#### Member

**Ms Ketj Tsojniashvili**

**July 12, 2019**

(Signature)

(Print Name)

(Date)

#### Member

(Signature)

(Print Name)

(Date)

#### Member

(Signature)

(Print Name)

(Date)

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**Member**

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(Signature)

(Print Name)

(Date)

**Member**

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(Signature)

(Print Name)

(Date)