

UBT COLLEGE

BA ART AND DIGITAL MEDIA PROGRAMME

ACCREDITATION

REPORT OF THE EXPERT TEAM

31 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.

Date of site visit:

31May 2019

External Expert (EE) member:

Professor Alan Brickwood - for the BA Art and Digital Media programme only.

Coordinators from Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA):

Avni Gashi, Acting Director of KAA.

Shkelzen Gerxhaliu, Senior Officer for Evaluation and Monitoring.

Arianit Kreasniqi, Senior Officer for Evaluation and Monitoring.

Sources of information for the Report:

The EE was provided in advance of the visit 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 Programme Proposal for the proposed new BA Art and Digital Media programme together with model syllabuses.

Meetings held with the management of the institution, quality assurance representatives and administrative services were common to both institution and programme evaluations being conducted during the visit. Meetings were also held with heads of study programmes, teaching staff, employers and external stakeholders. This being an initial accreditation, there were no meetings with students and no specific samples of student work to examine.

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

Criteria used for the program evaluation:

The KAA's recently published Accreditation Manual together with formats for the preparation of reporting by Expert Teams (ET).

The Institutions own criteria for quality assurance, as published within the SER.

1.2. SITE VISIT SCHEDULE

30 May

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| 19.45 | Meeting at the Reception of the Hotel |
| 20.00 | Working dinner |

31 May

| | |
|---------------|--|
| 08.30 | Meeting at the reception of the hotel |
| 09.00 – 10.30 | Meeting with the management of the institution |
| 10.40 – 11.50 | Meeting with quality assurance representatives and administrative services |
| 12.00 – 13.00 | Meeting with the heads of study programs and Deans |
| 13.00 – 13.50 | Lunch break |
| 13.50 – 14.50 | Visiting tour of the facilities and infrastructure |
| 14.50 – 17.40 | Meeting with teaching staff |
| 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

UBT College describes its origins as being built upon the experience of the Institute of Enterprise Engineering and Management. It was licensed to operate as a private provider of higher education by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology on 18 October 2004 (reference number 808/02-1).

The philosophy of the institution is described in its SER as offering competitive programmes in education with teaching based on labour market demands and international practices. It further describes itself as a pre-eminent centre of intellectual and cultural activity in Kosovo, improving the region's quality of life through the skills, knowledge, experience and engagement of its faculty, staff, students and alumni. Its aim is to be a leading contributor to growth and strategic development by preparing leaders for the 21st century with a global outlook and the skills needed for educational, social, economic, political, environmental and cultural advancement.

In delivering its mission statement, UBT has identified several strategic objectives:

- Achieving academic excellence.
- Developing research, innovation and social responsibility.
- Creating a positive working and learning environment
- Maintaining and increasing internationalisation and regional partnerships.
- Partnering with the community.

The College currently has around 10,000 students enrolled on courses within 15 Faculties. This represents 6.6% of all higher education students in Kosovo and 18.3% of students studying in private institutions. It has an overall student progression rate of 77.6% across a total of 31 programmes and a graduate employment rate of 98.8%.

Of these, 6% are expected to be studying on programmes in the field of Art and Design.

The proposal seeks accreditation for a 3-year, full time, BA Art and Digital Media programme with an intake of 50 students each year, to total 150.

2. PROGRAM EVALUATION

2.1 MISSION, OBJECTIVES AND ADMINISTRATION

During discussions with the Dean of Faculty, Head of the study programme and teaching team the EE examined closely how the proposed curriculum, and especially its balance of studies, enabled the overall programme to comply with the very strong mission statements made at both institutional and Faculty level on the preparation of graduates for the ‘world of work’ in Kosovo.

The EE was informed of the demand for ‘art professionals’ by the Kosovo labour market and how it is currently operating with many shortages of professionals in industry and across important cultural and art institutions. These include the Art Gallery, National Theatre, Kosovo Museum, Ministry of Galleries and Libraries, all due to a weak arts support infrastructure and supply of young people coming through the education system.

The EE was entirely satisfied with the descriptions made about the state of affairs in Kosovo and statements in the detailed proposal. These were endorsed during discussions with staff in the Faculty and from a meeting with an independent employer/stakeholder. The latter being the owner of a company established some 16 years ago in the field of digital media and currently employing 30 persons.

Compliance level

The proposed study programme is fully compliant with the overall mission of the institution. (Standard 1.1)

The BA program in Art and Digital Media is designed to prepare students academically and practically so that, upon successful completion, they will have developed a set of intellectual, practical and transferable skills consistent with the National Qualifications Framework and the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

The outcomes provided in the proposal are very thorough to include critical awareness, interpersonal, social and communication skills and an ability to handle and employ

information including information technologies. These being consistent with universal expectations of a graduate from higher education.

In designing the programme, several members of teaching staff have been able to draw upon their own experience and advice from contacts, which included studying and working abroad in the UK, Finland, Norway, Slovenia, Germany, Italy, the USA, Canada, Albania and Turkey. Advice had also been sought from a number of overseas higher education institutions - The School of Visual Arts and Parsons School of Design, both in New York; University of the Arts, London; Kingston and Ljubljana Universities. The EE was able to inspect several professional endorsements and offers of collaboration and support from industry – both in Kosovo and in the UK.

Compliance level

The EE is entirely satisfied that the intended outcomes are soundly based and fully compliant (Standard 1.2)

The general shape of the study programme is readily recognisable and embodies a pattern of ‘best practice’ commonly found elsewhere in institutions of higher education internationally. Teaching methods are broad with a predominance of practical, as opposed to theoretical, interdisciplinary rather than multidisciplinary, and progression through coursework embracing projects, problem-based learning, simulated learning, case studies and collaboration with professionals and practitioners – all alongside conventional lectures, seminars, tutorials and self-directed learning.

Students are required to learn research skills and have a high-level awareness of the social, historical and technical context of their work.

Compliance level

The study programme has a well-defined overarching didactic and research content. It is fully compliant. (Standard 1.3)

There are formal policies, guidelines and regulations dealing with responsibilities relating to the management and delivery of programmes and recurring procedural and academic issues. There is also a Code of Ethics relating to conduct in teaching, research, assessment in all academic and administrative activities. These are established at institutional level with local Faculty arrangements for administration and implementation. They are comprehensive, detailed and describe the roles, behaviour and responsibilities of academic managers and staff, the academic calendar, ECTS arrangements, regulations concerning student attendance and student group sizes. They are made publicly available to all staff and students.

The Faculty has an established Faculty Council and two sub committees - the Quality Assurance Sub Committee and the Ethics Committee. These will be using a comprehensive

and highly appropriate set of key performance indicators to inform their work. This is evidenced by SWOT analyses which highlight, for example, commonly found weaknesses in the competences of school leavers, career guidance, slow economic development and an unstable operating environment.

Compliance level

The EE is satisfied that these measures are fully embraced at Faculty level. They are fully compliant. (Standards 1.4, 1.5 and 1.6)

ET recommendations:

1. The Faculty Council keeps under review the collation of data and, in particular, the KPIs it uses to inform its work.
2. 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).
3. An administrative check be taken of a variety of different, outdated titles used to describe the Faculty in different parts of the documentation.

2.2 QUALITY MANAGEMENT

The Faculty Council is entrusted primarily with the role of protecting academic standards. This is to ensure that academic policies relating to teaching and learning are applied across all programmes and to making recommendations in relation to academic matters. The Dean has overall managerial responsibility for the overall delivery of quality academic and other services to the Faculty's students, staff and other stakeholders.

The programme proposal is new and located within a newly formed Faculty of Art and Digital Media. There is therefore limited evidence upon which to draw at present other than in the compilation of the programme proposal.

The standards comply with those in the KAA's Accreditation Manual, are incorporated in the Faculty's QA processes and implemented more generally across the institution. Knowing this, plus the positive attitude and experience of the leadership and staff of the Faculty, the EE is as confident as can be that these standards will be applied satisfactorily in relation to the programme.

Compliance level

It is a new programme and actual compliance is difficult to assess. The EE, however, considers the arrangements will probably be 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 Faculty has met the minimum requirements specified in the Administrative Instruction on Accreditation. The SER provides listings of staff by qualification, tenure and by the percentage of time they will spend on teaching, research and administration – although the numbers given for the latter are identical across all staff. This has been approved by the National Quality Council.

It also specifies a degree of exclusivity so that no member of teaching staff may hold more than two positions at any one time (one full time, one half time) regardless of the education institution where they are employed.

Most of the 25 staff listed have contracts through to 2021, some a little longer. They are mostly full time and this has been verified via the e-Accreditation System operated by the KAA. Staff members assigned in the curricula as subject leaders cover nearly 80% of the teaching load.

The EE was pleased to see that there is an ‘equivalence’ facility in the regulations that recognises qualifications equal to a requirement for a PhD for staff in charge of programmes. This applies to artistic and applied science situations.

The Faculty’s Staff Development Plan has a sound set of objectives, matching measures and finance procedures to ensure the development of staff in a rapidly changing environment. To date, the priorities that have emerged from internal consultations with senior staff include supporting professional development of those in management roles, supporting e-learning activity, ‘knowledge’ and ‘technology transfer’.

During 2018 staff development was focused upon updating pedagogical skills in a number of topical areas such as student-centred learning, learning how to design programmes, group learning, problem and project-based learning, e-learning, assessment and the integration of key skills into the curriculum.

The principles and arrangements in place covering the responsibilities of teaching staff in their engagement in the academic community, availability for consultation with students and community service, together with regular appraisals, all look sound. In particular, these should enable a wholistic, fair and flexible approach to the shape and content of an academic member of staff’s portfolio of work and their workload. This to include the main areas of teaching, research and external engagement whether the latter be ‘for profit’ or ‘not for profit’ and could result in some interesting and innovative arrangements. Not all staff can be motivated, capable and willing to embrace teaching, research and external engagement on some common ratio. An individual’s priorities can change over time.

The system appears sensitive enough to accommodate any peculiarities of the subject range associated with the programme proposal.

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

A particular concern of the EE was the content of the curriculum and especially the appropriateness of its strong fine art base.

There were a number of questions that had to be pursued and resolved satisfactorily. These included whether graduates would be equipped with the skills to develop animation and visual concepts from initial design to finished product? Could they realistically create animations and motion graphics for games and movies; develop 3D models, animations and simulations; be able to work with character design, game world environments and animations, curating, video art production, post production, stage production, gallery and museum management?

Essentially the concern was about whether the design of the programme with its fine art base would produce graduates consistent with the programme objectives and mission of the Faculty and UBT - whether those graduates could survive and prosper in the workplace of Kosovo.

Discussions with the Dean and teaching staff associated with the programme were wide-ranging and included topics on:

- the qualifications and poor preparation of school leavers (identified repeatedly in the Faculty's SER as a 'weakness' of the system in Kosovo);
- the rapidly changing technological environment - a great deal of which now relies upon intuitive and abstract approaches rather than traditional technologies and skills;
- the necessity to avoid extremities of a wide spectrum of endeavour that might include graduate impracticality and overconfidence in their abilities, at one extreme, and esoteric self-indulgence at the other;
- how art studies and practice can provide a low barrier to participation;
- curriculum design and a proposed balance of studies based largely on a 60/40 ratio between practice and theory:

and, especially important to this programme proposal,

- the significance of 'transferable skills'.

The EE challenged the teaching staff in these matters and was satisfied with the rationale for the overall design of the programme – content, delivery and assessment methods. They understood and appreciated difficulties that might occur and described strategies they said they would adopt to exploit success and minimise any impact from shortcomings once the programme was operational.

The curriculum overview and sample syllabuses provide full descriptors for each subject. These include objectives and learning outcomes; the teaching and learning methods to be used; the balance between theory and practice and types of assessment; the resources and equipment that will be made available to students; timing, duration and indicators of workload; and reading lists. These are to be included in a student handbook given to students at an induction session prior to the commencement of each academic year. This handbook will also include procedures and ‘students’ rights’ in the event of dispute and appeals over, for example, the assessment of their work.

The EE was impressed with the thoroughness of this information which should enable students to have a good understanding of what the study programme provides and what is expected of them.

It had been decided not to attempt to conduct the programme in English. There is therefore no English language component in the curriculum. The teaching staff are aware this will probably limit student access to foreign learning resources, postgraduate study and professional mobility.

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

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 thorough and fully compliant. (Standards 4.1 to 4.12).

ET Recommendations

1. The teaching team look closely at the assessment scheme to assure themselves that the apparent lack of weightings between subjects, coupled with detailed assessment regulations, could not condone students following unintentional pathways and outcomes – for example, a student progressing through the programme with a substantially theoretical bias.
2. The Faculty and programme teaching team might reconsider their decision over the absence of English language teaching at a point when there has been some experience of running the programme. It could be offered as an option.

2.5 STUDENTS

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.

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 difficulties arise. 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.

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 section on research was a joy to read. It pointed to sound policies of a general nature and others more specific to art and design in the Faculty and to the local culture and work environment. This was encouraging and demonstrated a genuine enthusiasm to explore and exploit opportunities in Kosovo.

The EE was informed of UBT’s track record of, and ambitions for, organising international conferences. For eight consecutive years UBT has gathered world class researchers, artists and specialists from various countries to present their research findings. In October 2018 the Faculty held its first international conference under an ‘integrated design theme’ and intends to repeat this on an annual basis. The EE was told that 41 festivals were planned in Kosovo over four months, starting in September 2019, of relevance to the new programme - including one for sound engineers.

The Faculty has published its priorities for research activity and is planning to establish an Art Research Institute alongside seven other existing Institutes and eleven Centres of Excellence at UBT.

There is also a progressive attitude to academic staff workload that takes into account respective commitments and obligations of teaching, external activities, research and associated administrative duties. UBT has also demonstrated real support by its acceptance of more flexible definitions of research for the Faculty. These include the participation or production of articles published in indexed journals; conference papers; panel discussions, talks, seminars and debates; community outreach programmes focused upon art; books, online media projects and other relevant publications; exhibiting; moderation of guest lectures with artists, curators and art critics; collecting. The SER also provides a listing of the research publications of 14 academic staff in the Faculty.

Compliance level

The EE was impressed by the enthusiasm and innovative approach by the teaching team to take a lead in the expansion of research in the field of art and digital media nationally. The arrangements for research and staff development are fully 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 visiting specially equipped studios, laboratories and workshops with dedicated photography, video, television, sound and editing equipment; a large theatre; classrooms, IT suites and two libraries – one of which was very new.

The space and equipment looked adequate for the numbers of students proposed for the new programme. The SER included a credible outline of predicted income and expenditure relative to the programme over the next two years.

Compliance level

Infrastructure and resources planned for the programme extend over two years to 2021, are credible and represent full compliance. (Standards 7.1 to 7.6).

3 OVERALL EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EE

Delivering a higher education programme in fine art is relatively straightforward, so too is a programme in digital media. There are many of these.

Less common is a higher education programme that has clear vocational objectives to produce graduates for a tough and highly competitive digital media industry using a curriculum built around a core of fine art.

The proposal is innovative, but soundly-based. It draws upon experiences of how some of the big successes in the industry have evolved from non-conventional sources. It utilises the low barrier to participation that fine art offers. It encourages very open thinking and ideas with abstract visualisation and an intuitive, rather than a conventional technical, approach to synthesis and solutions. It overtly exploits transferable skills.

With a new proposal, it is difficult to be absolutely certain and it was for this reason that the EE's examination included three broad queries:

- Whether the faculty, and as a consequence, the proposed programme, might not be able to participate fully and exploit the advantages of a large multi-disciplinary institution of higher education. Initial impressions in the SER suggested the Faculty might be a bit isolated.
- Linked to this, whether there was a bias in UBT that might not be supportive of the programme. The SER has many references to its science, engineering and technology orientation.
- Whether the innovative design of the programme was conducive to producing graduates consistent with the vocational programme objectives and mission of both the Faculty and UBT – could the graduates succeed in Kosovo's world of work. The programme proposal is unusual.

The EE was more than adequately satisfied on all of these three queries.

The EE was impressed with the staff met. All had postgraduate qualifications, most had significant professional and teaching experience and were active in research. Above all, they were genuinely enthusiastic about the new programme.

In conclusion the External Expert considers the BA Art and Digital Media programme proposed by UBT College to be fully compliant with the standards included in the KAA Accreditation Manual

The External Expert therefore recommends the BA Art and Digital programme be accredited for a duration of 3 years with 50 students enrolled on the programme each year, to a total of 150 students, as requested.



Professor Alan Brickwood

12 June 2019