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Republika Kosova - Republic of Kosovo



Agjencia e Kosovës për Akreditim  
Agencija Kosova za Akreditaciju  
Kosovo Accreditation Agency

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***UNIVERSITY OF PRISHTINA  
FACULTY OF MATHEMATICS AND NATURAL SCIENCES***

***Programme of Biology – Master Level (Msc)***

***ACCREDITATION***

**REPORT OF THE EXPERT TEAM**

*PRISHTINA, May 08, 2019*



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Context

**Date of site visit:** May 08, 2019

**Expert Team (ET) members:**

- Mladen Krajacic – Full Professor Tenure – University of Zagreb
- Vassilis Tsiantos – Full Professor – Eastern Macedonia and Thrace Institute of Technology
- Delia Gologan – 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 by the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences
- Quality Improvement- and Implementation of Recommendation Plan by the Department of Biology
- Data resulting from the Site Visit

**Criteria used for program evaluation:**

- Compliance with the overall mission statement of the Faculty, and the University
- Consistency with the National Qualifications Framework, and the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area
- Recognition of didactic and research concept, as well as formal regulations dealing with academic and ethical issues (Kosovo Accreditation Agency - Accreditation Manual)



## 1.2. Site visit schedule

### (7<sup>th</sup> May)

19.45 Meeting at the Reception of the Hotel

20.00 Working dinner

### (8<sup>th</sup> May)

08.45 Meeting at the reception of the hotel

09.00 – 09.30 Meeting with the management of the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, University of Prishtina (including Dean of the Faculty, Prof. Tahir Arbnesi, and Head of Department of Biology, Prof. Avni Hajdari, also Vice-Rector for Quality, Prof. Merita Berisha)

09.35 – 10.35 Meeting with the head of the Study Programme in Biology (Msc) (Prof. Ferdije Zhushi Etemi, Prof. Elez Krasniqi)

10.40 – 11.20 Meeting with quality assurance representatives (Coordinator for quality assurance, Prof. Lluga-Rizani)

11.25 – 12.10 Meeting with teaching staff  
Professors Linda Grapci-Kotori, Idriz Vehapi and Hazbije Sahiti

12.10 – 13.15 Lunch break

13.20 – 13.50 Visiting tour of the facilities and infrastructure (*used for the implementation of the programme*)

14.00 – 14.50 Meeting with students  
(Defrim Sahitaj, Leonora Ibrahim, Adelina Sadriu)

14.55 – 15.40 Meeting with graduates and employers of graduates

15.45 – 16.00 Closing meeting with the management of the faculty and program



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

The Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences was founded in 1971 by the Assembly of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo. as a unit of the University of Prishtina. Ever since, five departments of the Faculty have been responsible for research and higher education activities in mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology and geography. This is the only research and higher education institution in natural sciences in the country.

Following establishing of the Republic of Kosovo, the Faculty has changing study programmes aiming to rich European standards, thus an agreement with Bologna Declaration was achieved in 2001. All the formal policies, guidelines and regulations are in agreement with the University of Prishtina Statute.

Study programmes offered by the Department of Biology, constitutive unit of the Faculty, encompass:

- Bachelor study programme in
  - Biology
  - Ecology and Environmental Protection
- Master study programme in
  - Ecology and Environmental Protection
- and
- PhD study programme in
  - Biology of organisms and ecology

## **2. PROGRAM EVALUATION**

### **2.1. Mission, objectives and administration**

The proposed Master programme in Biology has to improve biology-bachelors' knowledge and understanding in a comprehensive spectrum of biological disciplines. Above all, it should provide advanced scientific knowledge and professional skills in botany and zoology. The graduates are expected to be competent for professional career in public institutions, private enterprises, governmental and non-governmental organisations, dealing with biological processes, structures and systems, interpreting and evaluating biological data,



as well as resolving practical problems in the respected field. Moreover, graduates would be skilled to apply for further PhD study programme in biology.

The study programme is well defined and its mission complies with the overall mission of the Faculty/University. Learning outcomes meet national and substantial European academic standards. Procedural and academic issues are publicly available to both staff and students, who comply with ethical regulations in research, teaching and other academic and administrative activities.

**Compliance level:** Fully compliant

**ET recommendations:**

No recommendation

## 2.2. Quality management

According to the respective article of the Statute of the University of Prishtina, the Faculty has to establish a Study Committee – an advisory body, responsible for drafting new study programme and for adaptation/revision of the existing one. So, it has been done for the programme undergoing accreditation. Aside the Faculty management, responsible for organising teaching process, research, quality assurance and monitoring of students examination and progress, a Head of the Department is responsible for coordination and supervision of those issues. Furthermore, at the department level, there are two persons among the academic staff, who are responsible for the respective programme.

At the university level, quality management is provided by the Central committee for quality assurance and evaluation, and the Office for academic development. There is also the Committee for quality assurance and evaluation at the faculty level encompassing management-, academic staff- and student-members, of which the Faculty Coordinator for QA is link between the faculty- and university-level. Finally, students' evaluations of teaching staff and courses are conducted regularly.

Thus, quality management issues look formally well developed and interconnected, however, it's practical value seems quite uncertain. In fact, the effectiveness of the system is not obvious, as revealed from the site visit.

**Compliance level:** Partially compliant



### **ET recommendations:**

1. Less administrative and formal issues would certainly be sufficient.
2. More commitment, action to address problems, and responsibility would certainly be necessary.

### **2.3. Academic staff**

The programme ensures satisfactory provision level of Assistant Professors or higher positioned, full-time staff – those who have to provide courses lectures. Their teaching workload (6 hours per week) makes them feel comfortable, leaving enough time for research, and administrative activities. However, restricted number of assistants, and a demand to organise laboratory work, exercises and seminars in small groups of students, raise a question on:

- assistants' teaching workload, and their ability to participate in research or/and
- quality of the practical work, potentially organised in too large groups

As considered above (2.2) it is uncertain if the overbuilt formal system provided efficient quality assurance, at least when talking about teaching quality.

It is uncertain if promotion criteria included recognition of teaching quality and improvement efforts, although students' evaluations of the teaching staff occurred regularly.

Bizarre structure of the teaching/research staff:

- 9 full professors
- 4 associate professors
- 4 assistant professors
- 8 assistants

reflects far too weak promotion criteria, incomparable to European standards! However, this important issue is out of the scope of this accreditation procedure, and should be considered on the ministry/government level.

In spite of those system weaknesses, the institution provides some opportunities for professional development of teaching staff, especially younger ones, but this is mostly restricted to teaching skills. Forced primarily by their own ambitions, some staff members made significant efforts to improve their research performances, practical work infrastructure,



and consequently their learning outcomes, as well as general service to the institution and the community.

**Compliance level:** Partially compliant

**ET recommendations:**

1. Research-based promotion criteria should be much higher to stimulate quality improvement, competitiveness, and comparability to European research/higher education standards.
2. Staff should be additionally stimulated, even forced, to apply for research trainings, internships, study visits and postdocs at respectable universities abroad.
3. The promotion criteria should rely to a greater extent on students' evaluations

#### **2.4. Educational process content**

Nowadays, the Master level Study programme in Biology is considered to be “classically” oriented, however the concept is actually perfect, trying to use strengths and avoid weaknesses.

Conceptualised towards botany and zoology, the programme does not miss mandatory courses in “modern” biology in the scope the first, fundamental semester. Partly joint second semester offers some mandatory courses aiming to develop general skills (project planning and management, scientific research principles), and starts to divide programme stuff by offering mandatory physiology and ecology courses in botany or zoology, respectively. The third semester brings just a menu of elective courses in both specialisations. Finally, the last semester encompasses fieldwork in botany or zoology, and a master thesis completion. Indeed, the programme is arranged to use the particular staff- and infrastructure-capacities.

The curriculum structure, with its logical flow, provides learning outcomes and develop general (biology), and specific (botany or zoology) competences, comparable to the respective curricula in the EHEA.

According to students' opinion, there is around 30% of the bachelor-level revision in the courses content. So has been declared by the teaching-staff, too. In that case, a number of syllabuses are improperly written, bringing a content that is expected to be completed at the bachelor level.





Some courses do not bring precise description of the practical work (laboratory exercises). That failure should have been discovered by the Committee for implementation of accreditation recommendations (see the abovementioned statement on formally overbuilt, but not efficient enough, quality management system).

Some courses declared laboratory methods (e.g. chromatography), doubtless very important and useful, however, those methods were not expressed in a particular scientific context (e.g. separation of plant biochemical compounds).

Practical work – internship is a specific and potentially very useful part of the study programme, validated with 5 ECTS, as it was a workload of an elective course. However, its real value is uncertain, as long as there is no indicator of a successful completion.

There is no complaint on student-teacher relationship, student assessment mechanisms, or other mechanisms used for verifying student achievement. Properly designed ECTS system, student workload and adequate number of examinations contribute to the academic feasibility of the programme.

**Compliance level:** Substantially compliant

**ET recommendations:**

1. In spite of remarkable progress, further effort is expected towards improvement of syllabuses – the management system has to be able to discover individual failures.
2. Syllabuses, with their course contents should easily be recognised as master-level syllabuses.
3. Practical work descriptions are expected to have a few words more to express a concrete scientific context, instead of being just a list of methods.
4. Literature references, in the scope of course contents, should be updated. Furthermore, they should be cited in agreement with publishing standards – to demonstrate to the students how to do it properly.

## 2.5. Students

According to the formal system presented by the Self Evaluation Report, clear and formally adopted admission requirements are consistently followed and fairly applied to candidates who possess a high-school diploma, or an equivalent document. Study groups are properly dimensioned, and feedback on students' performance and assessment results is given



promptly. Records of completion rates are kept for all courses and the entire programme, and included in quality indicators system. Academic staff is available for consultation, advices and tutorial assistance.

There is no complaint concerning students' obligations or violation of their rights. The students' transfer between faculties and study programmes is properly regulated.

**Compliance level:** Fully compliant

**ET recommendations:**

No recommendation

## 2.6. Research

The study programme provider would not be considered research-intensive institution. Much stronger commitment to research, as well as international recognition of the research performances should be a driver for continuous development, improvement and update of students' qualification objectives and learning outcomes. Unfortunately, very bad research environment does not contribute at all in defining scientific research objectives. As already stated above, promotion criteria are far too low to stimulate any harder research. Statements that have defined research objectives can be found in the Self Evaluation Report. Policies are established for defining what is recognised as research, and expectations are declared concerning research performances that have to be comparable with international standards. All those objectives, polices and formal expectations fail with promotional criteria that are quantitatively low and not qualitative at all. Insufficient financial support, is another threat that does not play in favour of research prosperity.

Most of the academic staff has a track record of research results published in a number of low-profile journals, or proceedings from easy-entering conferences. Some staff-members have a number of publications published in one single low-profile journal. Some members appear as co-authors of papers that are not related to their teaching proficiency. Some members have not published a remarkable paper for a long time. Those are bad examples originated from that non-stimulating environment.

In spite of unfavourable conditions, some staff-members have made a significant step forward, succeeding to participate in international collaborations, using project-funds to equip their laboratories and improve learning environment for their students. They have published



scientific articles in more prominent journals, and above all, they have included junior teaching staff in their research projects, and supported by mentoring a development of their research skills. A number of successful collaborative research arrangements with colleagues from international community have been developed, without significant assistance and support by both the faculty and university level. These positive examples, resulting from individual enthusiasm, clearly demonstrates that the promotional criteria have to be raised significantly.

**Compliance level:** Substantially compliant

**ET recommendations:**

1. Significantly higher promotional criteria, including qualitative, rather than quantitative aspects, should stimulate higher research performances at the Department of Biology, but also in the whole Kosovar research/higher education area. It has to be arranged from top to the bottom, with an initiative from the Ministry/Government level.
2. In agreement with higher expectations, greater research performances have to be facilitated by more adequate financial support.
3. Stronger selection is necessary, in favour of high-quality staff members. At the same time, the staff structure has to be changed to ensure much higher portion of younger people (assistants, doctoral students and postdoc fellows), and relatively small number of higher positions, reserved for the most prominent scientist/teachers only.

## 2.7. Infrastructure and resources

Implementation of the study programme is substantially ensured concerning overall look at the Department of Biology. Number of teaching and seminar rooms, as well as laboratories, is sufficient for students involved in the programme. In recent years, laboratory equipment supply has generally increased and chemical reagents seemed to be more available. Some parts of the Department do not look very fancy, but this is certainly not the crucial bottleneck in study programme development.

At the same time, similarly as it was stated above (staff and research chapters), there are some laboratories that look restricted in space, but fully equipped for both research and superb laboratory work with students. Those positive examples originate again from



individual performances of outstanding staff-members, and unfortunately not from the system.

Technician staff is missing. At least some of them would be necessary at the Department, to ensure wishful research-intensive environment.

A modest faculty library should have recent international titles (written in English), and those titles have to be included in the learning process as (at least) additional courses literature. The University library, situated next to the Faculty in the scope of the campus, is probably not equipped with items, necessary to support the study programme in biology.

At the Ministry/Government level, as well as the University level, the Department of Biology and the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences are not recognised as STEM area, preferable according to European research and higher education standards. The University has to change its stepmother-relationship to natural sciences and allocate much more money in agreement with specific staff expenses, and not (only) applicants number. The Faculty government is in charge to address much stronger demands to the University, to ensure fair allocation of income.

**Compliance level:** Substantially compliant

**ET recommendations:**

1. More efforts are needed to raise the overall Department to the level already reached by some more developed and properly equipped laboratories.
2. Efforts are expected from all the system levels – Department, Faculty, University, and Ministry – not exclusively from some individual staff members, although the last ones are extremely appreciated.

### **3. OVERALL EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATION OF THE ET**

The Master Study Programme in Biology is compliant with the overall mission statement of the Faculty and University. A consistency with the National Qualifications Framework, as well as substantial consistency with European Higher Education Area standards can be recognised. A strategy for implementation of recommendations from the last accreditation procedure, as well as milestones, a committee for implementation and a list of responsible people are formally appointed. However, the quality management system has to be able to control the weakest links of the chain, because – “a chain is only as strong as its weakest

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link”. It means that the system is expected to successfully manage staff members who are not able to properly write their CVs or syllabuses documents, whose research performances are far below the average in spite of the highest (full professor) academic position, and who are reasonably presumed to be weak links of the chain, concerning study programme quality.

Putting aside weaknesses, that are strongly recommended to be fixed, a remarkable progress has been made by the Department of Biology. The Self Evaluation Report is prepared with more precision comparing to what was produced two years ago. In spite of non-stimulating environment, some staff-members have improved their research performances by international cooperation and more respectable publications. In spite of unfavourable financial support, improvements have been made concerning research-, and student’s practicum-equipment. There were no significant complaints from students’ representatives at the site visit.

In conclusion, the Expert Team considers that the study program in **Biology – Master level**, offered by Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, University of Prishtina is **substantially compliant** with the standards included in the *KAA Accreditation manual* and, therefore, recommends **to accredit** the study program for a duration of **3 years** with a number of **30** students to be enrolled in the program.

#### 4. APPENDICES (*if available*)

1. A
2. B
3. C



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### Expert Team

#### Chair

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(Signature)

(Print Name)

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#### Member

Mladen Krajacic

May 21, 2019

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