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Republika Kosova - Republic of Kosovo



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Agencija Kosova za Akreditaciju
Kosovo Accreditation Agency

UNIVERSITY «HAXHI ZEKA» (UNHZ)

INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION

REPORT OF THE EXPERT TEAM

May, 2020, (Ljubljana, Bucharest, Tbilisi)



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Context

Date of site visit: 14th of May, 2020

Expert Team (ET) members:

- *Dr. Istileulova Yelena, Fulbright, Bologna Expert on QA (EU Commission, DAAD)*
- *Prof. Dr. Elene Jibladze, Ilia State University*
- *Ms. Delia Gologan, PhD student*

Coordinators from Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA):

- *Naim Gashi, Executive 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 University Haxhi Zeka (UNHZ)*
- *Information obtained during the site visit;*
- *Meetings conducted with the management of the institution, teaching and administrative staff, students, graduates, external stakeholders and employers of graduates;*
- *The previous ET report*
- *Video sent by UNHZ*
- *Web-site of UNHZ;*
- *Supplementary documents requested by the ET*

Criteria used for institutional and programme evaluations

- *KAA Accreditation Manual;*
- *Benchmarking of HEIs in Kosovo;*
- *Triangulation;*
- *International articles published on the HEIs of Kosovo*



1.2. Site visit schedule

2. Site Visit Programme

14th May 2020

09.00 – 10.30	Meeting with the management of the institution (<i>no slide presentation is allowed, the meeting is intended as a free discussion</i>)
10.30 – 11.20	Meeting with quality assurance representatives and administrative services
11.20 – 12.00	Lunch break (<i>to be provided at the site visit place</i>)
12.00 – 12.50	Meeting with the heads of study programmes
12.50 – 13.40	Meeting with teaching staff
13.40 – 14.30	Meeting with students
14.30 – 15.10	Meeting with graduates
15.10 – 15.50	Meeting with employers of graduates and external stakeholders
15.50 – 16.00	Internal meeting – Expert Team and KAA
16.00 – 16.10	Closing meeting with the management of the institution

Other information

Overall instructions for HEIs

1. Each meeting should be attended by maximum **6 persons**;
2. The students selected for the meeting should reflect a diversity in terms of fields of study, programme, study cycle, year of study, **students with special needs** if any, etc;
3. The teaching staff selected for the meeting should reflect **a diversity in terms of faculties** and programmes, **full-time and part time, local and international**, etc;
4. The students, graduates and employers of graduates should not be employed at the institution;
5. Anyone **whose attendance won't be agreed in advance with KAA** and the Expert Team will be asked to leave the interview session;
6. **Nametags are to be provided** for all people attending the meetings.



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1.3 INTRODUCTION. A brief overview of the institution under evaluation

The University "Haxhi Zeka" in Peja (UNHZ) is the third largest public university in Kosovo out of 7 public universities, with 11,000 students, 13 bachelor and master studies programmes in the areas of *Business (1), Management in Tourism, Hotel and Environment (2), Law (3), Agribusiness (4) and the Arts (5)*. The environment in Kosovo's higher education has been changing deeply and promptly during the last 5 years, and as a result of it, "education policies are shaped, mediated, localized and hybridized through multiple processes and in interactions"¹. That situation required some instant regulation with the introduced standards by the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) in 2018 to bring a higher quality in the quickly changing environment of its higher education.

There is a trend towards reduction of the number of HEIs: Kosovo had 30 HEIs in 2018, including 9 public HEIs. There are 7 Universities and 21 private HEIs (colleges, institutes, higher professional schools, and academies)² according to the provided reporting, and many of those public and private institutions are going through the newly introduced rigorous accreditation process during the last 2 years.

The University "Haxhi Zeka" (hereafter "UNHZ") in Peja was founded as a public institution in 2011, on the 14th of November on the basis of the Law on Higher Education of the Republic of Kosovo, at a time when the government of Kosovo aimed to develop higher education and increase study opportunities in different regions of Kosovo. Previously this institution was a part of the University of Prishtina with its inherited traditions since 1960, initially as a High Economics - Commercial School and then as Faculty of Applied Business Sciences (ABS). The University was separated from the University of Prishtina in 2011, named after Haxhi Zeka, the National Albanian leader. The study programmes offered by University "Haxhi Zeka" in Peja are study programmes organized according to the Bologna system, with 240 ECTS (4 years) at Bachelor level (60 ECTS per one year).

In terms of the structure and composition of UNHZ's employees, 67 people are the members of the administrative staff (55% female vs. 45% male), and 113 academic staff (70 teaching staff on a full-time and 43 – on a part-time basis) is male-dominated. The strategic plan (p.

¹ Selenica, E. (2018). Education for whom? Engineering multiculturalism and liberal peace in post-conflict Kosovo. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 18(2), 239-259.

² Shala, S., Leka, D., & Morganella, T. (2018). Plagiarism in Kosovo: a case study of two public universities. *International Journal for Educational Integrity*, 14(1), 1-15.



15) makes reference on the figure of 111 academic staff, with 67% male vs. 33% female (74 vs. 37), reflecting small, but acceptable inconsistencies between the SER and Strategic plan. The multi-ethnic composition of the University includes near 10% of non-Albanian community (mainly, Bosnian origins) among its teaching staff.

2. INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION

The current institutional evaluation was carried out on-line by the ET from 3 different locations and countries due to the international epidemiologic context and the lockdown linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. The University's representatives were present at their administrative building of the University in Peja region, Kosovo for the online interviews which took place smoothly with no technical problems interfering with the discussion.

This report follows the KAA manual template and consists of 11 sub headings through which the administration, organisation and management of the institution, as well as teaching and research are assessed.

2.1. Public mission and institutional objectives

The previous mission statement of the UNHZ in 2019 was subject to serious criticism because it was written in a similar way as the missions of two other public universities instead of highlighting the unique features of this institution. The first experience with the new KAA Standards introduced in 2018, their new format and the shortage of time to adopt and implement the new standards were among the main reasons that the UNHZ did not get approval for its institutional accreditation – one of the standards not met at that time being connected with the mission of the institution.

The UNHZ organised the process of rethinking and recontextualising the mission statement and its vision. The institution defined the current mission, vision, and strategic objectives after its preparation, and situational analysis on 26 November 2019 during one-day workshop organized under the moderation of a consultant and with the participation of members of the commission, including the elected members from the students' community. The University mobilised all its capacities, involving various stakeholders to participate in the workshop on discussing the mission and vision of the UNHZ, as well as the new Strategic plan for 2020-2024, which incorporates the updated mission and strategic objectives. The University had a process of revision of mission inviting the representatives from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology of the Republic of Kosovo (MEST). After the feedback from stakeholders was received, the new mission and vision statements were sent to the



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University's Senate for its approval at the beginning of December 2019. As a result, the University defines its current mission statement in the following way:

*“The University Haxhi Zeka continues its positive **academic and artistic tradition**, creates **transformative academic** environments and experiences in order to realize the full potential of its **students**, it implements advanced scientific standards and helps the economic development of Peja region and the country at large”.*

During the site visit (on-line), the university top-management also underlined that the new re-considered mission is different from other universities, and refers to its unique area with the developed agriculture, business infrastructure, as well as the cultural traditions, including Arts and touristic areas.

First of all, the opinion of the ET is that the new wording of this mission is clear, concise and distinguishable with an attention to Peja region. The main emphasis is made on Peja's academic and artistic traditions as well as the community services reflected in the economic development of this region and the country at large. The mission statement is also brief, but incorporates the traditions in teaching and community services ensuring evaluation of progress towards the goals and objectives. It directly covers the **key pillars in teaching** (*academic tradition with realisation of the full potential of students*), **community service** (*development of Peja region*), and indirectly - its **research** (*linked to the transformative environment and implementation of advanced scientific standards*).

The present mission is well known by all members of community proving the transparency of the review process: it has also been published on its web-site, in line with its vision and values (Source: <http://unhz.eu/language/en/>).

Second, the mission statement is complemented by vision with its direct emphasis on the **other elements of pillars** - quality teaching, research as well as creativity in arts in addition to their transparency:

*“A modern and respected university, offering **quality teaching, research and artistic creativity**, which acts as a reliable partner for businesses, the community and local and international higher education institutions, as a promoter of regional development and is a supporter of sustainable development of Kosovar society at large”.*

Third, the mission meets the standards of the KAA in the way how it is defined: the mission reflects the uniqueness of this institution. The mission serves as a guide for UNHZ's strategic

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planning, being consistent with its medium and long term institutional listed objectives (p. 15 of the SER and Strategic plan (from pp. 39-107).

As far as the objectives are concerned, being defined in the SER (p. 15), the ET has asked the top-management to clarify what are the strategic objectives that they are focusing on, and got the answers that the following three fields are of strategic priorities:

1. Teaching and learning;
2. Efficient management and administration;
3. Improving quality through the consolidation of QA mechanisms within the University;

During the online site visit, the representatives of the top-management of UNHZ also made some comments that they faced the certain difficulties during its previous accreditation experience – the new practice of accreditation’s evaluation, the failure of the institutional accreditation due to the introduced changes by KAA and the level of communication with the agency which was not good enough for this institution. By this time, the institution has overcome the difficult time and coordinated all efforts of the management, teaching staff, students and other stakeholders to be prepared for the current accreditation exercise. The UNHZ also invited the representatives of the MEST (Ministry of Education) to get them involved into a process of mission’s revision. It should be noted that the representatives of the management of institution, the heads of study programmeme as well as all other participants (representatives of QA, administrative services, teaching staff, students, graduates, employers and other stakeholders) were well-prepared, and the constructively engaged dialogue and fruitful discussions were taking place during the ongoing online visit.

The answers received during the online site-visit on the new mission and institutional goals in line with the analysis of the SER, Strategic plan and website have been positively assessed by the ET.

At the same time, two things linked to this chapter about the full spectre of community’s involvement in the mission and strategic objectives have remained unclear to the ET, until the answers and comments with clarifications to the first draft of this report were provided.

First, when the representatives of the top-management of institution were asked “*why the University’s mission is not recognised by the outside community*”? (from the SER, p. 15; SWOT analysis), one of the management representatives of this institution answered that it was just a misunderstanding.



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The management of institution has provided the clarification to the first draft of the ET's report and answered: "*The mission of the university is not yet recognised by the outside community*" remained as a weakness in the SWOT *by mistake*. Indeed, the SER confirms that "*...the management has organized various meetings with the academic community, with the administrative units, steering committee, the civil society, industry, MEST representatives, etc. in order to keep them informed about the latest developments of the university...*" In addition, the management has published a revised mission on the institution's website, informed its stakeholders, and groups within and outside the university, about the changes.

The second issue is related to the Statute, which still has a general definition under its mission statement (article 6): it does include the listed areas of academic and artistic traditions, but it also reflects those areas (e.g.: professional counselling) which are not listed in the present mission statement:

*The university is an autonomous institution of higher education that develops academic education, scientific research, artistic creativity, **professional counselling** and other areas of academic activities.*

The ET double-checked this information; indeed, the SER of UNHZ makes a direct reference that the UNHZ Statute has not yet been revised. The same is related to eight objectives of the Statute, which are recommended to be updated. Therefore, the ET hopes that the correspondent planned actions on the listed updates and revisions will be fulfilled.

Though considerable amount of efforts has already been made to improve its public mission and institutional objectives, the management of the institution needs to prepare the action plan till the end of 2020 to adjust and complete the necessary updates. The ET believes that the top management should continue its work finalising the revision of the Statute within its inner circles and with the Ministry of Education or other public authorities responsible. In addition, dissemination of its additional services should be thinking over based on the mission for the representatives of the outside community and stakeholders. The University's mission and strategies are the recently developed tools, and it could take more time and efforts to be recognised by the outside community and stakeholders. The ET also understands that under the current conditions of the COVID-19's lockdown it is more difficult to work with their stakeholders online. Using the creativity and artistic traditions, some interesting actions can be organised through the online sessions, workshops and conferences attracting the attention and delivering the messages about its mission, vision and the objectives of the



institution to its internal staff and to the relevant stakeholders of Peja and Kosovo's community.

Thus, the ET concludes that the current version of the mission statement is an effective guide for its strategic planning, decision making and positive efforts of the top-management are to be continued. Considering that a good progress has been made from the UNHZ's previous assessment till this current stage, the ET also recommends the UNHZ to put its additional institutional efforts to finalise the revision of other documents and regulations (e.g. Statute). The ET also believes that some focus is to be dedicated to the diversity of the teaching and students' staff in terms of its multi-ethnic composition (not required by the standards).

Compliance level: Fully compliant

ET recommendations:

- 1. Envisage the revision of the UNHZ Statute, Research Strategy 2019-2024 regarding its mission and objectives as well as all other relevant articles;*
- 2. Ensure that a new mission statement is disseminated with the provided and additional services to the relevant stakeholders and outside community;*
- 3. Use the situation with the lockdown to organize a series of actions like online sessions, workshops, artistic performances and conferences with the targeted results attracting the attention and delivering the messages about its mission, vision and the objectives of the institution to its relevant community and stakeholders;*
- 4. Consider the possible diversification of the teaching and students' staff from the perspectives of multi-ethnic composition and diversity (related to the introduction part, as well as the beginning phase of the internationalisation process);*
- 5. Prepare the action plan with the listed changes applied to regulations and corresponding updates in UNHZ's website.*
- 6. Consider the potential benefits of reflecting, in the future, the institutions' focus on the agricultural activities of the region in the mission/vision/strategic plans.*

2.2. Strategic planning, governance and administration

The UNHZ developed its Strategic Plan for the following five academic years: from 2020-2024, meeting the KAA's requirement – that the strategic plan should cover at least a period of minimum three years. This Strategic plan has undergone a scrutinised revision from its previous version. The previous Strategic plan for 2017 - 2022 received the negative evaluation in 2019 by the ET of international experts. The Steering Committee of the

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University established a working group with an expanded list of 24 members, including students, external stakeholders, the labour market's representatives and potential employers. The reconsidered Strategic plan includes the following strategic objectives:

1. *Efficient, transparent and accountable management and administration.*
2. *Quality teaching with modern methods and technologies and attractive programmes.*
3. *Consolidated quality assurance system in line with international standards.*
4. *Research activity and quality artistic creativity which contributes to the development of society*
5. *International and inter-institutional intensive cooperation*
6. *Numerous quality services and activities for students.*
7. *Sufficient, contemporary and well-equipped infrastructure.*

The goals for the next 4 years incorporate the issues of strategic importance in teaching, QA, the drive towards internationalisation and re-orientation of a “teaching-university” towards a stronger “research-oriented” university. The web-site also reflects the need to “*create new knowledge through scientific research based on international research standards and developing innovative applied ideas to meet the needs of society*” increasing scientific research by 30% from its current level in the next 5 years.

During the on-line site visit's discussion, the ET noted with satisfaction that the representatives of UNHZ have commented that they also communicated these changes through the media and various meetings with different representatives of labour market. As far as the short and medium-term planning, the data gathered indicated a focus of the short-term efforts on improving the quality of teaching, greater engagement in research as well as on the employment of graduates. The following points currently remain as the top three priorities of the institution with realistic account of aspects of the internal environment:

- QA process;
- Teaching and learning with the focus on improvement the curricula;
- Transparent management and administration issues with the mechanisms of control;

The SER points out that this institution went through the scrutinised analysis, and the SWOT is realistically reflecting some shortages of the strategic planning, governance and administration with a lack of new mechanisms to cover some of the aspects of this university. There are still some other areas of improvement, *first of all*, related to the revision of Statute, especially in the parts associated with the strategic planning, governance, administration and other regulations. It has also been mentioned in the section for “public mission and institutional objectives” of the SER, that this process is on the way.



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During the online discussion, the top-management of the institution shared the information that the decisional, executive and consultative bodies have their student representation, including interim committees. The Senate, the highest academic body of the University, includes the members of administration and 2 students-representatives elected by students' community. Students have their voting members in the university's decision-making bodies as well, such as the University Senate and Faculty Councils. It was also highlighted that there is an overlapping of the composition of these bodies, thus eliminating the check-and-balance options. The ET recommends the university to consider differentiating the decisional and executive bodies – for example: a common practice in the European University is that the Rector is not part of both of the Senate – considered the decisional, legislative power of the university, but only of the Administrative/executive body. This way the democratic decision-making processes are guaranteed. At the same time, when the students have been asked about decisional, executive and consultative bodies, they had some difficulties in differentiating them thus indicating that more efforts could be put into explaining to the students how the university works and the methods in which they can get involved as partners of the university.

There are available versions of some documents accessible to relevant parties on the UNHZ website, that should be updated. The Steering Committee is the main decision-making authority – responsible for these issues of management and finance, and the Rector is the main managing authority of the University. The election criteria and processes of the decision makers are described, with the selected institutional regulations uploaded to the website of the institution: <http://unhz.eu/regulations/>. The ET recommends that the older versions of documents should be gradually replaced with their revised and updated versions (e.g. Statute).

The implementation of the strategic plan for the fields of Management and administration with its strategic objective for efficient transparent and accountable management and administration provides the indicators with the targets. The updated adjustments have been made by UNHZ about the long-term planning indicators. However, the Performance Evaluation Framework for Management and administration in 2019 for measurement of achievements are provided for 2022 and 2024 only. *The ET also noted* the following parts are to be reflected, and the UNHZ agreed on it:

First of all, the year of 2020 is not included there, and it is difficult to make judgement about how the listed indicators will be targeted by the end of 2020.

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The majority of indicators for management and administration are simply not available for its basis year - 2019 year, and the next target year is only the year of 2022. It is also recommended to plan 2020 year at this stage to provide a good basis for its short-term planning, otherwise the rational long-term planning will be hindered.

Second, out of 15 listed indicators in 2019, there are only few of them provided with data. For instance, one of those indicators is:

- *Number of meetings per year between academic staff and administrative staff*, with the aim of promoting and encouraging collaboration and teamwork – provides “0” results.

The ET understands that if the figure “0” is located for this indicator, it means that there were no meetings taking places during 2019. Since the same figure is not indicated for neither for 2020 nor for 2021, the ET expresses its concern (with 4 meetings – planned for 2022 and 2024 years). Since the year of 2020 is not included there, it is difficult to make judgement about how the listed indicators will be targeted by the end of 2020. Therefore, the targets are recommended for the year of 2020 with the purposes of planning its consistent results.

Third, some inconsistencies could be traced through the calculation of the budget’s share in 2020 in the SER and the Strategic plan for 2020 related to the fields of “Management and administration”.

While the share of expenditures for management and administration (without donors) within the overall structure of budget in the SER (p.21) is planned about 1.8%, the Strategic plan identifies approximately 2.3 % of expenditures for management and administration within its structure of budget without donors.

Eventually, the budget planned for 5 years (2020-2024) in the SER (p. 21) refers to 10,249,976, Euro and then in the same SER (p. 35), there is a reference to the 3 years’ budget for its 10,931,087 Euro. The UNHZ provided these specific issues with explanation to p.2.2 and 2.3 with the specifics related to 3 years and 5 years planning (more explored in 2.3)

The University also agreed with recommendations provided below and the need to include the relevant indicators related to the short-term target (end of 2020).

It should be noted, that-even if there are no clear short-term indicators in the SER, there is an Action plan prepared for certain activities for the short-term basis up to the end of the year



linked to the UNHZ development strategy (up to the end of December, 2020) providing the basis and evidence for the short-term targets and the planned outcomes.

As far as the longer-term budget processes are concerned, the SER mentioned that a working group drafted the Strategic Plan of the University "Haxhi Zeka" in Peja 2020-2024, with seven important strategic areas, shown in terms of their distribution within the budget. (Comments: the next chapter 3. Financial planning and management) will explore more.

The responsibilities of administrative staff are clearly defined in the Regulation on the internal organisation and systematisation of jobs outlined and provided by the University UNHZ in Peja. The ET also benchmarks all HEIs against each other and should note that the UNHZ provided the satisfactory SER, the online meetings were well-organised and the ET also got a requested documents within a short time. the best reporting in line with the well-organised meetings during the online site visit and an effective feedback.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

- 1. Provide the better communication between academic staff and administrative staff;*
- 2. Consider splitting the responsibilities of the decisive and executive bodies of the university and avoid overlaps of their members in order to ensure a check-and-balance system between them, specific to any democratic institution;*
- 3. Revise and incorporate the related issues of strategic planning, governance and administration in its Statute reflecting its present changes; Include the strategic indicators related to the short-term target – by the end of 2020 in order to monitor the progress made between 2020 and 2022;*
- 4. Replace some of the regulations on the web-site - <http://unhz.eu/regulations/> - with their updated revised version;*
- 5. Ensure that the internal staff and students understand the mechanisms of involvement, the processes, the differences and engagement in the activities of the decisional, executive and consultative bodies. The priority and consideration should be paid that these decision-making structures are clearly differentiated with the adequacy of processes and demonstrated results achieved.*
- 6. Make certain that responsibilities of administrative staff are clear and matching their qualifications;*



2.3. Financial planning and management

The University “Haxhi Zeka” in Peja operates under the MEST budget. According to its SER, UNHZ sees it as an obstacle, because “it is forced to go through longer procedures” (for approval) and long-term budget planning is hindered. Therefore, UNHZ identifies its 1st strategic objective as an efficient, transparent and accountable management with the expected results in its financial independence – “with a specific budget line in the Law on Budget”. The University also should meet all legal requirements to be financially independent from the MEST, including generation of its own resources with the expected identified results with the complete University’s regulations. The main source of financing is the Government, and the University perceives its budget as an insufficient one. According to Article 190 the University is entitled to receive funding from the following 5 sources:

1. the Ministry of Finance’s allocations (for teaching, research, etc.) on the approved budget;
2. Tuition and other fees paid by students;
3. Payments for commercial services;
4. Donations, gifts and aids;
5. Contracts with various bodies for teaching, research, artistic work and consulting.

UNHZ is a public university, and therefore is subject to external audit by the Audit Office of the Republic of Kosovo. The Steering Committee is responsible for the decisions related to financial matters. Internally, the Budget and Finance Office employs 8 people for its operational financial management, and a Vice Rector for Budget, Finance and Infrastructure is directly involved into the issues of budget planning and monitoring. Externally, the issues of financial controls are regulated by Article 204 of the UNHZ Statute including the audit, monitoring of expenditures and budget commitments with reporting and setting the measures. According to the SER, the UNHZ is subject to an annual financial audit and regular reporting to the national authorities. Financial planning, budgeting and accounting functions are carried out by the office that include 8 people working on the financial issues.

The SER also mentions that the additional funding is regularly requested from MEST, MoF, Prime Minister’s Office and the Assembly of Kosovo. The previous ET recommendations made in 2019 were the following: to diversify their financial sources and attract research funds. The current SER recognises that attracting research funds remains the problematic area in line with the lack of its own funds for the staff advancement. At the same time, the SER provides a positive trend in the staff advancement (in chapter 8): Staff, employment process and professional development. From the previous 2019 year, the team of UNHZ is trying to diversify their financial sources through the following financial flows:

- donations from local businesses (7 companies made donations in 2019);



- involvement into international cooperation projects (including 7 Erasmus+ projects planned for this year, with the new sources of income);
- funding from the partners outside.

During the site visit's online discussion, the top management confirmed that they dedicate their efforts to become part of the Erasmus+ and diversify their financial sources, including cooperation with international universities and getting the donations from local businesses.

The present SER makes reference that the budget has been allocated according to the UNHZ's key 7 important areas in 2020-2024 in its Strategic plan by the Working Group of UNHZ. The UNHZ budget was distributed among the same seven areas with the purpose of showing the distribution within the longer term's budget.

The ET also got the satisfactory explanation from the UNHZ on the following inconsistencies (provided below in italic format in the listed 3 inconsistencies) regarding the specifics of the MEST related to the budget and financial management planning. *On the one hand*, the government provided the planned budget for the UNHZ for the next three years (2019-2021) in 2019, and indeed, it was mentioned in the SER. *On the other hand*, UNHZ plans its budget for five years 2020-2024 although they were aware that the budget was approved for only three years 2019-2021. The SER was submitted to the KAA on February 19. In the meantime, the Government planned the new budget for the period of 2020-2022 (March 19, 2020).

The **initial version of this ET** report included the following inconsistencies (and the ET also decided to keep it here just to reflect the specifics in financial planning, as many ET members are unclear about the policies which address the institutional financial sustainability):

*First, the ET notices that there are the following **inconsistencies** within the SER, and therefore, the logic of its distribution in the UNHZ is **unclear**: it provides the same amount of budget allocated for its seven areas of priorities within **5-years** (2020-24) on p. 21, and then - the same amount of budget is shown within **3 years** on p. 35.*

*Second, according to the SER (p. 34), "the University budget is planned for 3 years (2019-2021), with the year of **2019** being approved (not shown in the SER), and the other **two years** are estimated", based on the instructions provided by the MF/MEST (its instructions are not included). Then SER shows **three years**' projections (10,931,087), but does not provide any explanation (for instance, why the years of 2021 and 2022 are allocated with the same amount of lower sum, whether the inflation or deflation rates are taken into accounts, etc.):*



Year 2020 - 3,710,317.00 €

Year 2021- 3,610,385.00 €

Year 2022- 3,610,385.00 €

*At the same time, the SER (p. 20) presents its five-year strategic plan to its budget for 5 years (2020-2024) with the amount of **10,249,976.00. €** (without donors' funding) or **13,993,576.00 €** (with donors' funding). If the SER considers this budget plan for its 5 years' implementation, the following results are received: it is about **2,798,715.2 Euro** per each year (with funds from donors), or **2,049,995.2 Euro** allocated by the MEST per each year (without donors' funding). Therefore, both allocated amount of funds do not obviously cover the needs. The UNHZ budget for its the last year (2019) - **3,555,130.34 Euro** (p. 16; Strategic Plan).*

The detailed budget for each of the UNHZ activities is provided for its planning 5 years in the strategic plan (p. 107), with the UNHZ budget (without donors' funding) for 2020 in the amount of 2,230,716.00 Euro, 2021 – 1,881,136.00 Euro, and 2022 – 1877840.00 Euro (and till 2024). Therefore, comparing the budget of the last year - 3,555,130.34 Euro (p. 16, Strategic plan) and the budget projections for 2020 (and further) is not favourable. Therefore, the ET raises concerns about the sufficiency of the funds and its strategic planning with the longer-term budget, unless the other logic is provided.

Eventually, there are no quite clear examples of attribution of total cost to various activities.

The ET should refer to the fact that the UNHZ has also provided additional comments that the budget planning is based on Article 22 of the Paragraph 1 of the Statute (although the Steering Committee has the right to revise budget and also change the strategic plan according to the available budget). The government planned its budget for three years (2019-2021), - that is why 3 years planning is included in the SER, and the UNHZ has planned its budget for five years 2020-2024 although they were aware that the budget was approved for only three years 2019-2021. The SER was submitted to the KAA on February 19, and the Government plans new budget for the years 2020-2022 (in March).

Looking at the structure of expenditures of this 2020 year, the key three major parts of expenditures go for infrastructure – about 70,6%; teaching – 12.2 % and scientific research – 8.1%, showing the actual and current priorities of the UMIB as an institution: infrastructure; teaching and research.

During the online site-visit's discussions, the institution's top-management team has made the references to the amount of *11 mln. and 13 mln. Euro* which is planned as a final budget



amount to be finally received ensuring the ET about the sufficiency of resources to cover its plans. The ET has also asked for the additional clarification for these two sums, and got the satisfactory answer from the UNHZ that the budget approved by the Kosovo Parliament for 3 years is over 11 million euros, while the budget planned in the Strategic Plan for activities for 5 years is over 13 million euros.

The budget should be clear about the division of funds among various research activities, projects' activities and consultancy services provided to the community's groups and stakeholders. The ET recommends that the proposed spending for the upcoming financial years should reflect not only its research spending (for instance, it has been mentioned that research spending is to be increased between 30% up to 40%), but also its anticipated revenues from the services provided to the various stakeholders on the labour market. The budget should include the planned development of its personnel, first of all, its teaching staff. After the ET received the additional clarifications, the status of the compliance level has been increased from "partially compliant" (improving the evaluation of 3.1 and 3.5 standards) to "substantially compliant".

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

- 1. Provide more clear explanation on the correlation between the expected incomes and expected expenditures – the latter should be correlated with the Strategic plan of the institution;*
- 2. Clearly demonstrate a sufficiency of the institutional budget, providing the evidence for the possible additional sources of income, especially in the case of a strictly limited budget*
- 3. Ensure that the financial sustainability through the evidence of alternative forces of funding;*
- 4. Provide the attribution of total cost to all listed activities with an additional explanation.*

2.4. Academic integrity, responsibility and public accountability

The university has two codes of ethics, one is designated for the academic personnel and students and the other one – for administrative staff. Hence these two documents encompass

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all of the constituents of the university – academic personnel, administrative and support staff, as well as students. Documents define main principles of behavior in line with professional, moral and ethical values. The principles of academic freedom and scientific integrity are well defined in the Code of Ethics for the academic staff and students. The matters of plagiarism is also addressed separately in this Code of Ethics and the matters of various forms of corruption is put forward to a greater extent in both documents. University has a plan to purchase an anti-plagiarism software in order to make its anti-plagiarism efforts more effective.

As the University of Peja is public higher education institution, the matters of institutional autonomy are circumscribed by somewhat rigid regulatory framework within which it has to navigate. Within this framework, the university maintains institutional autonomy and communicates its main principles through the Codes of Ethics.

The decision-making body that oversees ethical conduct in the university is the Ethics Council consists of nine members, including Vice-rector of Teaching and a Vice-rector for the Quality Assurance. The mandate of the Council, as well as the procedures of its operation are laid out in the Statute of the university while the disciplinary measures for the unethical conduct are defined in the two Codes of Ethics. The issues of student plagiarism are reviewed separately, by a designated body specifically for this violation.

The university is dedicated to create the culture of academic integrity and ethical conduct. At the same time, the management is well aware that reporting upon ethical misconduct is culturally frowned upon and is perceived as breaching of collegial code. Therefore, several awareness-building events have been carried out to create a healthy understanding of collegiality. Since plagiarism is a new concept in higher education circles and especially students, the additional awareness building activities have been dedicated to this matter. A kiosk of ‘complaints’ has been introduced on campus to create an option of anonymous reporting of unethical behaviour. In general, the cases of breaching professional and/or ethical integrity can be reported by any member of the university community, but it might be more difficult for students to overcome their fear in doing so if their anonymity is not safeguarded and if they are not ensured that their academic path will not be hindered by their report. A potential solution is an Ombudsman which investigates complaints that students have (although, usually with private education providers), being implemented in some European universities.

In its turn, the University administration makes sure that its operation is transparent and key information with regard to the university operations is readily available to the university community mainly through two mediums: university website and email communications. It is

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worth highlighting that university has given a considerable attention to the matters of openness and transparency thus making it as one of the priority areas in their strategic plan. Therefore, in the next few years the university foresees the increase in activities that are targeting more transparency of university work for internal and external stakeholders. The ET recommends that it should also address ethical conduct among the administrative staff.

It should be mentioned that both Codes of Ethics were approved in February, 2020 and it is still to see whether the approved procedures are put to practices accurately and whether the University continues to put effort in awareness building of its university community with regard to the values of integrity and academic freedom. The ET encourages the university to continue its efforts in this direction and collect the relevant data for monitoring the successful implementation of the processes. Relevant reports on the activity of these structures should be made publicly available – for example through publication on the institutional website – but with the safeguarding of the identity of the watchdogs/reporting persons. The fact that the university does not have all relevant information on the website has also been indicated in other parts of this report.

Compliance level: **Substantially compliant**

ET recommendations:

1. University management has to put special attention to adherence to the ethical norms of the organization and perhaps, monitor the work of the Ethics Council for the first few years.
2. Ensure that the ethical code and the connected procedure address the potential misconducts within the administrative staff / body.
3. Consider the potential benefits of having an Ombudsman – a trust worthy person, who is not an academic staff member, that the students can address to in order to report misconducts, abuse or any breach in following the regulations by the academic or administrative staff.
4. Include publishing more up-to-date relevant information and reports on the website.

2.5. Quality management

Over the course of the past year Quality assurance mechanisms have been reviewed, upgraded and more diversified in the university. This was partially due to the changes in the KAA manual made in 2018, the recommendations from the previous accreditation evaluations, and partially to the fact that quality assurance is a strategic objective of the university for the next few years.



The university management is committed to the quality culture and it is made as one of the strategic priorities of the university. At the regulatory level, the university has introduced the framework of the QA, which takes into account input, process and output measures of assessment. In the coming years, it will be a challenging task for the university to make the introduced framework a well operational diagnostic tool for the university internally and avoid the trap of using the QA mechanisms as a mere response tool to the external quality assurance demands. If the university is successful in this, then they will have fulfilled their intention to created and nurture quality culture.

Universities approach to the QA is comprehensive.

- It attends to the regulatory framework of the QA, including assessment instruments. After 2018, a strategic plan for the QA, as well as the QA Manual were developed. In the light of a comprehensive diagnostics, the QA has introduced six type of assessment targeting academic personnel, administrative staff, assessing quality and relevance of teaching through student, alumni and industry questionnaires.
- Teaching and learning are both incorporated in the internal QA mechanisms. While currently teaching represents a substantially large portion of the university life, research has its share of attention. This is due to mainly external pressures, to which the university has been responding positively. University of Peja has developed a separate strategy for research, and the quality of the work will be evaluated in accordance to the annual implementation plan of it.
- It has ensured effective organizational footing of the QA in the university. In 2018 two QA units were created at the university level: Quality Assurance Office and Quality and Assessment Management Council. First representing an implementing body and the latter being an advisory (and a supervisory) body. In addition, Quality Coordination Offices are created at the levels of faculties. Finally, the university has a Vice Rector for International Cooperation and Quality Assurance. Currently, the QA offices in the university are understaffed. The university management is well aware of this challenge and has launched the hiring process, which was halted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The ET considers that more staff should be hired for the QA office/structures in order to be able to implement all the provisional processes. Funds and necessary resources for their training should be included in the strategic and financial planning of the institution. University representatives mentioned that the students are involved in the QA at the decision-making level – in the Council, as well as at the operational level. Students have actively participated in drafting the QA



Manual and developing questionnaires. Students have also assisted QAO in collecting the responses from student survey. Roles and responsibilities of each QA unit is clearly defined in the Regulation about Quality Assurance, which was adopted in February, 2020. Interviews demonstrated that not only QA representatives but academic personnel and faculty deans are part of the QA processes.

The new QA system covers a whole range of institutional activities but could develop more the components or types of activities focusing on the outcomes of research as this is also a priority area for the institution.

It needs to be highlighted that the QA instruments have been only recently introduced, therefore there is hardly any evidence that the data and results that have been solicited from the assessments have been fed back into the improvement measures of the specific areas in the university. So far, there is one QA report reflecting all six types of assessments. However, there is no evidence that the information and results that have been generated through the data collection have been used for the improvement as of yet. Put it differently, the university has taken into account inputs, process and outputs of the university life, but still has to demonstrate that it is well incorporated into the outcomes. As current QA mechanisms have recently been introduced, those have not been reviewed. However, there is no evidence that the university has streamlined procedures to do so. It is advisable that the Quality and Assessment Management Council and the QAO develop and adopt the procedures to provide foundation for the regular review of the universities internal QA policy, procedures and instruments – just like the review efforts they have made during 2019.

The ET considers that using acquired data for improvement – this should be the area where the university and, particularly, QA representatives have to concentrate their effort for the next years. It is also important that the university carries out regular review of its QA efforts.

Still, few examples of using QA information to improve teaching and learning experience should be mentioned. For instance, analysis of self-assessment reports of academic personnel identified the need to build their capacity in modern teaching methodology and project writing for research. University, has responded to this need quickly and organized trainings in both areas.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:



- 1. Make the introduced framework into a well operational diagnostic tool for the university. Avoid the trap of using the QA mechanisms as a mere response tool to the external quality assurance demands. If the university is successful in this, then they will have fulfilled their intention to create and nurture quality culture.*
- 2. Use collected data for improvement – this should be the main area where the university and, particularly, QA representatives concentrate their effort in the following years.*
- 3. It is advisable that the Quality and Assessment Management Council and the QAO develop and adopt the procedures to provide foundation for the regular review of the universities internal QA policy.*
- 4. Consider increasing the staff of the QA structures.*
- 5. Ensure that the QA system covers all activities within the university – for example: continuing to develop the indicators and QA processes for the research activity.*

2.6. Learning and teaching

UNHZ offers 13 programmes, 8 Bachelor's Degree and 5 – Master's degree programmes. BA level programmes of 3 or 4 years correspond to 180 ECTS and 240 ECTS respectively and MA level programmes of one or two years corresponding to 60 or 120 ECTS. The programmes are organized in accordance with the overarching legal provisions in the Law of higher education, complemented with the university level provisions in the statute and three documents to regulate Bachelors, Postgraduate (Masters) and Doctoral programmes. It should be noted that the doctoral programme is still in the accreditation phase, hence is not part of this review.

According to SER, the activity and the way in which these regulations are respected is monitored by the Dean of each academic unit who is submitting a report to the senior management at the end of each semester. Monitoring of the study programme is also done by the Studies Committee, the Evaluation and Monitoring Council and the Quality Assurance Office. Clearing the share of responsibilities between them is essential for using strategically the resources of the university. It is worth mentioning that these regulations have been approved only in February, 2020, hence no reports have been submitted to the ET for the review.

It is obvious, that the programme development process that revolves around learning outcomes has been recently introduced into the higher education system of Kosovo, which is



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reflected into the careful and basic approach of the university to the programme development. There is no programme curriculum available on the university web-site.

The ET was presented a sample MA programme curriculum and only through this programme we could carefully make inferences. For instance, according to the SER, „*Learning outcomes for study programmes are formulated based on the approach adopted by the NQF incorporating knowledge, skills as well as broader competences by distinguishing between BA and MA levels*” (SER, p. 59). The university declares that the programmes are consistent with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area, however based on a limited sample the ET cannot assess the correlations between the learning outcomes and each study programme.

The university makes the study schedule available and most of the course syllabi are available online. In most of the cases, syllabi have learning objectives and learning outcomes defined, but in few cases assessment methods are not mentioned. The student assessment methods are the only ones centrally defined in the university regulations, these include: exams, colloquiums, seminar papers, professional practice, practical tests etc. In its turn, differentiation of the learning outcomes into knowledge, skills and attitude is vague. Overall, the university is in the process of transitioning from the old to the modern teaching practices, which will take considerable time and effort to fully develop. It is important that the university puts effort to build capacity of its academic personnel as well as the representatives of the Office of Academic Affairs in programme development methodology.

Programmes are developed according to the procedure specified in the statute of the university. The programmes are initiated and the faculty level, market research is carried out, and international programmes are also reviewed, then the capacity to deliver the programme, both material and human is assessed and finally, the programme is drafted. Only after this process, the decision to pursue the programme approval is followed upstream, to the senate. It is worth mentioning here that the employers/industry representatives are in close cooperation with the university, public as well as private sector. These are involved in final stage of the programmes – providing internships and/or employment, but are hardly involved at the beginning, in programme development stage. It is highly desirable that the university develops formal ways to involve industry in programme development.

There is an appeal procedure approved within the university and both students and staff members were aware of it. However, the SER mentions that after the student files a



complaint to the Dean regarding the received grade: „Depending on the reasonableness of the request, the Dean may appoint a committee of three members (excluding the professor against whom the complaint is made) to evaluate the candidate” (SER, p. 61). The ET recommends the Dean to automatically assign this committee in order to ensure an objective and non-discriminatory implementation of this procedure.

„UNHZ currently employs about 70 full-time academic staff and about 50 part time staff” and they are appropriately qualified. Due to the high student/faculty ration, the university has been hiring. Its hiring strategy is to attract young professionals and those, with the practical experience. In this manner, the university addresses two main issues with the academic personnel – lack of capacity in modern teaching and learning techniques and English language proficiency, and the demand to incorporate practice in the academic programmes.

The university is aware that the student teacher ratio of average 70/1 should be addressed as soon as possible by developing benchmarks in this regard and being actively hiring.

According to SER, the learning methods and learning environments offered by the institution are student-centered. In this regard they mention that „*Students are provided with interactive teaching that enables them to develop their abilities, skills and competences through lectures, theoretical / practical and laboratory exercises, discussions, seminars and group work*” (SER, p. 61). Moreover, students are represented in different committees of the university, thus taking part in decision-making processes including those related to the learning process.

The discussions with both the students and the employers indicated that there is a practical component of the teaching – learning experience, but it could be increased so that students are even more prepared for a transition to the workplace market. Especially given the high unemployment rate that Kosovo is facing, both practical experience during the studies and internal/external mobilities can constitute an advantage when looking for a job.

The ET expresses its concern that by the time of the interviews in May, the students in the last/final year did not start working on their final thesis. Even considering the difficulties of the period created by the CoVid-19 pandemic and the contextual lockdown, they should have been able to continue their work on their thesis, being advised by their mentors/supervisors/coordinators online/at distance. It might be translated into late graduation and delays for enrolling for a new programme (for those who intend to continue



their studies with a Masters' programme or a PhD). This, as well as the possibility of similar pandemic times to reoccur, makes the ET remark the importance of focusing on skills development of the academic staff to use technology as integrated part of their teaching strategy and be more flexible on switching to an full-online teaching-learning experience during the next years.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

Potential recommendations:

- 1. Clear the differences in responsibilities of the Studies Committee, Evaluation and Monitoring Council and the Quality Assurance Office in terms of monitoring the study programmemes.*
- 2. It is important the university puts effort to build capacity of its academic personnel as well as the representatives of the Office of Academic Affairs in programme development methodology.*
- 3. It is highly desirable that the university develops formal ways to involve industry in programme development.*
- 4. The appeal procedure should be non-discriminatory and thus automatically assign a committee to re-evaluate the paper of the student that files a complaint regarding a received grade.*
- 5. Put more attention on the monitoring over the supervisors for the final thesis of student so they can guide student throughout a thesis writing process and not only at the final stage;*
- 6. Continue the efforts of increasing the practical component of the teaching and learning process, work-based training and improve the connection with practitioners;*
- 7. Continue the efforts of developing the skills of the academic staff in order to permanently update their teaching strategies as well as integrating more and more the digital technology into teaching.*
- 8. Consider re-organising the content of the last semester of study so that students can focus more on thesis writing and thus finish it in due time to be able to defend the paper at the end of the last semester.*

2.7. Research

Research is a strategic priority of the university, which is brought forward in their strategic plan. It has also created an office for research responsible for the development of the research capacity. The university has a research strategy for 2019-2024 and its main target is to increase university's research output by 30% within 5 years. According to SER, the



university allocates 1,004,400 euros to this strategic goal (however, it remains unclear for the ET whether this sum is allocated over the course of three years (as strategy covers 2019-2021) or it refers to the period of 2020-2024, p. 20-21, as SER indicates. In addition, the UNHZ Strategy for Scientific Research was prepared in January, 2020 for a five-year period (p. 24, Strategic plan), with the allocated sum for “scientific research” in the amount of 1,465,400.00 Euro with an about 300 thousand euros distributed on the annual basis. The Strategic plan (p. 70) refers to the main challenges: Lack of professional and financial resources for research activities, but the ET considers that it is not only about the financial resources, but also about the lack of experience in research practices, their contextualizing within the relevant theoretical frameworks and the correspondent experience in international publication and peer-review processes.

The research strategy outlines 5 objectives with respective tasks and ambitious targets that the university needs to carry out. It also has a plan to develop a monitoring and evaluation plan of the research strategy, however it was not developed at the time when the accreditation review took place.

So far, the university has taken several steps towards a right direction in order to promote research activities in the university. For instance, it has encouraged international cooperation for research, it has been working closely with the industry to produce applied research, it has identified some needs of the academic staff and has been offering trainings to support them. It has been involved in number of international and national project promoting research. Most noteworthy and relevant is the ERASMUS project “Enhancing research Culture in Kosovo”. One of the project’s aims is to establish an interinstitutional research journals in the key research areas for Kosovo.

One of the main challenges that the university faces is lack of English language competence to do scientific research well. During the interviews, it was mentioned that the English language courses are provided for those, willing to learn, as well as provide peer-support for translation / article spellchecks when needed. The university have also concentrated their efforts to higher younger generation PhDs or PhDs in obtaining international PhD titles/degrees. ET remains skeptical that the university will be able to produce one research article per academic staff annually. Apart from lacking English language skills and lack of research experience, the academic staff has a heavy teaching load (8 to 10 hours per week on average), could have administrative responsibilities as well, and has to be involved in the



community work. And this adds on top of their other full-time / part-time job that most of them have outside the university.

To summarize, the university has introduced a number of activities to support its academic staff to produce research output, however this has not yet developed into a support system that will function in a long-term perspective to ensure that the university produces and maintains quality research. Based on SER and the interviews, the ET could conclude that the measures would not lead to the annual targets set in the research strategy, hence these would need to be reviewed and readjusted so that they are grounded in the current reality of the university and does not hinder its development by becoming a rigid and unachievable document. It should be highlighted that this is not merely because of the university's lack of effort, but is a combination of policy level pressures and, perhaps, overly optimistic view of the university representatives on research production nowadays.

While the university is under tremendous external pressure to produce quality research and has an ambition to be recognized both nationally and internationally, it is unlikely that this will happen in the coming 5 years. The university has to be realistic with its strategic objectives. First evaluation of the research strategy implementation should focus entirely on being realistic with regards to the research opportunities and university's capacity to do quality research. For the first step, it will be extremely important to gain a thorough understanding of what it takes to create the research capacity in the resource scarce country.

Compliance level: Partially compliant

ET recommendations:

The university has to be realistic with its strategic objectives. First evaluation of the research strategy implementation should focus entirely on being realistic with regards to the research opportunities and university's capacity to do quality research. For the first step, it will be extremely important to gain a thorough understanding of what it takes to create the research capacity in the resource scarce country.

2.8. Staff, employment processes and professional development

There are few prepared documents that serve as a basis for the full-time academic staff, and some of general recruitment procedures and professional development. The SER makes the references towards the public policies and regulations governing the employment of



academic staff and their appointment, and promotion of full-time academic staff being derived from public documents such as:

- the Law on Labour in the Republic of Kosovo;
- Law on Higher Education in the Republic of Kosovo;
- the University Statute

and other prepared documents in UNHZ which regulate internal procedures for academic staff and external expertise such as:

- Regulation on selection procedures relating to the appointment, removal and advancement of regular academic staff at the UNHZ in Peja;
- Regulation of Evaluation Procedures for engaging external collaborators at UNHZ in Peja;
- Manual for planning and assessment of the performance of the academic staff

The University also prepared but did not test its Regulation on Selection Procedures relating to the evaluation of its full-time academic staff as well as their appointment, removal and advancement of academic staff being signed on the 1st of April, 2020 during the COVID-19 “locked-down” situation. This Regulation was developed for the University’s 6 types of academic full-time positions: Full Professors; Associate Professors; Assistant Professors; University assistants; Lecturers and Corepetitors (Faculty of Arts). Therefore, rights, responsibilities, recruitment processes, supervision, performance evaluation, promotion, support processes and professional development have been formally defined.

As far as the performance evaluation is concerned, it is the new procedure. According to the regulation, the assessment is foreseen to be made from several evaluative levels: the supervisor (Dean), students and self-assessment. It is comprising the 50% based on the dean evaluation, 20% based on students’ evaluation, and 30% self-evaluation. It is going to be regulated internally, and each staff member should prepare a professional plan on the annual basis, being monitored by the head of the unit. The Academic Staff Assessment Manual is a new document which was drafted in 2019 with the evaluation methods and mechanisms for the academic staff helping the staff of UNHZ to be developed throughout their careers.

There was a recommendation provided during the discussion, that in case of a poor evaluation, it should be a discussion between a teaching staff’s member and the dean. If the poor evaluation is not improved in a semester, he /she gets a training for those areas in which he/she is lagging behind. If it is repeated again, the policy may imply the firing of the respective professor (for the third year). In fact, the low scores which are repeated three times



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in a row directly affect the advancement process and termination of the contract of academic staff.

During the discussion with the teaching staff, it should be noted that the new initiative has been mainly supported by the academic staff of its institution.

At the same time, it also should be noted that some parts of this Regulation remain unclear, in the part how the performance evaluation of activities for Musical arts has been prepared. As an illustration's example, this Regulation provides assessment for Composer/Theoretical-Pedagogical artistic activities, - "*the vocal performance*" which is assessed as the 0.7 (local)/1 (international) levels (as the highest one), and the *performed solo* as the lowest one - 0.1 (local)/0.3 (international). Therefore, it is not clear whether it is related to the composer who also performs his composition as *performed solo*, being assessed with the lowest score of 0.1/0.3 versus the same composer who get the score 7 times higher when the other vocalist performs his/her composition. If it is the case, the appropriate analysis with the logical questions are to be raised whether the regional or Kosovo labour market identifies how many composers are in the region of Peja and Kosovo (compared to its vocalists). *Second*, it might be relevant information on how many years a musician should spent to become the composer, including all his/her formal education, training and experience. *Third*, the ET doubts whether this approach can be applied for Arts and music, especially when there is such a significant difference applied for these creative activities (e.g. composer performs his own composition vs. somebody else performs his compositions). *Finally*, the ET recommends to look at the good practices or recommendations whether the performance indicators should be applied for the part related to the individual compositions.

According to the SER, the Employment Manual will be drafted as part of the process of reviewing and updating regulations and other university documentation as foreseen in the first strategic objective of the development plan. The ET received the comments from the UNHZ to this initial report that it approved the Employment (Handbook) Book for academic staff based on the existing legislation and policies in April 2020, which was not reflected in the SER. The previous understanding of the ET:

The ET understanding was that the Employment Manual is not yet prepared as a ready document, despite many internal regulations are already developed, and it has also been planned as a first strategic objective. Therefore, the ET initial recommendation was to complete this document, that also includes the updated regulations, with its recruitment policy and its orientation days for new staff. Because this procedure actually takes place, it is

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better to have an agreed written description for the recruitment process and the new staff employee's orientation programme which is the part of the well-written procedures included into the Employment Manual.

According to the Strategic plan, in order to promote the professional development - the UNHZ informed the ET has already established the Team for Professional Development and Counselling) on March 25, 2020 and few meetings have taken place (see Annex 3, Team for Professional Development and Counselling in Albanian). However, it still not clear how it is going to work, whether UNHZ will create a Team for Professional Development, which in collaboration with the Office for Excellence in Teaching, will provide individual support to academic staff in planning their professional development, respectively in drafting individual development plans for one year.

The ET thinks that criteria and processes for performance evaluation are not always clearly specified and might be quite subjective unless they are clearly defined, written with the references to good practices (in Arts/Music) and included into one holistic document (Employment Manual).

Thus, the professional development of academic staff and the performance evaluation should be the key area given the special close attention. The Office for Excellence in Teaching identify the needs of the academic staff for professional development of the academic staff, respectively for training in the function of mastering and applying contemporary teaching and evaluation methods by the academic staff.

As far as the ratio of students per full time staff members is concerned, it varies from one faculty to the other one. During the discussion with the heads of study programmes, it was mentioned that the highest ratio of students per teaching staff is in the Faculty of Business which amounts to 70 students/1 teacher (with 2300 students), and there is a strategic objective to reduce this number. The Faculty of Business introduced assistant professors and tutors to reduce the ratio of teaching staff per students bringing the target down to 1/30. Other representatives of faculties provide much lower ratio: Faculty of Agriculture - 1/40, and Faculty of Arts - 1/10. In addition, the objective is to decrease this ratio to 1/20 in the next 2-3 years and 1/5 in Faculty of Arts.

Regarding the conditions for hiring, the following conditions with the priorities were listed:

- assistants enrolled into a PhD;
- professors with research and mobility experience;



- additional criteria which are mentioned in Statute (min. 3 years of experience in teaching + 1 scientific paper published/1 solo concerts or significant participation in international events).

The orientation days for new staff, and its formal procedures take place to familiarize UNHZ members with the people, services and policies take place in UNHZ, despite some policies are not available (as noted by the SER). There are activities related to the various trainings depending on the needs of the academic staff foreseen in the revised Strategic Plan. In addition, CVs of the teaching staff were provided with the evidence of their relevant characteristics to effectively lead and manage the teaching, research and administration processes for their related specializations. In terms of development of its staff, a reference in the SER for 20 study visits (to European countries) and over 60 members of the UNHZ staff has received various experiences and good practices, more related to the years of its previous accreditation evaluation.

The ET also checked the web-site <http://unhz.eu/language/en/> - for the results of any evaluation made publicly available, but it did not manage to find it. The ET also accepts the comments from the UNHZ adding two additional points to the overall standard on Staff, employment processes and professional development. However, it is still a small gap to reach its substantial compliance, therefore, keeping the level at the same level.

Compliance level: Partially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *Refer to the Employment Manual with its recruitment policy and processes not only as part of the process of previewing and updating regulations, but also making it as a working and active document with the processes for the recruitment and orientation of the new staff as the valid and existing practice;*
2. *Identify and analyse the needs of academic staff for their professional development improving their teaching and research skills on the annual basis;*
3. *Include the explanation for assessment of performance indicators with some methodological background, market analysis and/or the references to good/best practices and discuss it both within the related Chairs and at the institutional level;*
4. *Refer to the good practices the part of regulation. Special attention should be paid to the performances of Art and music compositions. One of the recommended practices could include the activities of SAZAS (Slovenia) related to the evaluation of compositions (Source: <https://www.szas.org/English-forms>). The good practices*



applied in the Universities with the relevant activities for the Guild <https://www.the-guild.eu/> and LERU <https://www.leru.org/> universities

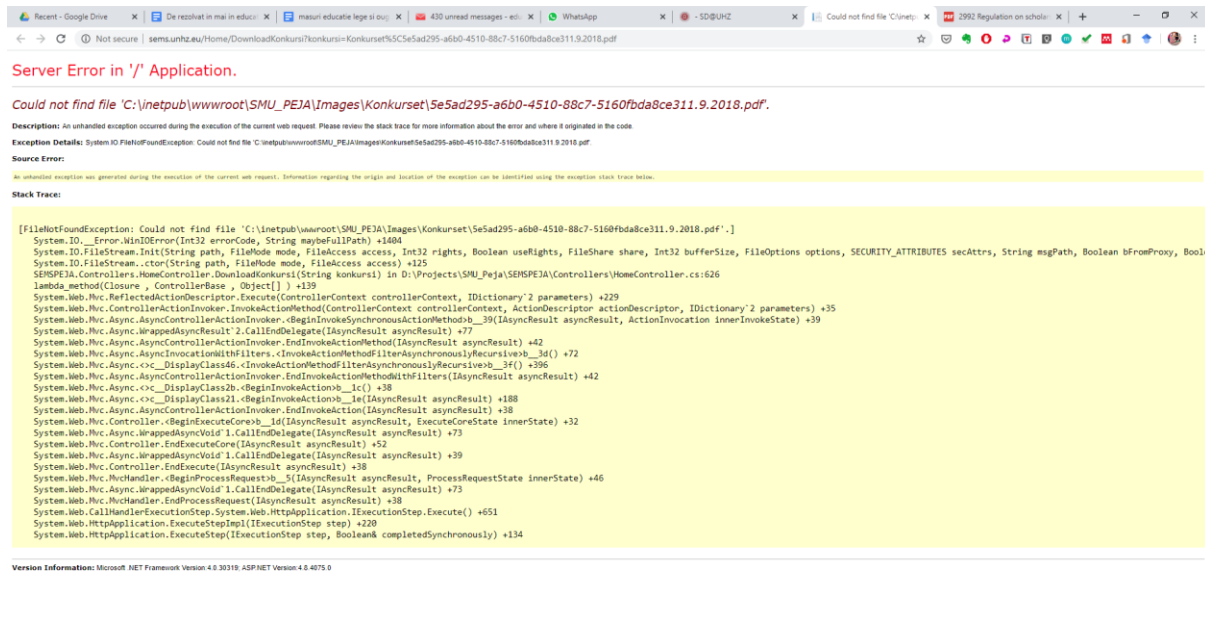
- 5. Evaluate the first experience with the various results of evaluation process, including the self-evaluation, and decide which information can be made publicly available*

2.9. Student administration and support services

It is important for a HEI to ease the transition of its new students from highschool to university. Part of this process is informing potential future students about admission criteria and about the university programmes in advance.

As far as the admission process is concerned, the SER stated: „UNHZ organizes a transparent process of admitting new students on a competitive and merit-based basis.” The admission process „is determined by the University’s Statute, the Regulation on Basic Studies and the Regulation on Master Studies, and is done through a public announcement approved by the University Senate” (SER, p.84) and all criteria and the calendar is published by the university. For the BA programme any candidate who successfully passed the Matura exam is eligible, and they present the diploma at admission. For the MA programmes, students are eligible if they have successfully graduated from an appropriate BA programme – for example: students who have completed programmes comprising of 180 ECTS credits are eligible for two-years MA programme. This is consistent with the practice among EHEA member states as well.

Checking the university website, one can observe that the did not announce yet the admission procedure for the academic year 2020 – 2021, and the website for the previous years is not working (generating an error message) or in Albanian / Bosnian making it impossible to see the criteria previously used. The ET recommends the university to publish the admission criteria in advance even if they cannot announce the admission calendar and number of places available only after the accreditation is decided by KAA and the respective public authorities. This way interested potential students can start prepare for the entrance exam in due time.



Some of those interviewed mentioned that the exam was from subjects relevant to the programmes but at the level of the highschool and that students don't need to undergo special training to pass this exam.

Besides the admission criteria, it is important for a HEI to have a complete presentation of its programmes, courses, services etc. on its website. The experts have checked the website of the institution and it contains these pieces of information.

After the admission process is done, it is important for the university to help students integrate in the community and for this it can organize orientation programmes and provide students with student handbooks with relevant information about the functioning of the university, scholarships, course requirements, exams, extracurricular opportunities etc. UNHZ organizes open days for anyone interested and `welcome weeks` for newly enrolled students. The ET recommends the university to continue these programs and constantly improve them based on the collected feedback from the participants.

The UNHZ has a student magazine that includes some of these data, as well as a Guideline for new students (SER, p.86) that contains important and relevant information for students. Even though the SER mentioned the university does not have a Student Handbook yet and that this is foreseen to be developed in the near future (no deadline is proposed) (SER, p.85),



The UNHZ provided the link to such a document among the extra-documents provided to the ET (<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ej3EaORrI930OyXkUQjy86UX72nX2BK2/view>). The ET recommends that the university works with the student union at developing and constantly updating the information presented within such handbooks.

As far as the orientation programme is concerned, the university organizes an `open day` event for potential students before starting the admission procedures. *We recommend that the university works with the student union to further develop such an orientation programme.*

Scholarships & financial support. The university offers scholarships to reward performance – they are available to second-year full-time students with a GPA of at least 9.00 at BA level and 9.50 at MA level and only if the students have not repeated the year of study (art. 3 of the Regulation for Scholarship allocation – 2018). Special scholarships of `distinguished students` are allocated to those who register extraordinary performances. The SER did not include information about scholarships or financial – aid programs dedicated to socially support students, but the UNHZ student handbook included info about potential beneficiaries of a exception from paying the student fee as a financial support for those students found in difficult socio-economic situations. The ET recommends the university to continue promoting these financial instruments – including through publishing them on the website - as it might be just the right argument for some potential students to decide to continue their studies and enroll in a program offered by the university.

Data collecting and analysis. It is important for a HEI to collect and analyse data referring to the profile of the student population, student progression, success and drop-out rates, besides students' satisfaction that is collected through the student surveys. This statistical data can complete the QA reports and help an informed decision about the direction of development of the university, its programmes and services. *`UNHZ currently implements the SEMS electronic system which is an electronic platform to support the learning process` and store and maintain data about the students `starting from their enrolment data to assessments and exams data` (SER, p. 86). Based on the data collected through SEMS `UNHZ manages to generate different data and statistics to make different assessments or analyses for the purpose of the learning process` and plans to improve the platform with modules for: quality management, e-library, student attendance, alumni network etc. *There is no target date for this to be implemented, therefore we recommend the university to set such targets.**



Several standards of the KAA manual refer to the student rights within the university as a minimum set of rights should be guaranteed – among them is the right to appeal against a grade. The SER describes at page 87 an appeal procedure that students can use to appeal against decisions made by University bodies, academic units and organizational units. There are also Complaint Boxes located in all faculties. Members of the community were aware of this procedure. If it is not already published among the regulations of the institutions, we recommend it to be included there – stating the responsible person for receiving the complaints, the process, its duration and potential outcomes of the process..

Policies and procedures dealing with misconduct. As part of the universities' efforts to build a qualitative learning environment are the efforts to deal with misconduct, plagiarism and cheating and reduce these phenomena to a minimum. In the SER it is stated that „*the University's Code of Ethics of Academic Staff and Students defines the academic dishonesty as well as forms of academic fraud such as copying or plagiarism*” (SER p.87). Students submitting a thesis/dissertation are „*required to sign a testimony agreement that the document was prepared by him or her and that the document is his / her original work and without any plagiarism*”. There are no specifications regarding similar procedures for preventing plagiarism and misconduct among professors and interviews indicated that no such case was reported.

The university offers a range of student services. The SER mentions the offices that deal with student services. Also it mentions that „*University administrative and technical services are assessed through questionnaires by students each academic year*” (SER, p.88) Moreover, the university has collaborations with local institutions to provide access to sports facilities, while investing in their own dormitory and sports facilities – these investments are in progress and planned to be done during the next two-three years. The effectiveness and relevance of the student services it offers – including academic counselling, career planning etc., is regularly monitored through satisfaction surveys for students: „*University administrative and technical services are assessed through questionnaires by students each academic year*” (SER, p.88). Services should be modified according to the evaluation results. Students are aware of the available services, but don't access them very often – one could investigate what is the motive of the lack of popularity of these services as it might be linked to their relevance or availability. Graduates mentioned that the career planning service of the university helped them identify scholarship and internship opportunities both in Kosovo and abroad.



Extracurricular opportunities are offered to the students who can get involved in the student parliament, participate in conferences, summer schools as well as a wide range of social, sporting and recreational events. The university could consider opening up the university facilities to students beyond the school hours so that students can work on their own projects, learn in groups or take up voluntary activities.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. Consider to allocate financial support for students coming from difficult socio-economic backgrounds. Ensure that the procedure and criteria for providing student financial support – e.g. scholarships, financial support, tax
2. Establish effective processes in place to collect and analyze reliable data referring to the profile of the student population, student progression, success and drop-out rates (including the reasons for them), students' satisfaction with the learning resources and student support available, career paths of graduates; the statistical data is used for quality assurance purposes, as well as to support decision making. They will complement the data collected through the perception questionnaires developed by the university as part of the new QA system. Set specific deadlines for collecting these data.
3. Develop a student handbook covering all information relating to admission, progression, recognition and certification, regulations, the rights and responsibilities of students, actions to be taken for breaches of discipline, responsibilities of relevant officers and committees, and penalties that may be imposed;
4. Consider publishing the admission criteria and the bibliography for the entrance exam in advance so that potential future students can enroll, even if the exact number of places available can only be announced after the accreditation decision of the KAA and MEST.
5. Consider working with the student union and/or NGOs for developing a relevant and useful student handbook and orientation programme.
6. Consider motivating your academic staff to undergo plagiarism checks for their papers before submitting them for publishing. If a specific software for this is not available, consider developing an internal peer-review system and encourage the staff members to report any cases of plagiarism. A no-tolerance policy towards plagiarism



and misconduct among students, academic and administrative staff members is a key ingredient for a performant university.

2.10. Learning resources and facilities

UNHZ operates in 3 different buildings with a total of 5734 m² of space consisting of The facilities of the university include: amphitheatre (3); classrooms (22); cabinets (14); concert halls (1), computer cabinets (1); laboratories (4); library (2); administration offices (55), student services offices (7), student offices (4), warehouses (6), maintenance offices (4), space for heating (3), etc. The university evaluated its needs and reached the conclusion that existing spaces are not enough, thus is currently investing in a new 5000 m² building that will be allocated to the Faculty of Arts. UNHZ has allocated budget for this investment (approximately 1 milion euro/year). All the buildings and grounds of the campus are adequate, clean, attractive and well maintained as it is visible from the video provided by the institution. In order to provide clean physical environment UNHZ has engaged a cleaning company which takes care of the maintenance of the university premises 24/7 and undergoes frequent external audits from specialty departments of the municipality that check the correspondence of the university spaces with the legal standards.

UNHZ has „two libraries that are supplied with over 6500 books for all profiles of studies and within of which are two reading rooms” (SER, p. 91) – the book fund is both in Albanian (most of them) and in English. Both students and staff, can also access books from the National Library of Kosovo and can get information about the available books there through the Electronic Library. However, most learning materials are offered by staff members to the students in electronic version, through the ESMS platform. Moreover, students and staff have mentioned being able to access international databases like Scopus, but there usage is still low within the academic community. More is to be done to help both staff and students get used with this. We recommend the university to create the possibility for its academic community members to access the online databases using their institutional email address, from home.

The university has a cooperation with National Library of Kosovo "Pjeter Bogdani" and the Association of Electronic Libraries of Kosovo in order to standardize the functioning of the library and have access to their resources – e.g. electronic library. Moreover The Electronic Student Management System is updated on an ongoing basis, with manual materials and



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videos distributed for each update` (SER, p. 92). However, it is not very clear what type of materials do the students receive through ESMS, neither if they have access to the materials recommended as mandatory for their courses – in print or electronic version.

Books and electronic resources can be accessed within the reading rooms offered by the university which are opened all day long during weekdays and from 8.00 to 16.00 on weekends, with prolonged working hours during the exam period. The university has 58 computers available for students on the premises. Students can also be borrowed home and there is an electronic system for recording loans and returns, and the university implements the standards and regulations of the Association of Electronic Libraries of Kosovo in order to improve their management system and to prevent loss of materials.

The university developed a new QA system that includes several instruments for collecting perception data from both students and academic staff. They include questions regarding the infrastructure, facilities and administrative services. Unfortunately, this is the first year the system is implemented and there is no report on these issues available yet.

The UNHZ does not have infrastructure adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities. The new building that the UNHZ is investing in, is planned to include such facilities. The ET encourage the university to consider ways in which the institution can become accessible for potential students with all sorts of disabilities, beyond ensuring the existence of ramps at the entrance of the university. For example: adapting the learning materials to the special needs of such students can be considered by the Resource Center for Teaching and Counseling as mentioned in the extra-documents provided by the university.

Inventories are maintained of equipment owned or controlled by the institution including equipment assigned to individual staff and the university was able to provide this list to the ET. We recommend that space utilization is monitored and when appropriate facilities reallocated in response to changing requirements. The university should also monitor the adequacy of the provision of computer equipment to students and staff members.

The university developed an `IT Office which is responsible for: the technical management and maintenance of the IT network in UNHZ, developing procedures for Internet's and server's security infrastructure measures, in accordance with applicable electronic management policies that include inter alia day-to-day operations of the auxiliary desk, continuous monitoring and maintenance of the server room and essential infrastructure equipment`. Moreover, UNHZ is planning to add five more modules to the Electronic



Management System that they already have in place. The ET recommends the IT department intensifies the efforts put in training programs to ensure effective use of computing equipment and appropriate software for assessments, teaching and administration.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. When considering the transformation of the university in an inclusive institution, more has to be considered beyond adapting the campus for physical access of potential students and staff with different disabilities.
2. Ensure that the computer equipment, operating systems and software used in the educational processes and college administration are updated considering the specifics of study programmes and the effectiveness of the administrative processes.
3. Consider the risks associated with the use of machinery equipment in the teaching and learning process and take the necessary measures to prevent or to instantly deal with them;
4. Increase the institutional efforts to adapt the teaching resources to students with special educational needs or physical disabilities;
5. Increase the access of staff and students to electronic journals or international databases of recent articles, in order to guarantee them access to up-to-date research results and connection with what is trending in research.
6. Provide training programmes to ensure effective use of computing equipment and appropriate software for assessments, teaching and administration.

2.11. Institutional cooperation

The expert team acknowledges the difficult context of Kosovo that is hindering the HEIs efforts of internationalization. Political issues, visa policies and scarce access to Erasmus+ like programmes are barriers faced by all universities and colleges in Kosovo. Even in these conditions, ` In recent years, UNHZ has greatly increased the number of international and regional collaborations with universities and higher education institutions thereby expanding the university's internationalization network` (SER, p. 95).

Even though the University only recently approved its Strategy for international cooperation (25th March 2020), `International and inter-institutional cooperation is the fifth area included in the "Strategic Plan of the University "Haxhi Zeka" in Peja 2020-2024"`` (SER, p.96).



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UNHZ designated a special committee at university level to start working at a Strategy for international cooperation.

The university has assigned the institutional cooperation portfolio to the Vice Rector for International Cooperation and Quality Improvement `whose aim is to encourage, promote and advance the internationalization of the university` (SER, p. 96). Therefore, a member of the upper management is directly mandated and accountable for the initiatives and results in this area, thus showing the importance of this area for the university.

UNHZ has concluded cooperation agreements with 41 universities and institutions of higher education from various countries of the region, Europe and around the world, such as: Germany, USA, France, Italy, Switzerland, Finland, Turkey, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Northern Macedonia, Albania, etc. As part of the international cooperations initiated UNHZ has been part of different projects: EUFORIA, T2P Project (budget of 125588.00 euro), Project Western Balkans Urban Agriculture Initiative (budget 120,219.00 euro) etc. – out of which the university benefited in different ways: acquiring new books for the library, covering the costs for different mobilities etc.

The ET considers that the university could benefit from strategically targeting those countries of interest for the institution and those types of cooperations relevant for the institutional objectives of the university. These could be defined by a Strategy for institutional cooperation or Strategy of internationalization. Such a document could also include targets for the internationalization at home so that the institution becomes more welcoming for foreign students and staff members that could join UNHZ for shorter or longer periods of time. Among others, such initiatives usually include: developing study programmes taught in English, adapting the curricula so that it includes up to date and diverse subjects, translating regulations in English, training administrative staff to provide services to international students/staff, English signs around the campus etc.

UNHZ is engaging in activities that support the international visibility of the institution – encouraging and supporting mobilities among both students and staff members. For example ` In 2019 two academic staff went for mobility in Malta, two in Durres, one in the United States, five academic staff in Germany` (SER, p.100). The university tries to support such activities either from its own budget or from international projects. Moreover, as a result of the institutional cooperations cultivated by the institution and also as part of the institutional efforts to encourage international visibility of its staff and students, UNHZ has organized the following three international scientific conferences since 2017 and several symposiums –

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each of them gathering local and international participants. Summer schools were planned for 2020 but the plans were postponed due to the recent international epidemiologic situation caused by the pandemic of COVID-19.

Engagement in international cooperation and contributions to the community are included in promotion criteria and staff performance review. This is proven by the fact that 'According to the Regulation on Appointment, Reappointment and Promotion of Academic Staff, the promotion of academic staff is made if the individual has published papers in international scientific or artistic journals. Also their active participation in international conferences is another criterion which is set for advancement'. More clear and transparent provisions in this sense are needed in order to make it easier for staff members to follow these regulations.

The university encourages academic staff members to engage in cooperation with HEIs from abroad, through finding different opportunities to support their involvement in international projects and mobilities. The institutional efforts were confirmed by the academic staff who appreciate it. Unfortunately, the budget and financial management is centralized so there is no control on the share of the existing (scarce) resources among faculties.

The university encourages its staff to be involved in community-linked issues and forums, and such involvement is accounted for during the staff evaluation (according to SER, p. 101). Therefore, staff members are part of discussions at the level of the municipality for the development of the community.

Relationships with the local industries and employers were confirmed by the group of employers present at the discussions during the online interviews. Some of those present confirmed that they work together with the university for offering practical training for students, internships, developing study programmes tailored for the local needs – e.g. the programme for the beer brewery. They also confirm that they were part of feedback procedures through which the university asked for their opinion on different study programmes and university-related issues. However, the university could consider including employers representatives in different advisory committees that evaluate study programmes or offer feedback on the strategic plan of the institution.

Even though there is no Alumni Center, the university keeps in touch with its alumni through its official website, where they can find relevant information about scholarships offered by the university or its partners. Moreover, the university manages to keep in touch with some of its graduates by email.

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Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. Considering developing a Strategy for institutional cooperation that identifies responsibilities, targets, deadlines and strategic types of cooperations important for the institution to follow.
2. Increase the provision of English language courses and study programmes delivered in English as an important competitive advantage that enhances the reputation and attractiveness of the college (nationally and internationally);
3. Ensure that the institutional cooperation strategy that the university is working on is adequate to guide the institutional efforts into this direction clearly defines the priorities of the college and includes related measures; for the achievement of the priorities in this area, ensure that relevant financial and human resources are allocated;
4. Continue to develop and diversify the ways in which assist and encourage staff to develop collaborative arrangements with the international community and to participate in forums in which significant community issues are discussed and plans for community development are considered;
5. Continue the efforts to improve the engagement local industries and employers to assist programme delivery and content (including engagement in the work of committees or other structural units considering study programmes and other institutional activities); by diversifying the ways of involvement – for e.g. creating frequent and constant opportunities for them to actively participate in the development and revision of study programmes, as well as the strategic planning of the university;
6. Ensure a more systematic communication with the graduates and employers, considering the possibility of involving them in recruitment processes and /or fundarising efforts.
7. Increase the prioritization and resource allocation dedicated to internationalization and institutional cooperation as the expert team considers this is an extremely relevant and important dimension of the future development of the University of Peja.
8. Clarify the manner in which the engagement in international cooperation or in community projects is reflected in a staff member performance review and how it is considered for his/her promotion.



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OVERALL EVALUATION AND JUDGEMENTS OF THE ET

The ET would like to note that the process of accreditation was carried out in the conditions of externalities of COVID-19, which went smoothly during the 14th of May, 2020 with no technical problems. The University organised all processes effectively, and the UNHZ also responded to the needs of the ET and provided it with the requested documentation.

Overall, the ET should emphasise that it has been impressed by the UNHZ team's motivation, and commitment. However, the ET also believes that the UNHZ has much higher potential, and despite a lot of efforts have been made, the institution should continue to improve its quality, finalising its documents. The UNHZ should use the year of 2020 as the main threshold with its indicators to continue its further planning and improve its quality. The ET also expresses its hope that the recommendations of its team will be taken into account.

In conclusion, the Expert Team considers that University «HAXHI ZEKA» (UNHZ) has reached its overall “**Substantially compliant**” level with the standards included in the *KAA Accreditation manual* and, therefore, recommends *to accredit* the institution for a duration of *3 years*.

1. APPENDICES (*if available*): N/A



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