Republic of Kosovo
Republika Kosova - Republic of Kosovo

Kosovo Accreditation Agency
Agencija Kosova za Akreditaciju
Kosovo Accreditation Agency

Kosovo Accreditation Agency Strategic Plan
2021-2025

Content

Introduction

KAA Strategic Plan 2021-2025 is the basic document that will determine the orientation and direction of quality assurance processes in higher education sector for the next 5 years.

The Plan is drafted in accordance with the KAA mission that was used as a guide in setting strategic objectives, which enable the continuous evaluation of the effectiveness of the KAA actions. In addition, the Plan has been drafted taking into consideration the principles applied in the European Quality Assurance Area (EHEA), especially the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG 2015), as well as the recommendations from ENQA external evaluators.

The Strategic Plan was drafted following a broad consultation with all relevant actors of higher education in Kosovo. Using a comprehensive approach, KAA has ensured that strategic objectives are in line with the needs and requirements of higher education system in Kosovo and relevant to the context within which our quality assurance system is developed.

The contribution of all actors to the drafting of this Strategic Plan indicates that there is an increased commitment from the entire academic community to continuously improve the quality of higher education in the Republic of Kosovo.

Naim Gashi, KAA Director, Foreword

Quality assurance system in higher education sector is constantly developing. Increased mobility of students and academic staff requires that the quality of academic grades offered by higher education institutions in Kosovo to be comparable and equal to the quality of academic grades offered by European universities.

As the regulator of quality assurance system in Kosovo, KAA's main responsibility is to ensure a quality of diplomas offered to our students that would enable them to have competency in labour market within the country and abroad. Therefore, it is KAA's obligation to ensure that our higher education institutions through their specialised academic and scientific staff are applying the latest approaches in teaching and research, in line with the standards widely applied in European universities.

We will be there to ensure mutual trust between the students, academic staff, higher education institutions and society at large, applying transparent, credible and quality procedures in external quality assurance, such as accreditation and follow-up. As an Agency, we will be committed to promote good governance principles, with special emphasis on transparency and accountability, as well as enhance the quality in any higher education institutions' activity, to put Kosovo on the map of the European Higher Education Area and soon to regain its membership in the ENQA and EQAR.

KAA Context

External quality assurance system in Kosovo is characterized by specifics similar to European countries that went through transition, such as uncontrolled increase in higher education institutions, lack of internal quality assurance mechanisms and lack of clearly defined policies to develop academic and scientific staff.

Accreditation mechanisms were established to apply a quality assurance system for higher education institutions and to increase transparency of institutions towards students and society at large. Despite challenges from external and internal factors, such as limited human resources and frequent changes in KAA management, in 10 years of its operation, KAA managed to establish a quality standard that was comparable to Central and Eastern Europe countries. KAA has successfully achieved to be part of main European quality assurance mechanisms and has been actively involved with all important external quality assurance events in Europe.

Although the accreditation process has been applied for 10 years now, KAA has reflected about the impact of accreditation on enhancing the quality of higher education in Kosovo. In the last two years, KAA reviewed the Accreditation Standards, in consideration of changing requests and needs of higher education institutions and the entire system in general. Currently, Accreditation Standards aim to consolidate higher education institutions' internal quality system and support HEIs in Kosovo to enhance quality and constantly develop their operations. Based on accreditation results, it is evident that higher education institutions are working hard to maintain their quality criteria, demonstrating institutional maturity which clearly contributes to a better student life and quality competences for them.

In line with the developments and circumstances that affect the development and processes of the Kosovo Accreditation Agency, there are needs identified that have to be met to ensure that KAA mission is constantly being implemented. Special KAA legislation drafted, follow-up procedures becoming functional, increased human resources, increased cooperation with academic community such as HEIs, students, employers, etc. are some of the components to be addressed by the KAA in the next five years. Apart from their importance in meeting formal criteria to have the KAA regain its membership in the ENQA and EQAR, these components definitively aim to change the KAA approach from a quality assurance system to a quality enhancement system.

To have strategic objectives that would advance the KAA work and increase the quality of external quality assurance, KAA applied a data and evidence-based approach to identify the needs and requirements. Find below the SWOT analysis prepared by working group, analysing KAA strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and the data available to come up with objectives that are relevant to KAA goals.

Strengths
- KAA quality assurance framework is aligned with the principles in the ESG 2015 Standards and Guidelines. - SCQ autonomy in decision-making is guaranteed by the Law on HEIs and AI on Accreditation; - KAA is the key mechanism to ensure quality in HEIs, therefore it is supported by students, society, donors and other relevant actors; - Professional and financial support from international donors; - Accreditation evaluations are conducted by international accreditation experts only; - KAA evaluation standards take into account the National Qualifications Framework requirements, which refers to European Qualifications Framework; - In the accreditation process, KAA involves student experts from European Students' Union; - Dedicated and experienced administrative staff; - Professional staff trained for external quality assurance processes; - KAA has internal regulations for quality assurance in place; - KAA regularly participates in international events; - KAA has good relations with ENQA member agencies and other regional agencies; - KAA is transparent with the public, publishes complete expert reports, decisions and other information related to accreditation process; - SQC meetings are transparent and monitored by civil society; - KAA managed to partially digitalize the accreditation process via "e-accreditation" platform; - Higher education has made further progress by establishing consultative bodies, such as the Rector's Conference and Students' Union; - KAA has helped to strengthen the contribution of students in decision-making; - KAA has increasingly supported HEIs through trainings organized on quality assurance issues.

Weaknesses
- Lack of a KAA Law; - Accreditation is considered to be a control approach instead of being a supporting approach for HEIs; - Exclusion from ENQA; - Exclusion from EQAR; - Lack of post-accreditation procedures and follow-up procedures; - Insufficient human resources to fully verify whether accreditation standards have been met; - Insufficient human resources to execute daily activities; - Accreditation standards are equally rated and there is no difference between them; - Lack of accreditation standards for regulated study areas; - Students are not sufficiently involved with the KAA activities; - Employers are not involved with the KAA activities; - Limited physical environments for the KAA.

Opportunities
- Approval of the Law on KAA; - Return of Kosovo to EQAR and ENQA; - Increase the number of professional and competent administrative staff; - Setting up local expert groups; - Cooperation with European accreditation agencies to implement evaluation processes; - Raising the awareness of academic staff about the role of quality assurance in higher education; - Increase the cooperation with civil society organizations and other stakeholders; - Increase the cooperation with local institutions to inform the debate about relations between study programs and labour market; - Modernization of higher education through accreditation; - Full digitalization of accreditation process; - Internationalization of Kosovo higher education through accreditation; - Increased regional cooperation in the area of exchange of information; - Advancement of accreditation standards to enable HEIs integration to Erasmus, Erasmus + projects; - Kosovo integration to Bologna process; - Integration of Kosovo higher education system in European Research Area; - Preparation of annual thematic analysis; - A stronger connection between education system and labour market; - Establishment of a centralized KAA system to provide data about market demand; - Accommodation of KAA to a new building to increase staff performance and improve services.

Risks
- Reputational damage as a result of political interferences to KAA autonomy; - Slow economic development may impact the quality of study programs offered; - Lack of appropriate working conditions in HEIs in Kosovo, with the academic staff forced to search for better opportunities abroad; - Inadequate infrastructure to support study programs, including libraries and labs; - Lack of HEIs awareness about opportunities of investment in innovation, research and science; - A trend of offering academic programs with no sufficient academic staff available.

KAA mission, vision and goals

Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) is an independent agency responsible for the external evaluation (accreditation, re-accreditation, validation and follow-up) of higher education institutions in Kosovo.

KAA mission is:

To support quality development in higher education institutions through external evaluation process and to assure Kosovo society that quality of higher education is at international standards level.

Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) goals are:

- to promote, improve and enhance higher education quality;
- to increase transparency and accountability in higher education system;
- to improve quality of studies in higher education institutions,
- to encourage innovative content in higher education;
- to ensure comparability of qualifications from higher education institutions in Kosovo with qualifications from international programs;
- to implement the objectives of integrating Kosovo in European Higher Education Areas and contribute to its development.

Values that underpin the KAA work include:
- *Independence* - KAA decisions are made independently and justified in a consistent and verifiable manner;
- *Transparency* – KAA is guided by principles of responsibility and public accountability by means of an effective information policy;
- *Credibility* – KAA organizes credible external quality assurance processes, and academic community and society at large have trust in the KAA's work;
- *Professionalism* – KAA applies high professional standards applied in Europe in regards to external quality assurance processes.

KAA Strategic Objectives

To ensure strategic objectives that are relevant and effective, KAA has done an evaluation of the present situation, identifying the key achievements of higher education in Kosovo; it has identified HEIs needs and requirements in terms of external quality assurance and the gaps to be filled. Strategic objectives have been set based on the following intervention areas:

- Legal framework
- Management and administration
- External quality assurance
- Digitalization
- Internationalization

First strategic objective
"To regain the KAA membership in European Network for Quality Assurance - ENQA and registration in EQAR"

Second strategic objective
"To consolidate the legal framework that guarantees KAA institutional and financial independence in performing external quality assurance processes"

Third strategic objective
"To advance the KAA management and administration by increasing physical and professional capacities"

Fourth strategic objective
"To improve quality in higher education sector with efficient and effective accreditation and follow-up procedures"

Fifth strategic objective
"To advance KAA procedure digitalization for an effective external evaluation procedure information and data management"

Sixth strategic objective
"To strengthen KAA cooperation with external quality assurance international agencies".

FIRST STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

1. **"TO REGAIN THE KAA MEMBERSHIP IN EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE - ENQA AND REGISTRATION IN EQAR"**

Retuning KAA to European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) are the two strategic priorities not only for KAA but also for Kosovo Government.

External evaluation procedures applied by KAA are designed to ensure compliance with ESG, but according to ENQA external evaluation, KAA partially complies with some of them. To this end, KAA has taken actions and processes aiming to achieve full compliance with European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) and meet recommendations given by ENQA external evaluation panel.

Measures:

1.1. Full or substantial compliance with European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG);
1.2. Meeting recommendations given by ENQA external evaluation panel;
1.3. Meeting formal requirements to register to EQAR;
1.4. Strengthening KAA role in higher education sector in Kosovo;
1.5. Enhancing transparency in KAA actions and maintaining public trust.

SECOND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

2. **"TO CONSOLIDATE THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK THAT GUARANTEES KAA INSTITUTIONAL AND FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE IN PERFORMING EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESSES"**

The primary aim of this strategic objective is to draft and approve the Law on Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA). Although so far KAA competences and responsibilities have been clearly stipulated in the Law on Higher Education in the Republic of Kosovo, it is considered necessary to draft a special law that would provide full institutional and financial independence to the KAA.

The special law shall prevent any intervention from outside, strengthen further the KAA position in higher education system in Kosovo and, with an organizationally and operationally independent KAA, it shall allow for improved external quality assurance. Drafting a special legislation on KAA is also a prerequisite to guarantee to international external quality assurance mechanisms that KAA decisions are independent and KAA is acting autonomously with no influence from third parties.

Measures:

    2.1. Assurance of KAA institutional, financial and operational independence with the Law on KAA.
    2.2. Consolidation of sub-legal acts that contribute to continuation of procedures and maintain KAA institutional memory;
    2.3. KAA progressive financial growth.

THIRD STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

3. **"TO ADVANCE THE KAA MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION BY INCREASING PHYSICAL AND PROFESSIONAL CAPACITIES"**

Development of internal quality assurance mechanism is one of KAA main priorities for the next five years. KAA should further evaluate, analyse and reflect on internal procedures applied to ensure quality and integrity of its activities. This requires a higher number of administrative staff and their constant professional development. Since the purpose of external evaluation mechanism, among others, is to increase transparency and accountability, by improving internal quality procedures KAA will advance these two principles by constantly promoting them across higher education sector. KAA will implement the criteria stipulated in the Manual for staff evaluation and development to guarantee the measurement and promotion of internal quality.

So far, KAA has made progress in communicating with relevant external stakeholders, especially with higher education institutions and students. However, mechanisms and formal instruments should be established to collect data from these stakeholders, to ensure a national consensus in terms of external quality assurance system. ENQA recommends KAA to increase communication with employers, whereas it recommends active involvement of students in KAA management and external evaluation processes.

Measures:

    3.1. Increased and continuous development of KAA by means of professional trainings;
    3.2. Strengthening KAA internal quality assurance by means of formal internal procedures;
    3.3. Internal quality assurance by strengthening cooperation with respective external actors;
    3.4. Create a KAA external evaluation model.

FOURTH STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

4. **"TO IMPROVE QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR WITH EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE ACCREDITATION AND FOLLOW-UP PROCEDURES"**

After 10 years of external quality assurance, KAA has managed to establish a quality assurance system that guarantees compliance with minimal criteria by higher education institutions. Since HEIs are maturing institutionally and are demonstrating seriousness in maintaining quality assurance, KAA will have to change its evaluation approach from a quality assurance system to a quality enhancement system. This means that KAA will make HEIs more responsible to ensure compliance with quality criteria by constantly supporting and providing professional training to build a sustainable and functional internal quality assurance system.

To increase credibility in external quality assurance processes, KAA will have post-accreditation and follow-up procedures made functional to fill the gap in between accreditation visits to HEIs. Post-accreditation and follow-up procedures will guarantee the implementation of KAA recommendations by HEIs. In addition, processing of appeals by HEIs will be consolidated by applying transparent procedures in line with the principles in European quality assurance guidelines.

To strengthen internal quality assurance capacity, to have equal treatment of all HEIs and to eliminate bureaucracy, KAA will fully digitalize accreditation and re-accreditation procedures in the next five years, so that external experts have real-time access to documentation related to external evaluation. Apart from quality increase, digitalization will increase transparency and accountability towards all stakeholders in higher education in Kosovo.

Measures:

4.1. Efficient and effective external evaluation procedures in place by reviewing the Accreditation Manual;
4.2. Assuring that there is a closure of accreditation cycle through follow-up procedures and post-accreditation procedures;
4.3. Increased involvement of HEIs in KAA decision-making through constant input;
4.4. Increased support for HEIs by KAA through professional training, informative sessions, forums and informative materials.

FIFTH STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

5. **"TO ADVANCE KAA PROCEDURE DIGITALIZATION TO HAVE AN EFFECTIVE EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE INFORMATION AND DATA MANAGEMENT"**

Evidence based decision-making and planning for changes is widely based on credible data. KAA has many possibilities to use the data available. An advanced digital platform will not only help generate quantitative data to perform deep system analysis, but it also contributes to increase the efficiency of KAA services provided for HEIs and students.

Measures:

5.1. Assurance that there are systematic processes in place for data management through procedure digitalization;
5.2. Improvement of administrative services through digitalization;
5.3. External evaluation process digitalization, making e-accreditation fully functional;
5.4. Improvement of communication between KAA and relevant institutions by using shared databases.

SIXTH STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

6. "TO STRENGTHEN THE KAA COOPERATION WITH INTERNATIONAL EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES"

KAA aims to follow the trend of international developments in the area of external quality assurance. Most of European quality assurance agencies perform evaluations beyond their national boundaries. KAA should make efforts to become part of these initiatives and enable the internationalization of Kosovo higher education in Europe. Meeting ENQA and EQAR recommendations is an important element for KAA so that Kosovo is promoted in European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

Measures:

6.1. Joint KAA activities with European quality assurance agencies;
6.2. KAA participation in joint projects with international quality assurance agencies;
6.3. Promotion of Kosovo higher education system in Europe;

Implementation plan and follow-up

To implement the Strategic Plan, KAA has drafted a detailed activity framework, including clear deadlines and performance indicators. Strategic objectives in this plan will be translated to concrete KAA working plan and will be subject to regular evaluation and reporting by KAA.

KAA Director will assess the plan every six months and report to State Council of Quality (SCQ) whether the activities in the strategic plan have been accomplished. This assessment every six months will ensure KAA timely identifies the gaps or challenges in regards to strategic plan accomplishment and makes the necessary interventions to continue with the plan.

For more transparency and accountability towards society in regards to KAA actions, the Strategic plan will be published in the institutional website and distributed to higher education institutions, students, donors, relevant ministries, etc.