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



**ANNUAL WORK REPORT
OF THE STATE COUNCIL OF QUALITY AND
KOSOVO ACCREDITATION AGENCY FOR THE
YEAR 2021**

Prishtina, 2022

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ACCRONYMS

ADA – Austrian Development Agency

KAA - Kosovo Accreditation Agency

CEENQA - Central Eastern Europe Network of Quality Assurance

ENQA - European Network for Quality Assurance

EQAR - European Quality Assurance Register

ESG - European Standards and Guidelines

HERAS - Higher Education, Research and Applied Science Plus

HEI - Higher Education Institutions

Public HEI - Higher Education Institutions financed by the Government of the Republic of Kosovo

Private HEI - Self-financed Higher Education Institutions

INQAAHE - International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

AC - Appeals Committee reviewing the appeals to SCQ decisions submitted by HEIs

NQF – National Qualifications Framework

SCQ - State Council of Quality

Law on HE- Law on Higher Education

MESTI - Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation

QAINTE – Quality, Accountability, Integrity and Transparency in Higher Education Project

SER – Self-Evaluation Report

QA - Quality Assurance

AI - Administrative Instruction

WUS Kosova - World University Service Kosovo

KSAC – Kosovo Subject Area Code

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1. INTRODUCTION

This document was prepared to report the annual work of the State Council of Quality and the Kosovo Accreditation Agency for 2021. It provides information on the activities of the State Council of Quality and the Kosovo Agency for Accreditation for the period of one year. The report reflects:

1. Evaluation and accreditation processes of higher education institutions and their study programs at Level V - Bachelor, Master and Doctorate for the year 2020/2021;
2. Activities and developments that contribute to the internal quality assurance of the work of the Kosovo Accreditation Agency and the functioning of the State Council of Quality;
3. Addressing of recommendations for return to ENQA and EQAR; and
4. Cooperation with national and international partner institutions.

2. KOSOVO ACCREDITATION AGENCY (KAA)

The Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) is a public, independent agency responsible for accreditation and re-accreditation of public and private higher education institutions in Kosovo and their study programs. It was established in 2008 by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST), in accordance with Law No. 2003/14 on Higher Education.¹

Through the accreditation process, KAA supports development of quality in higher education and at the same time provides the society with assurance that the quality of higher education teaching and study meets the minimum international standards.

The legal basis for the operations of the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) is the Law on Higher Education in Kosovo (No. 04/L-037, dated 31.08.2011) and the Administrative Instruction on the Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Kosovo (No. 15/2018),² as amended thrice in 2019 by the MEST (AI 02/2019; AI 08/2019 and AI 13/2019).³

In line with the Article 7 of the LHE (No. 04/L-03), the KAA responsibilities include: advising with the Ministry on applications from institutions for licenses to offer courses or programs; inspecting providers of higher education and advising with the Ministry related to granting, modification or revocation of licenses; performing periodic audits

¹ <https://akreditimi.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Ligji-per-Arsimin-e-Larte-ne-Kosove.pdf>

² https://akreditimi.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/UDHEZIM_ADMINISTRATIV_MASHT_NR_015_2018_PER_AKREDITIMIN_E_INSTITUCIONEVE_TE_ARSIMIT_TE_LARTE_NE_REPUBLIKEN_E_KOSOVES.pdf

³ <https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2019/07/4dd5f6a7-x.pdf>

over the quality of licensed providers of higher education and taking decision on accreditation or their re-accreditation; and undertaking periodic quality assessment of programs offered by accredited providers of higher education.

KAA provides accreditation in these levels:

- Accreditation of higher education institutions
- Accreditation of study programs
- Accreditation of institutions and study programs
- Accreditations of HEI branches and study programs offered in these branches
- Recognition/validation of international accreditations

Following its establishment, in line with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG),⁴ KAA developed its accreditation standards and procedures and published them on their official website.⁵

According to Article 7 of AI No. 15/2018 on the Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Kosovo, an accreditation request may be submitted by:

- A higher institution itself to be evaluated at institutional level or to have the study programs evaluated
- Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI)
- State Council of Quality within the KAA, in specific cases

To have a transparent accreditation process, KAA has prepared all the documents needed for the accreditation procedures that may be used by the HEIs, such as: KAA standards, KAA Guidelines on drafting the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) for Higher Education Institutions and their programs evaluation, respectively the Accreditation Manual.⁶ These documents served as guidelines for higher education institutions for accreditation purposes, but also as guidelines for internal quality assurance and management.

KAA consists of an administrative structure, headed by the KAA Director, and a governing and decision-making body - the State Council of Quality (SCQ). The administrative structure of the KAA currently consists of the Director and eight officials.

6. https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf

5 <https://akreditimi.rks-gov.net/guidelines/>

8. <https://akreditimi.rks-gov.net/accreditation/standards/>

3. STATE COUNCIL OF QUALITY (SCQ)

The State Council of Quality (SCQ) is the governing body of the Kosovo Accreditation Agency and is responsible to make decisions on the accreditation of higher education institutions and their study programs. The activity of the SCQ is based on Law No. 04/L-037 on Higher Education in the Republic of Kosovo and the relevant secondary legislation including the Administrative Instruction on Criteria and Procedures for Election of SCQ Members (No. 05/2018, dated 15.03.2018) and the Regulation on the Work of the State Council of Quality (No. 621/18D, dated 12.06.2018).⁷

Election of SCQ members is regulated with the provisions of the Law on Higher Education, specifically Article 7, paragraph 4, stating that *'The KAA shall be governed by a Board consisting of not less than five and not more than nine persons, appointed by the Ministry for a fixed term; among persons of both genders active in academic work in higher education and/or the professions within and outside of Kosovo, such that there are at least three persons ('international experts') not employed by any higher education provider in Kosovo. This Board shall be designated the State Council of Quality of the KAA. Its membership shall be ratified by the Assembly. Decisions or recommendations regarding the accreditation are made with the majority of votes by its members. Council reports annually to the Ministry and Assembly about its accreditation activities and the adequacy of the supporting infrastructure available'*.

The legislation in force enables the election of SCQ members on the basis of professional and transparent criteria and procedures. The list of nominees is ratified by the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo. Based on the Work Regulations of the State Council of Quality, SCQ sets the annual agendas for the accreditation process of HEIs, approves accreditation standards, procedures and criteria, approves teams of external experts, proposed by the director of KAA, receives decisions on accreditation as well as approves the Statute and all regulations of KAA.

The SCQ composition in its 85th meeting of 22.01.2021 was as follows:

- Prof. Dr. Gazmend Luboteni, President,
- Prof. Assoc. Dr. Vjollca Krasniqi, Vice-president,
- Prof. Assoc. Dr. Arta Basha – Jakupi,
- Dr. Sc. Spec. Rozafa Koliqi-Lila,
- Prof. Dr. Magdalena Ziolo,

⁷ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1eRBWnoiUghGYcsp8nO5HlmVWIDUyQ3Te/view?usp=sharing>

- Prof. Dr. Herbert K. Amato;
- Prof. Msc. Jeffery Butel;
- Prof. Ass. Dr. Dukagjin Zeka;
- Prof. Ass. Binak Beqaj, appointed by the former Minister of MESTI.

Out of the members above, the three international members resigned on 3 February 2021. The President Gazmend Luboteni and the Vice president Vjollca Krasniqi resigned on 4 March 2021. The term of the member Arta Basha-Jakupi ended in April 2021. The member Binak Beqaj was released from his position by MESTI through Decision No. 01B/01 dated 26 March 2021.

On 20 April 2021, the competition for the nomination of new members of the SCQ was announced.

After the completion of the election procedures and following ratification by the Assembly of Kosovo on 17 June 2021, the new composition of the SCQ is as follows:

- Prof. Ass. Dr. Hasnije Ilazi,
- Prof. Dr. Cassie L Barnhardt,,
- Prof. Ass. Dr. Krenare Pireva-Nuçi,
- Prof. Ass. Dr. Rozafa Koliqi-Lila,
- Prof. Ass. Dr. Dukagjin Zeka,
- Prof. Ass. Dr. Gëzim Tosuni,
- Prof. Ass. Dr. Seb Bytyçi,
- Prof. Dr. Werner Jakob Stueber,
- Prof. Dr. Alison Felce.

In the constitutive meeting held on 21 June 2021 and continued on 28 June 2021, the leadership of the SCQ was also elected: Prof. Ass. Dr. Hasnije Ilazi - president and Prof. Dr. Cassie L Barnhardt – vice president.

At the meeting of the SCQ held on 27.07.2021, the three international members of the SCQ:

- Dr. Cassie L Barnhardt;
- Prof. Dr. Werner Jakob Stueber; and
- Prof. Dr. Alison Felce

announced the submission of their letter of resignation from the SCQ. This resignation was a consequence of their disagreement with the requirement to declare assets in accordance with the domestic legislation.

At the meeting of the SCQ held on 28 October 2021, following ratification in the Assembly of Kosovo on 19 October 2021, the membership of the SCQ was completed with the appointment of Prof. Dr. Klemen Miklavic as an international member, thus returning the full function of the Council and decision-making according to the legislation in force.

The SCQ in its new composition is engaged in finalizing the processes suspended due to the non-operationalization of the previous Council, and in planning the activities that would fill the procedural vacuum and the processes for raising the quality in the Higher Education Institutions in harmony with the policies of the E4 group (ENQA, EUA, EURASHE and ESU) and Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

Table 1: Main activities of the SCQ in the period July-December 2021

No.	Description	Date
1	The State Council of Quality, after ratification in the Assembly of Kosovo, made a decision on institutions and academic programs awaiting accreditation. Accredited institutions and programs for 2021/2022 are attached in Annex 1.	July 2021 August 2021
2	The State Council of Quality advanced the standards through completing and clarifying the Manual for Accreditation in points 3, 4 and 5. In point no. 3 of the general principles of the Accreditation Manual it clarified the criteria for accreditation of General Medicine programs; In point no. 4 of the general principles of the Manual for Accreditation it established the criteria for accreditation of HEI branches; In point no. 5 of the general principles of the Manual for Accreditation it set the criteria for scientific research and academic titles for providers of programs at the BA/BSc and MA/MSc level.	September 2021
3	The State Council of Quality installed the spirit of partnership with HEIs for quality improvement in higher education by visiting all accredited HEIs and getting to know their work and requirements.	September – December 2021
4	The State Council of Quality reported to the Commission for Education, Science, Technology, Innovation, Culture, Youth and Sports in the Assembly of Kosovo.	September 2021
5	The State Council of Quality approved the Activities Plan for 2022 with the main priority being the return of KAA to the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher	November 2021

	Education (EQAR).	
6	The State Council of Quality with the help of the American Embassy, namely the Fulbright program, finalized the feasibility study for the digitization and automation of the processes in KAA	December 2021
7	The State Council of Quality approved the Strategic Plan 2021-2025 and Action Plan	December 2021
8	The State Council of Quality approved the Monitoring Methodology Manual	December 2021
9	The State Council of Quality participated in the drafting of the law on KAA	December 2021
10	The State Council of Quality approved the Annual Reporting Manual	December 2021

4. MEETINGS AND DECISIONS OF THE STATE COUNCIL OF QUALITY IN 2021

During 2021, SCQ held ten meetings, of which nine were regular and one was extraordinary. Table 2 lists the meetings held in order.

Table 2: List of meetings held in 2021

No.	Date	Remarks
1	22.01.2021	85th meeting of SCQ (with the previous composition of SCQ)
2	21.06.2021, 28.06.2021	86th meeting of SCQ (constitutive meeting with the new composition of SCQ)
3	07.07.2021	87 meeting of SCQ
4	07.09.2021	88th meeting of SCQ
5	17.09.2021	89th meeting of SCQ
6	21.09.2021	90ieth meeting of SCQ
7	05.10.2021	91st meeting of SCQ
8	18.10.2021	92nd meeting of SCQ (extraordinary meeting for approving evaluation reports of doctorate programs)
9	02.11.2021,	93rd meeting of SCQ
10	21.12.2021	94th meeting of SCQ

5. EVALUATION AND ACCREDITATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTIUTUTIONS IN 2020

Institutional and study program evaluation is an activity implemented periodically by KAA. The process is based on the evaluation of documents submitted by the applying institution (Self-Evaluation Report) and findings from the international expert team field visit. Based on the KAA published procedures, HEIs should prove that they meet the accreditation criteria in order to be accredited.

Based on Article 10 of the Administrative Instruction on Higher Education Institutions 'Accreditation (No. 15/2018), each HEI that submits a request for institutional accreditation/re-accreditation of one or more study programs, along with the Application/Request, should present the list of their academic staff, who previously should have declared through the KAA e-accreditation platform that they are engaged with that HEI, in the respective program, for the respective academic year. The application, along with the list of staff, is evaluated against the formal accreditation criteria and if the application is approved by the SCQ, it is included in the KAA annual evaluation agenda. If the evaluation by SCQ is negative, the application is refused and not evaluated further. The HEI, for which the application and the list of staff is approved, should submit to KAA a Self-Evaluation Report, which will be forwarded to the external evaluation team prior to their visit to HEI, respectively before the distance (online) evaluation via conference call.

In 2021, evaluation and accreditation process for Higher Education Institutions and their study programs by KAA was done based on standards that were revised in 2019 and the new Accreditation Manual, used by HEIs as a basis when drafting their SER. The new standards aim to advance the quality in HEIs in Kosovo and are focused on the consolidation of their quality assurance internal systems.

As the previous year 2020, 2021 was not a regular year due to Covid-19 pandemic. The situation affected the work of KAA as well; its activities were adapted and reorganized in line with the situation created and recommendations from the Government of Kosovo on fighting and preventing the spread of Covid-19. Based on the SCQ's decision of 19 April 2020, SCQ continued to have the accreditation process implemented in distance (online).

The decision that allowed for distance (online) accreditation was made by the former Minister of Education Hykmete Bajrami (Ref: 35/018, dated: 07.05.2020).⁸This Decision regulated the procedures for external evaluation by international peer reviewers via conference calls during the period the measures set by the Government of Kosovo were in place, as per paragraph 1.2 of the Decision No.01/07⁹ to manage the emergency

⁸ <https://akreditimi.rks-gov.net/about-us/dispozitat/dokumente/>

⁹ <https://kryeministri-ks.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Vendimet-e-Mbledhjes-se-7-te-te-Qeverise-se-Republikes-se-Kosoves.pdf>

situation created with the Covid-19 pandemic.

During 2021, the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) managed to successfully complete the accreditation process for 230 academic programs and 11 accreditation processes at the level of higher education institutions. Of this number, 199 reports/decisions were positive and 31 were negative. Despite many difficulties from the COVID-19 pandemic, KAA managed to complete all field visits within the legal deadline. Field visits were conducted by international experts remotely (online) while they were assisted by KAA physically in every external evaluation process, verifying all the persons who were involved in the accreditation. In addition, the physical verification of all the information, documents and videos that were presented to the international experts was done.

During the accreditation process, KAA did not receive any complaints from higher education institutions regarding the external evaluation process. Complaints usually came after the submission of draft reports of international experts, which in some cases were negative for the accreditation of study programs.

The accreditation process in Kosovo for the year 2021 was positively evaluated in the European Commission's report on Kosovo, and during meetings with the director of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), Anna Gover, as well as from the Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Central and Eastern European Higher Education (CEENQA) in the official journal of July 2021.¹⁰ The accreditation process in Kosovo was also positively evaluated by local monitors and international donors.

5.1 Institutional accreditation of higher education institutions

In 2021, KAA carried out the institutional assessment of 11 HEIs, of which 2 were public universities and 9 others were private colleges.

On 21.06.2021, SCQ held its regular meeting to analyze and vote the evaluation reports prepared by international experts. As can be seen in Figure 1, from a total of 11 evaluated institutions, based on the recommendation of international experts, 7 (See Tables 3 and 4) of these institutions were re-accredited while 4 others were refused accreditation (See Figure 2).

¹⁰ https://www.ceenqa.org/wp-content/uploads/CEENQA-Newsletter_Vol.11_No.1_July_2021.pdf

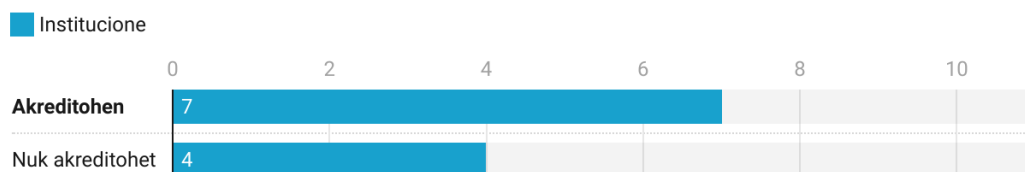


Figure 1: Decisions on HEI accreditation at institutional level

In the institutional evaluation process of HEIs, 9 international experts were engaged, of which 3 were student experts.

5.1.1. Institutional accreditation of public higher education institutions

Table 3: Public higher education institutions subject to institutional accreditation in 2021 and SCQ Decision.

No.	Institution	SCQ Decision
1	University of Gjakova “Fehmi Agani”	Accredited for 3 years
2	University of Gjilan “Kadri Zeka”	Accredited for 3 years

Table 3 lists the public institutions that were subject to institutional accreditation in 2021. Of the 2 evaluated public universities, the University of Gjakova "Fehmi Agani" and the University of Gjilan "Kadri Zeka" were accredited for a period of 3 years.

5.1.2. Institutional accreditation of private higher education institutions

Table 4: Private higher education institutions subject to accreditation in 2021 and the SCQ Decision

No.	Institution	SCQ Decision
1	Biznesi College (Prishtinë)	Accredited for 3 years
2	Biznesi College (Prizren)	Accredited for 3 years
3	Cactus Education	Not accredited
4	Globus College	Not accredited
5	Pjeter Budi College	Accredited for 3 years
6	Akademia Tempulli	Accredited for 3 years
7	UBT College (Gjilan)	Not accredited
8	UBT College (Pejë)	Accredited for 3 years
9	Universi College	Not accredited

Table 4 lists the private institutions that underwent institutional accreditation in 2021. As seen in Figure 4, of the 9 private institutions of higher education that were subject to institutional accreditation in 2021, five of them were accredited. Four colleges were not accredited at the institutional level.

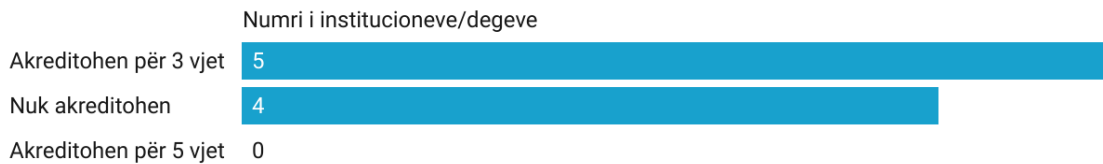


Figure 2: Private institutions of higher education and SCQ decisions

5.2.1. Accreditation of study programs in public Higher Education Institutions

Of the 141 academic programs of public universities that were subject to evaluation for accreditation or re-accreditation in 2021, 75 were at the Bachelor level, including 2 integrated programs (Architecture and Veterinary Medicine), 61 at the Master level and 5 at the doctorate level.

After evaluation by international experts and after review of the evaluation reports by SCQ, out of 141 evaluated programs, 125 of them were accredited (73 Bachelor's level, 51 Master's level and 1 doctoral level program), while 16 programs failed to meet the accreditation standards (2 at Bachelor's level, 10 at Master's level and 4 at Doctorate level). (See Figure 3)

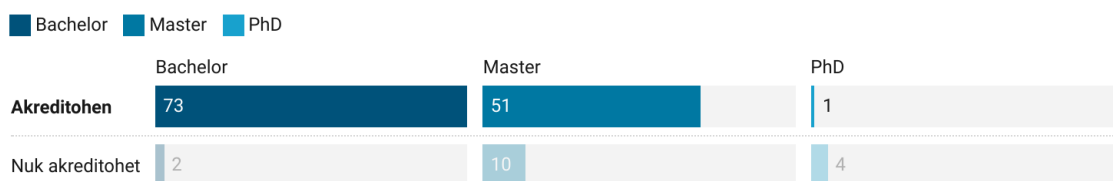


Figure 3: Evaluation of the programs of public higher education institutions depending on the level of study

5.2.2. Accreditation of study programs in private Higher Education Institutions

Of the 89 academic programs of private higher education institutions that were subject to the evaluation for accreditation or re-accreditation in 2021, 2 were level V programs of the National Qualifications Framework, 63 were at the Bachelor's level and 24 were at the Master's level (see Figure 4).

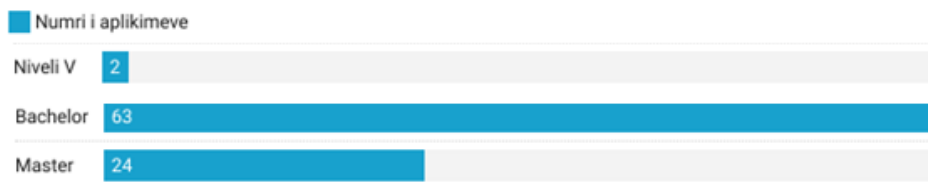


Figure 4: Academic programs of private higher education institutions

As seen in Figure 5, after the evaluation by international experts and after reviewing the evaluation reports by SCQ, out of 89 evaluated programs, 74 of them were accredited (0 at level V, 54 Bachelor level and 20 Master level), while 15 programs failed to meet accreditation standards (2 at level V according to the National Qualification Framework, 9 at Bachelor's level and 4 at Master's level).

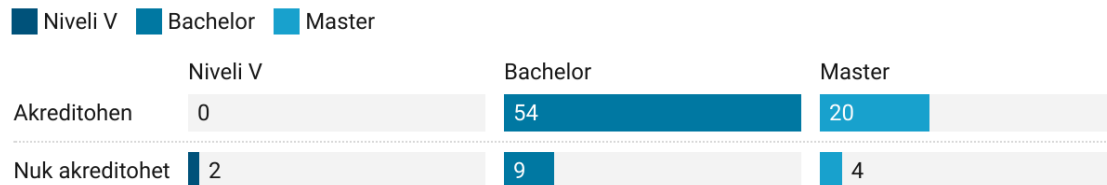


Figure 5: Evaluation of programs of private higher education institutions depending on the level of study

6. APPEALS COMMITTEE

The right to appeal SCQ Decisions is regulated with the Article 22 of the AI 15/2018, 19 stating that the HEIs may file an appeal within a period of 30 days from the day the party was notified of the SCQ Decision on accreditation, and this procedure is in compliance with the Law on Administrative Procedure.¹¹ The work of Appeals Committee is regulated with the Regulation No. 2/2019¹² on the KAA Appeals Committee operation. This committee should review the appeals received and respond to HEIs within a period of 30 days. An independent Appeals Committee was established in September 2020, consisting of 5 external members, 3 permanent members and 2 reserve members. One of the permanent members is a lawyer, with more than 10 years of experience. The committee members have a two-year mandate.

During the year 2021, the Appeals Committee at the KAA has reviewed a total of 22 complaints from Higher Education Institutions.

¹¹ <https://mpb.rks-gov.net/ap/desk/inc/media/FC95CB25-50B5-4385-A800-CB31810A35CC.pdf>

¹² <https://akreditimi.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Rregullore-mbi-punen-e-KA.pdf>

The Appeals Committee in KAA was comprised of:

1. Faton Merovci, chairman (permanent member);
2. Krenare Sogojeva, permanent member;
3. Muhamet Qerimi, permanent member;
4. Bujar Pira, reserve member;
5. Haki Demolli, reserve member.

On 24.09.2021 Mrs. Krenare Sogojeva informed KAA that due to her appointment as Commissioner for Information and Privacy, she cannot continue to be part of the AC in KAA. On 11.11.2021, the Chairman of the Complaints Committee Mr. Merovci handed in his resignation from the position of the chairman and from the membership of the CA, due to personal reasons. Consequently, as of November 11, 2021, the Appeals Committee in the KAA has had three members.

7. INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE OF KAA

With the support from the project funded by U.S. Embassy “Supporting KAA to meet some of the ENQA recommendations”, implemented by WUS Kosova, KAA developed the Manual on internal evaluation of staff, a mechanism that will contribute to KAA staff management and development..

The Manual is based on performance management process and is used for administrative and development purposes. The Manual aims to offer guidelines for developing staff performance evaluation process to be implemented by KAA. With this process in place, the KAA is dedicated to support all staff members to develop their potential and achieve personal objectives, which on the other hand will help the KAA to achieve its objectives.

8. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION, PARTNERSHIP AND PROJECTS

KAA is part of international networks for quality assurance in higher education and continues to be also for 2021.

In 2021, KAA continues to be a member of:

- Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies - CEENQA¹³.
- INQAAH¹⁴, International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education.

¹³ Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education. <https://www.ceenqa.org/>

¹⁴ The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) <https://www.inqaah.org/>

9. THE MAIN ACTIVITIES OF THE ACCREDITATION AGENCY IN 2021

9.1 KAA has successfully completed the accreditation processes for 230 study programs and 11 institutional ones

The Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA), in 2021, has managed to successfully complete the accreditation process for 230 academic programs and 11 accreditation processes at the level of higher education institutions.

As seen in Figure 7, 86.53% of the programs were successfully accredited, while 13.47% did not pass the accreditation threshold.



Figure 6: Decisions of the State Council of Quality for 230 academic programs

9.2 A total of 81 international experts are engaged for evaluation

According to the legislation in force, Kosovo is the only country in the region where the entire process of external evaluation of higher education institutions and their study programs is implemented by international experts.

The accreditation process in 2021 included 81 eminent European experts in the relevant fields of study (See Annex 2 – List of experts).

During this process, KAA has implemented the recommendation of ENQA, for the inclusion of student experts in the accreditation process.

All drafts of international experts' reports have been sent to higher education institutions for comment, before being sent to SCQ for review and decision-making process.

9.3 Approval of the Strategic Plan of KAA 2021-2025

The State Council of Quality approved the Strategic Plan 2021-2025 of KAA at the meeting held on December 18, 2021.

The five-year Strategic Plan of KAA has the following objectives:

- a) Regaining KAA's membership in the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the European Register for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (EQAR);
- b) Creation of a consolidated legal framework that guarantees the institutional and financial independence of the KAA in performing external quality assurance processes;
- c) Establishment of the advanced system of management and administration of KAA through the increase of physical and professional capacities;
- d) Improving quality in the higher education sector through efficient and effective accreditation and monitoring procedures;
- e) Advanced digitization of KAA procedures for an effective management of information and data of external evaluation procedures.

The KAA Strategic Plan was drafted by internal staff, four local experts and one external expert in support of the HERAS Plus Project.

In the compilation of the Strategic Plan, there was extensive involvement of higher education actors (see Annex 3 – KAA Strategic Plan 2021-2025).

9.4 Twinning between the Accreditation Agencies of Kosovo and Austria

With the support of the HERAS Plus project, funded by the International Development Agency (ADA) of Austria, the Kosovo Accreditation Agency has been twinned with the Austrian counterpart Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation.

This project increases cooperation in the field of education between Kosovo and Austria. The main beneficiaries of this project are KAA and all parties involved in higher education in Kosovo, primarily public and private higher education institutions. The improvement of policies and the increase of the capacities of KAA directly affect the quality of higher education in Kosovo. Through the implementation of European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) by Kosovo, the academic exchange of students and academic staff becomes much easier. With the implementation of ESG standards, there are more spaces created to facilitate the integration of the education system of Kosovo in the EU, and there are more entities established for the recognition of the diplomas of Kosovar students in EU countries.

The twinning project aims to exchange Austrian experiences with KAA through mutual visits, conferences, trainings, and consultations in the field of ESG standards implementation. Also, the project will focus on the design of methodologies for the process of accreditation and implementation (decision-making), reporting and the appeal process in accordance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). Part of the project is the support of AQ Austria for KAA in preparation for return to ENQA and EQAR (See Annex 4 - Agreement with AQ Austria).

9.5 Feasibility study for digitalization and automation of processes in KAA

With the support of the Embassy of the United States of America in Prishtina - Fulbright Project, SCQ member Krenare Pireva Nuçi and KAA official Flamur Abazaj, have finalized the feasibility study implementation project for the general digitization of processes.

This project will contribute to the digitization and automation of all processes in KAA and will enable increased transparency for the public.

In addition, the member of SCQ, Krenare Pireva Nuci, submitted the terms of reference which contain the requirements of the software specifications for digitization and automation, and this document is planned to be implemented during 2022 and will be put into operation for all actors of high education in the Republic of Kosovo.

The implementation of this project will be done with the funds of KAA and international donors, in order to increase transparency and accountability of interested parties, including students, the academic community, civil society organizations, and the general public.

Portugal is one of the EU countries that has been very successful in digitizing accreditation. KAA is planning to bring this model to Kosovo.

All actors of higher education have been involved in this project. Their recommendations have been analyzed and some of them have been included in the final document (See Annex 5 - Feasibility Plan)

9.6 Methodology for thematic analysis has been approved by SCQ

With the financing of the Embassy of the United States of America, the organization WUS Kosovo has implemented the project "Support of the Kosovo Agency for Accreditation for the fulfilment of some recommendations of ENQA".

The project was implemented in the period September 2020 - September 2021.

The main orientation of this project has been the implementation of ENQA's recommendation for the creation of the Methodology of thematic analysis. KAA, in addition to creating the thematic analysis Methodology, has also implemented two thematic analyses:

- a) Preparation of Kosovar graduates for the labour market - Perspective of the employer and the graduates;
- b) Thematic Analysis for Institutional Accreditation for HEIs.

Part of this project was also the training of the KAA staff for the future implementation of thematic analyses of topics of interest to the higher education system.

The actors of higher education in Kosovo and the business community have been involved in this project (See Annex 6 – [Methodology of thematic analysis](#), Annex 7 - Annex 8 – [Thematic Analysis 2](#))

9.7 The SCQ has approved the Guide for Internal Evaluation of KAA staff

With the support of the WUS Kosova project, SCQ has approved the Guide for the Internal Evaluation of KAA personnel, which was also a recommendation of ENQA.

The purpose of this guide is performance management as a continuous organizational process that is carried out to maximize staff productivity with the overall goal of improving the institution's effectiveness. This guide aligns with KAA's strategic goals and requires open communication between managers and staff (See Annex 9 - KAA Staff Evaluation Manual).

9.8 The Monitoring Methodology and post-accreditation procedures have been approved by SCQ

SCQ has approved the document Monitoring Methodology and post-accreditation procedures. Until now, KAA has not had a monitoring mechanism or post-accreditation procedures, and this has been a major setback for quality assurance in higher education.

The document will serve as a guide for KAA, higher education institutions, international experts as well as the general public for the implementation of fair and transparent post-accreditation and monitoring procedures.

The document also complies with Standard 2.3 of the European Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG), which requires quality assurance agencies to complete the accreditation cycle with post-accreditation procedures aimed at continuous improvement of the quality of higher education institutions.

In the drafting of this project, actors of higher education were involved, through conferences, interviews, round tables, and public hearings.

This document was produced with the support of the QAINTE Project, financed by the Austrian ADA. (See Annex 10 - Monitoring Methodology).

9.9 The Manual for international accreditation experts has been approved by SCQ

KAA with the support of the HERAS Plus Project has drafted an Information and Training Manual to provide practice-based guidelines for international evaluation experts who conduct external evaluations of higher education institutions (HEIs) in Kosovo on behalf of KAA.

The Manual is vital as KAA will use it to provide experts with formal training on the relevant topics of the accreditation process and contextual understanding of the circumstances in higher education and related processes.

The project directly affects the quality of the Accreditation Agency's services for the external evaluation of higher education institutions but also meets one of the criteria for our return to ENQA and EQAR (See Annex 12 - Manual on international experts).

9.10 Certificates for students

With the funding of the US Embassy, in the summer of 2021 KAA has digitized the issuance of accreditation confirmations. All students and graduates who need to be provided with certificates for the accreditation of their study programs can now obtain them online, without the need to come in person to the Accreditation Agency.

This is a great achievement, because, in addition to increasing the security of issuing documentation and eliminating all possibilities for human error, this platform also increases the reliability of documents issued by the Accreditation Agency to international partners.

Each certificate issued electronically allows all parties to obtain the certificate electronically at a separate link. All KAA counterpart agencies in Europe and beyond now have direct access to the verification of documents issued by KAA.

This service has passed all cyber security standards from the Information Society Agency (See Annex 11 - Application for online certificates).

9.11 KAA's new website and official Facebook profile have been launched

Funded by the Embassy of the United States of America, the new website of KAA has been developed and launched.

The site is in three languages, Albanian, English, and Serbian. All decisions and developments in the KAA are published on the website, thus increasing the transparency of the KAA.

KAA has also launched the official profile on Facebook, where all news, announcements, and developments in KAA are published ([See the new website, see the official profile on Facebook](#)).

9.12. ASHI guarantees the cyber security of KAA

In addition to the development of the new website, the transfer of the KAA servers to the State Information Agency (SIA) was also made. From now on, the website of the Agency, the issuance of electronic certificates for accreditation, and the e-Accreditation platform where the data of over 4000 people (academic staff) are stored, are guaranteed by SIA.

9.13 Connection of the e-Accreditation Platform with the Tax Administration

KAA owns the electronic platform E-Accreditation which stores all the data of the academic staff in the Republic of Kosovo. During 2021, KAA has linked this platform with the servers of the Tax Administration of Kosovo, to verify if the academic staff has more than one full-time job.

This platform has eliminated the phenomenon of engaging academic staff in more than one full-time position ([See the electronic platform](#))

9.14 All decisions and reports of international experts are published

Aiming for complete transparency and accountability, in 2021 KAA has published all the final reports of international accreditation experts and the SCQ decisions.

Full transparency and accountability are one of ENQA's recommendations, which KAA is fully implementing ([See decisions](#)).

9.15 KAA publishes the lists of accredited programs and the informative spot

In 2021, KAA has published the list of accredited programs in higher education institutions in the Republic of Kosovo for the new academic year 2021/2022.

The list of decisions with accredited programs includes the decisions of the State Council on Quality (SCQ) during 2021, but also programs that have had previous accreditations.

Also, KAA has published a publicity spot that advises new candidates that before deciding to apply to any of the HEIs, they should visit the KAA website and find out which HEIs are accredited. ([See Annex 13 – Accredited programs](#), [Watch the spot](#))

10. COOPERATION WITH LOCAL INSTITUTIONS AND PARTNERS

10.1 Approval of the Law on KAA in the Government

Representatives of the State Council on Quality (SCQ) and the Kosovo Accreditation Agency have actively participated in the drafting of the Law on the Kosovo Accreditation Agency.

This Draft Law regulates the status of the Kosovo Accreditation Agency as a regulatory agency in the processes and responsibilities of accreditation, re-accreditation, validation, and monitoring, with the aim of ensuring quality in higher education in the Republic of Kosovo. Relevant actors, experts from MESTI, the Accreditation Agency, the State Council on Quality, representatives of the academic community, donors, and civil society were involved in the compilation of this draft law.

This version of the Draft Law ensures the independence of the Accreditation Agency as well as the implementation of European quality assurance standards in higher education. With the approval of this law, the last criterion for the re-application of the KAA for regaining membership to ENQA and EQAR will be fulfilled, and this is priority number one in the action plan of the State Council on Quality (See Annex 14 - Action Plan document compiled by the State Council on Quality).

10.2 Dynamic plan for regaining membership to ENQA and EQAR

SCQ and KAA have compiled and submitted to MESTI the Dynamic Plan for regaining membership to ENQA and EQAR.

According to this Plan, of the 13 main recommendations for regaining membership to ENQA and EQAR, more than 90% have already been fulfilled. After the Law on KAA is approved in the Assembly and the sub-legal acts are issued, it is estimated that the criteria will be met at the level of 100%.

10.3 SCQ and KAA visits to higher education institutions

The Chairperson and members of the State Council on Quality (SCQ) visited all accredited institutions of higher education in Kosovo, and these visits were recommended by ENQA. During the visits, in addition to the management, meetings were also held with representatives of students and the academic community.

Leaders of higher education institutions, the academic community, as well as students, have provided concrete recommendations on increasing the quality of higher education.

The inclusion of HEIs in the decision-making process is also one of the criteria for regaining membership to ENQA and EQAR ([See news from field visits](#)).

10.4 New KAA building

The Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation (MESTI) has decided that the new public building, in the "Prishtina e Re" location, will be dedicated to KAA.

The facility is modern with over 1000 square meters, and meets all the needs of KAA.

Construction of the new headquarters is planned to be completed in early 2022, and KAA is expected to move into the new building by the end of 2022.

With this building, KAA fulfils ENQA's criteria for "sufficient space for the Agency's staff."

10.5 Recruitment of staff

With the amendment of the Law on Public Officials, the personnel recruitment procedures have also changed. Since the KAA staff are civil servants, we have waited until the new recruitment procedures were established in accordance with the new law.

Currently, KAA has 9 staff members, while a total of 32 have been approved. In 2021, an IT official was hired.

10.6 Cooperation with civil society

KAA has signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with the QAIN project, which enables the local organization ORCA to monitor the work of KAA and SCQ. BIRN organization also monitors the work of SCQ.

10.7 Cooperation with the State Advocacy

On 11.11.2021, the State Advocacy of Kosovo concluded that the KAA is fully complying with the legal framework in the Republic of Kosovo and is not at risk of any legal dispute.

The State Advocacy has pledged to fully support the Accreditation Agency, not only for legal protection in the courts but also for the compilation of legal acts, so that they are in full compliance with the legislation in force. The State Advocacy and the Accreditation Agency have appointed contact persons in order to facilitate cooperation between the two institutions. ([Read details](#))

11. COOPERATION WITH INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND PARTNERS

11.1 Report of the European Commission on Kosovo

In the report of February 23, 2021, within the framework of the Stabilization and Association Agreement Process, the European Commission positively evaluates the work of the KAA, stating that "*although in pandemic conditions, the accreditation process has been managed very well*". (Report???, page no)

Furthermore, the European Commission Report on Kosovo of October 2021 in the section on the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) is accurate, positive, and encouraging for the work of the KAA and gives hope for the regaining membership to ENQA and EQAR.

The European Commission stated that: "*The Agency managed to complete the full accreditation cycle for the 2021-2022 academic year, reducing the number of programmes and institutions, based on quality criteria*".

The European Commission appreciates the work of KAA for fulfilling the criteria for regaining membership to ENQA and EQAR when it states that "*The KAA continued efforts to regain membership*".

The European Commission has also verified the reports of civil society organizations in Kosovo, which have evaluated the work of the Accreditation Agency very positively ([See report](#)).

11.2 Review of standards at the bachelor and master level

Funded by the Austrian ADA, the HERAS Plus Project is implementing the standards review project at the bachelor and master level.

SCQ, KAA, HEIs, MESTI, local and international experts, representatives of donors, civil society, academic community, students, etc. are involved in this project.

Round tables and conferences were held with higher education actors. Currently, the first draft review of the standards by KAA and SCQ is being compiled.

11.3 KAA wins a grant from the American Embassy for the involvement of students in decision-making

The Accreditation Agency, on October 8, 2021, was announced as the winner of the grant by the American Embassy in Kosovo. The funded project aims to increase the involvement of students in the quality assurance process, ensuring a direct impact on the higher education system in Kosovo and making students important stakeholders within the system.

11.4 CEENQA presents the success of KAA in the process of digitalization of services

In the issue of December 2021 ([Volume 11, No.2](#)) of the magazine of the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA), the successful work of the Kosovo Accreditation Agency was presented (KAA) in the finalization of the implementation project for the general digitization of processes in KAA.

Alongside the sister agencies of Central and Eastern European countries, page 13 of this magazine, KAA-Kosova is presented with the title "*The feasibility study in digitization and automation of processes in KAA has been finalized*" ([Volume 11, No.2, p.13](#)). This is the third time in a year that CEENQA presents Kosovo and its Accreditation Agency as a success story for increasing the quality of higher education. In December 2020 and July 2021, CEENQA has also presented KAA with very positive evaluations.

Kosovo is a member with full rights in CEENQA ([See Annex 16 – CEENQA Notice](#))

11.5 KAA and the American ATMAE Association collaborate to promote quality in higher education

Upon the invitation of the American counterpart agency - the Association for Technology, Management, and Applied Engineering (ATMAE), which accredits all academic programs in the field of technology and engineering in the USA, the delegation of the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) and MESTI (NARIC Centre), in November 2021 stayed for one week in Orlando, Florida in the USA.

During the meetings with American counterparts, ATMAE has expressed its willingness to support KAA with experts to promote the development of academic programs in the field of technology and engineering in Kosovo.

The Kosovo delegation participated in ATMAE Board and management meetings, in several scientific and innovative conferences, in the fair of the most popular American universities, and in the competition of students in the field of robotics.

At the main ceremony, ATMAE awarded the delegation from Kosovo with an acknowledgment "for successful cooperation and accreditation".

11.6 KAA supported by QAIN T for the design of KSAC to facilitate the classification of study areas

The project financed by QAIN T aims to design the Study Field Codes for Kosovo (up to 3 levels), and this document is based on the ERASMUS Field Codes, and their adaptation in the context of Kosovo. Through this document, Higher Education Institutions will have the opportunity to review the compliance of the program holders with the relevant fields. Decentralization of this process would help HEIs to self-assess the compatibility of study programs with their program holders.

ANNEXES

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