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Kosovo Accreditation Agency

FACULTY OF EDUCATION
University of Prizren "Ukshin Hoti"

BA in Preschool Education

(ACCREDITATION)

REPORT OF THE EXPERT TEAM



29.04.2021, Tbilisi

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1. INTRODUCTION



1.1. Context

Date of site visit: March 26, 2021

Expert Team (ET) members:

- *Dr. Elene Jibladze*

Coordinators from Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA):

- *Naim Gashi, Executive Director of KAA*
- *Ilijane Ademaj, Senior Officer for Evaluation and Monitoring*

Sources of information for the Report:

- *Self-evaluation report*
- *Evidence provided by the Faculty of Education corresponding each standard.*
- *Requested additional documents, total of 10 documents*

Criteria used for program evaluation:

- *KAA Accreditation Manual – program accreditation standards*

1.2. Site visit schedule

09:00 – 09:40 Meeting with the management of the faculty where the programme is integrated (*no slide presentation is allowed, the meeting is intended as a free discussion*) – joint session

09:45 – 10:25 Meeting with quality assurance representatives and administrative staff – joint session



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10:30 – 11:10	Lunch break
11:00 – 12:10	Meeting with the heads of the study programme 1. Master in Educational Sciences with specialisation, MA
12:15 – 13:15	Meeting with the heads of the study programme 2. Master in Subject Teaching with specialisation, MA
13:20 – 14:00	Meeting with teaching staff
14:05 – 14:45	Meeting with students
14:50 – 15:30	Meeting with graduates
15.35 – 16:15	Meeting with employers of graduates and external stakeholders
16.15 – 16:25	Internal meeting of KAA staff and experts
16:25 – 16:35	Closing meeting with the management of the faculty and program

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

This report evaluates BA in Pre-School Education at the Faculty of Education in the University of Prizren for re-accreditation. The University was created in 2009 and is a successor of the Pedagogical Higher School (branch of University of Pristina, 1961). Currently, the university has six faculties, including the Faculty of Education. Pedagogical Higher School, mentioned earlier was absorbed by this faculty and is in operation since 2010. The Faculty of Education offers two BA programs: BA in Pre-school Education and a BA in Primary Education.

The mission of the university is to be a “competitive academic institution focused on providing quality education by conducting scientific research and contributing to innovation, in line with the demands of the labor market and the community where it operates locally, nationally and

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beyond.” (SER. p.4). The university claims that it pursues its mission by providing 21 study programs (both BA and MA) at 6 faculties. University offers academic programs in Albanian, as well in Turkish and Bosnian, hence reflecting the ethnic diversity and meeting the demand in its region. The research component is still to be developed in the university. On average, the university hosts close to 3800 students annually.

According to SER (p. 13), the mission of the faculty is to strive for excellence, provide education that combines theory and practice, encourages innovation and creativity, supports professional and personal development of academic staff and students. Importantly, the faculty focuses on Prizren and the region, primarily. The faculty offers two BA programs – BA in Preschools education and BA in primary education – in three different languages: Albanian, Turkish and Bosnian. The program under review is the BA in preschool education. The previous accreditation that the program went through was in 2020 until 2021, September. The university applies for reaccreditation.

For the academic year of 2020-2021, the faculty hosts 938 active students. Majority of them come from the Prizren region, and a small number of them also come from other regions of Kosovo and neighboring Albania (Kukes, Tropoja, Durrës, etc.), North Macedonia and Montenegro.

The Faculty is involved in couple of international projects together with the education faculties from other state universities (e.g. Caritas Kosova project on preschool education), which is an opportunity for the academic staff in the region of Kosovo to gain information from its European colleagues about modern teaching and learning practices and also, collaborate with other institutions in Kosovo and share and gain experience from them.



2. PROGRAM EVALUATION

2.1. Mission, objectives and administration

The mission of the UUHP is to be

“ a competitive academic institution focused on providing quality education by conducting scientific research and contributing to innovation, in line with the demands of the labor market and the community where it operates locally, nationally and beyond.

According to SER (p. 13), the mission of the faculty is to strive for excellence, provide education that combines theory and practice, encourages innovation and creativity, supports professional and personal development of academic staff and students. Importantly, the faculty focuses on Prizren and the region, primarily.

Respectively, the mission of the BA program in preschool education is the following:

“The preschool program encourages trends in preschool education, research and research into the excellence of theoretical and practical knowledge with competencies for contemporary work in the education of preschool children.” (SER, p.17)

These three are alined, mainly highligting importance of providing quality education. Knoweldge transmission and research are higlihgted in all three, perhaps overly stressed at the prgoram level, given that this is a BA level program and, curriculum does not reflect this much emphasis on reserach. In addition, the mission lacks clarity. The ET could only assume what could be inferred by the mission based on the key words, such as *reasearch*, *theoretical* and *practical knowledge*, *contemporary work in education*. Furthermore, the learning outcomes of the program are poorly formulated and need thorgouh review. While it is still manageable to



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distill, what will students know (knowledge transfer) after completion of the program, it is not clear, what will they be able to do (skill development) and what attitudes will they demonstrate. For instance, the statement - "The credit system enables deepening in the knowledge of certain areas within the elective courses, in addition to the obligatory courses of the program" (SER, p.18) – is not a learning outcome of the program, but rather something that could be part of the program description, explaining program structure and distribution of the program content between obligatory and elective courses. Also, proposed learning outcomes do not mention research or imply that research skills will be developed during the program, while the mission of the program heavily emphasizes it. *It is important that the program heads review the learning outcomes and make sure, those contain accurate content and that they are aligned with the mission of the program.* It might be that the mission of the program could be reviewed as well. For instance, SER, on p. 19 provides an excellent statement, which could very well be the mission of the program: "This study program aims to professionally prepare students for early education educators. The preschool program establishes staff with professional competencies that will help the functioning and advancement of preschool education in Kosovo."

In general, SER does not elaborate on what are the main pillars of the program, what it focuses on in particular and what is faculty's teaching and research approach/philosophy that is employed in the program. SER only provides the table with the courses assigned to each semester (p.).

is not very much reflected in the learning outcomes of the program. The learning outcomes are also accurately formulated, which makes it difficult to grasp how the mission of the program is broken down into the learning outcomes and then, how are those broken down into the coursework, which in its turn is distributed across four years of study.

As the Faculty of Education is part of the centralised state university, it abides to the rules, procedures and regulations that are created at the central level. Main accountability structure,

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hiring and firing policy of the academic and non-academic staff, regulations for the program development and alike are defined by the Statute and supplementary documents.

Other information, to guide students to the academic year, such as the program outline and the academic calendar is available online (i.e. the current program). The Code of ethics is also available at the university level, which concerns academic staff and the principles of ethical work is separately communicated to students with the help of anti-plagiarism brochure and emphasized during the course on academic writing.

The faculty of education has a strategic plan for 2020-2023, however the expert was provided with the Albanian version of the document, hence the content of the document, unfortunately remained unknown to the expert. Nominally, it is excellent that the faculty produced a strategic plan, however, it is more important that the strategic plan is implemented and monitored. It will be the task of the next evaluation visit to see, if the action plan has been implemented and monitoring reports are in place.

Compliance level: Partially compliant

ET recommendations:

- 1. Review the mission and the learning outcomes of the program.*
- 2. Develop unifying teaching and research approach which will be applied to the program.*

2.2. Quality management



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QA is centralized in the University of Prizren, and the faculty benefits from its services and is accountable to the central QA office of the university, granted that the faculty also has its QA representative.

The self-evaluation report was prepared by the self-evaluation team at the faculty, which consisted of the teaching staff and the representatives of the quality assurance unit of the faculty. The final version of the self-evaluation report has been reviewed and approved by the faculty council. The self-evaluation report is quite general and lacks some specific program related evidence that could help the evaluator to better reflect on the input, process and outcomes of the program. Therefore, the expert had to fill the information gap present in the self-evaluation report from the additional documents provided later on by the university.

The faculty representatives have done analysis of the main shortcomings of the programs and have already made some changes for this accreditation round (e.g. reviewing courses on English language and adapting it to the needs of the preschool education. now the English course is on English for preschool teachers). This allows the expert to assume that the evaluation process is integrated into normal planning and improvement process of the program.

The main data collection for diagnostics and improvement happens through the students' questionnaires and evaluation of the academic personnel by deans, as well as self-assessment and, interestingly, through peer-assessment. Different evidence is collected with different regularity, some – on semester basis and others – annually. The results of the student surveys are sent to the individual academic staff members and issues are discussed on individual level. As it was explained during the interviews, if some issues repeat themselves from one academic staff member to the other, then the faculty offers some trainings or workshops to remedy the occurred discrepancy. However, if the issues are not of a common character, then this falls under the personal development of an individual and he/she looks for professional development opportunities herself.



In general, the evidence that the faculty is collecting information is there. And the reports are also being regularly produced. However these are still descriptive reports, providing quantitative information about e.g. academic staff's performance. However, the report lacks analytical part – problems have not been identified and the ways to address them are not proposed, which indicates that the QA is in its initial phase of development and the QA representatives are making a good progress.

To conclude, it was mentioned during the interviews that new QA instruments were introduced two years ago. The discussion during the interviews made it clear that the faculty has made a great progress in incorporating QA instruments in its planning and improvement efforts and they should continue to do so. As the integration of the QA processes is still new, it is important that the faculty reviews their effectiveness regularly (perhaps once every two or more years). The full effect of the QA mechanisms and its impact on the program and the faculty's work is yet to be evaluated in the coming years.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *Move gradually towards analytical reporting rather than providing only quantitative data.*

2.3. Academic staff

As most of the institutions in Kosovo (and largely, in Eastern Europe), UUHP also struggles with striking a balance between the well experienced teaching staff and the younger generation of the professionals. This is true at the faculty level as well. In the SER, lack of academic staff is identified as one of the weaknesses of the program (p.20, 32). This is combined with the fact



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that as a state institution, its hiring procedures take quite a long time, which exacerbates the problem. As in many other cases, the faculty has opted to a strategy of attracting doctoral candidates as teaching assistants with the opportunity to move up the career ladder and become full time academic staff once they complete their PhD programs. *It will be efficient, if the faculty comes up with a more elaborate strategy of attracting academic staff in the upcoming years.* It is obvious that with the rising demand on preschool teachers, most of the state institutions will be offering the program, therefore increase the demand on the teaching staff at the universities. In this situation, it is better that the faculty had more than a single way of attracting academic staff to the program.

Some of the other challenges the faculty faces at the program level is research activity of the staff, which is also linked to their English language proficiency. Capacity building in new teaching methodology and curriculum development is also apparent. As it was mentioned during the interviews, Swiss Caritas is a longstanding partner of the faculty of education and is implementing a project, involving other state universities that offer preschool education programs, which concentrates on curriculum development and capacity building of the academic staff in preschool education. English language proficiency is problematic throughout the region among the academic staff who already hold the doctoral titles. Apart from offering English language courses which could be voluntarily attended by the academic staff, there is no other way of remedying this problem. As in many other cases, English language courses do not prove to be effective in these cases. The best way of overcoming English language problem is a long-standing exposure to the international partners, involvement in the research or capacity building projects and creating incentives for those, who are self-motivated and advance in English. Development of research skills is also another complex issue needs special attention. It is important that *that these kind of weaknesses are incorporated in the annual action plans of the faculty, so specific targets are set annually in order to stimulate development.*

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The Faculty was quick to adapt to the COVID 19 situation. Academic staff had to revise their course syllabi in order to fit the changed teaching reality. Also, trainings were provided to familiarise academic staff to the online teaching methodology.

Having said that, interviews with the academic staff made it clear that they are professionals in their specific subject areas and are self-motivated. They seem to be taking advantage of the research stimuli that the university offers – a publishing fee for those who wish to publish in impact factor journals. Participation in conferences is also welcome. It was mentioned during the interviews that the staff had participated in different conferences, presenting their work.

While the teaching load is regulated and varies from 6 to 10 hours per week, depending on the status of the academic staff, it seemed to the expert that they have to supervise high number of BA theses. As it was explained during the interviews, they supervise 10 to 15 theses annually. If a staff member has to supervise more, than they get a financial supplement to do so. Additionally, each of them supervises about 20 students during their practice. This workload is close to excessive, especially if we take into account that the academic staff needs to become more and more active in research and also contribute to the community work of the university (both of these are part of their evaluation scheme).

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. Develop a strategy of attracting new academic staff to the program by different means.

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2. *Reflect academic staff development needs and program weaknesses in the action plan and follow it.*

3.

2.4. Educational process content

According to the SER, the BA program in Preschool Education is a 240 credits (ECTS), which runs for four years, 8 semesters. The program is in line with the NQF and accounts for the European Qualifications Framework. Additionally, it closely follows the requirements of the national curriculum on preschool education.

As described in the SER, 2.4., the students will go through the first year of core courses, and elective courses will be introduced from the second year onwards. Throughout their studies, the students go through the practice in those preschools that the faculty of education cooperates with. The practice is well organized into phases, throughout four years of study and lasts for about 24 weeks. Over the course of the years, the faculty has developed good working relations with the preschools in the region and uses this network well to ensure that the practice component is beneficial for both student.

The learning outcomes presented on pp.33-34 are slightly different from those, on p.17. The expert is confused, on which one to use as the point of reference. While these learning outcomes have clearer formulation, it still needs more thought, in order for these to be achievable, measurable and verifiable. For instance, the learning outcome:

- *Applying scientific results to daily work with children,*



Courses assigned do not show that the students will be engaged in doing research themselves (small scale ones), and/or have a possibility to apply those in practice. Hence, it is unclear whether this learning outcome is achievable.

Furthermore, the learning outcome:

- *Creating a positive learning experience and acquiring basic skills for effective work with children*

This learning outcome is broad and vague, difficult to define what is ‘positive learning experience’ or ‘effective work’, hence it is difficult to measure its achievement.

The last learning outcome:

- *Building positive relationships at school with colleagues, parents, and the community.*

This one is also hardly verifiable. While it could be the case that the students demonstrate ethical interaction with colleagues or parents during the practice, it is unlikely that they get the opportunity to practice building positive relationships at the community.

Also, the learning outcomes are heavily oriented on knowledge and skills, but not much on attitudes.

Overall, it will be useful, if the program heads review the learning outcomes in the light of achievability and measurability and include the learning outcomes on development of attitudes towards their profession, as well as self-development.

Nevertheless, although the learning outcomes lack clarity and need more work, the structure of the program and the course syllabi are in a very good shape. It is clear that the academic staff has devoted time and energy to the improvement of this program. Teaching and evaluation methods are also diversified and fit the purpose of the course.



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The program needs to elaborate on its main priorities, its niche – What is the program’s main focus for the next six years? For instance, it could be the development of research skills amongst students, or could be emphasis on using technology in teaching, or it could be inclusive education. The choice should be made by the heads of the program and the academic staff. Based on the needs in the region or in Kosovo, taking into account modern tendencies in the profession.

The major challenge of the program currently is incorporation of research in the program. It is weakly represented yet and the program heads and the academic staff need to discuss on the strategies of amplifying research elements in the program and articulate it in the program’s research philosophy. Since incorporation of research in teaching is still relatively new development in Kosovo, it could be the case that professors already do it in their individual courses, but it is not consolidated and recognized as such. For instance, it could be that the students are involvement in the small group projects, as assignments in mathematics class, or there are subject-based clubs, which are intensively attended by students. All of these are good examples of research elements. If these type of work experience is present in the program, then it is important that it is emphasized and is incorporated in some of the core courses (as appropriate) as teaching methods.

To conclude, teaching and learning processes and practice component seem to be well organized, and interaction between the academic staff, students and practice mentors productive. The faculty is in the process of mastering how to construct the program around learning outcomes. It will need more time for the program development process to be streamlined and this should be the main concern of the QA and heads of the program for the next years to come. The discrepancies in the area of learning outcomes and its links with the program outline discussed in this section are vital to have a well-developed program.



Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

- 1. Review learning outcomes in terms of achievability and measurability and make the link between the learning outcomes and the courses explicit.*
- 2. Add learning outcomes which define the attitudes towards the profession, work and/or self-development.*
- 3. Consolidate the experience on incorporating research in teaching, which already exists in the program in individual courses and amplify them. And articulate it in the research philosophy of the program.*

2.5. Students

Admission criteria is determined by the faculty of education and announced by the UUHP. Student admission quota is approved by the faculty council and then – senate. Procedures for the enrolment exams and appeal is available at the university level. The information about admission requirements and procedures is publicly available on the university website. The admission requirements and process as aligned with the MEST requirements. The regulation also defines the procedure for students' transfer.

The SER does not indicate the number of students the program wishes to enrol. Hence the expert is unaware, what is the faculty's estimate for the annual enrolment. The expert could only suggest an estimate based on the statistics of previous enrolments, information about the academic staff and their workload, infrastructure capacity and the number of active students on the program. Given that some of this information is not accurate, the estimate is not going to be precise. The experts estimates that the program could host 95 students and increase the number, once the infrastructure – number of classrooms, laboratories and alike are increased



(SER points out repeatedly that the classroom capacity is currently low) and the number of academic staff increases (SER mentions this as well).

The teaching and learning processes are well organised and interaction between the academic staff and students, and practice mentors is smooth. Most of the students and graduates commented on the benefits of their studies, and that they continue professional relations with their professors up until now. Students are quite active in different student bodies, which also makes them aware of importance of their involvement in the educational processes and believe that they contribute to improving student learning experience with their involvement.

Students are aware of ethical academic conduct and know what plagiarism is and are aware of the consequences of an academic misconduct. As they mentioned, this is explained to them on the academic writing course. *It should be mentioned that the student support services are not very developed and the university could pay more attention to it.*

Although the university tracks student progression, there is a lack of evidence that the results are taken into consideration to improve the teaching and learning process and support students with academic difficulties. *It is important that the faculty begins to use student progression data to improve student attainment and support individual students with academic difficulties.*

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

- 1. Student support services need to more developed – such as career service, student affairs, psychological counselling, and alike.*
- 2. It is important that the faculty begins to use student progression data to improve student attainment and support individual students with academic difficulties.*



2.6. Research

The UUHP, in its strategic plan sets the research capacity development as one of its priorities and faculty of education follows it up in its strategic plan. In both cases, the efforts in this direction have just started with the usual suite of actions, including support of quality publication, participation in conferences and fostering international cooperations. It should be highlighted that building research capacity is a massive challenge for the institutions in the capital cities, let alone, in the regions of the country (similar situation in Eastern European countries). Therefore, UUHP operates with the limited opportunities already, especially financial one.

Baring this in mind, the university has made all the necessary steps to formally, on the level of regulations and formal structures, to prioritize research. As SER points out, the Institute of Scientific Research will be created at the faculty of education (p.50). The expert hopes that once the institution becomes operational, the research areas will be prioritized and faculty directs all its resources towards two or three research areas, rather than scattering its scarce human and financial resources in many directions.

It is evident that the pressure to produce research outputs has increased at the faculty level. However, the university still has not conducted the formal evaluation to assess the effectiveness of newly introduced policies, new regulations and incentive structures.

These steps at the university level are a very good start to promote research and develop research capacity in the institution. It would be extremely helpful, if some efforts are made at the faculty level. This could be bilateral cooperation with other faculties of education in the universities in Kosovo, as well as internationally. Targeted actions (combined with the university-level incentives) will amplify the possibility to build research capacity quickly and



in a more sustainable manner. As already mentioned above, it is essential that the faculty has its own research agenda. Faculty representatives could not elaborate on this.

The research capacity of the academic staff needs substantial upgrade, so that they are capable of publishing internationally as well. This, by no means, diminishes the importance of locally published research. However, the expert considers that gaining the experience of publishing internationally will help academic staff members gain experience in conducting and publishing quality research.

The SER mentions that one of the weaknesses is that the faculty lacks local or international cooperations to conduct research or to improve research capacity (p. 57). *The expert suggests that building partnerships becomes one of the main priorities in research area for the faculty.*

The faculty is currently involved in few projects with international partners (Swiss Caritas and TEMPUS projects) and through these projects the faculty representatives have research capacity building opportunities. These projects also make it possible to organize joint conferences with local partners (other universities), as well as participate in study tours abroad. Few of the staff members mentioned that they have participated in conferences recently (before the pandemic), therefore the expert has a fragmented view on what portion of the academic staff takes the opportunity to participate in local or international conferences? How many of them present their research projects/papers? This one again highlights the importance of collecting data on research productivity of the faculty in the coming years.

Compliance level: Partially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *Develop a research agenda for the Faculty of Education*



2. *Strengthen the research support system to explore and establish cooperations on education research at the regional, country and international level.*
3. *Regularly track the research activities of the academic staff and students and use the data to further develop the research performance and capacity.*
4. *Diversify the research activities and involve students in the research projects that are carried out by the Faculty of Education.*

2.7. Infrastructure and resources

The faculty of education is part of the UUHP, located near the Prizren city park. The faculty shares premises with the faculty of philology. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the SER repeatedly points out infrastructure, namely lack of classrooms and the rooms for academic council, as weaknesses in its SWAT analyses. This concern is reflected in the faculty strategic plan as a priority. In their SWAT analyses, the faculty mentions the lack of free wifi access as well (p.63). The library also needs modernisation. *Given the importance of these concerns, it is essential that over the course of the next couple of years the university addresses the faculty's concern and upgrade infrastructure and includes faculty infrastructure development as part of the strategic plan in order to meet the needs of the program and a growing demand on preschool teachers, as stated in the SER, 2.1.*

Due to the pandemic, it was impossible to see the premises personally, hence the ET had to guide themselves with the video provided by the faculty and the description in the SER. The interviews also revealed that the infrastructure needs to be better adjusted for the persons with disabilities.

The Faculty does not have its separate budget, but is part of the centralised university budget. Faculty provides its calculations to the central office to be considered in the overall budget of



the university. Faculty's budget is secured on the annual bases, hence the program has a guarantee that it will have its funds secured to run the program.

SER mentions that the university will attract funds from other sources that state funding. If this is a realistic assumption, it will be an important step forward, if the revenue/funding sources of the university are diversified.

ET recommendations:

1. *Reflect all infrastructure development needs in the faculty and university strategic plan and follow it through.*

3. OVERALL EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATION OF THE ET

In conclusion, the Expert (Team) considers that the BA program in Preschool Education offered by the UUHP is *Substantially compliant* with the standards included in the *KAA Accreditation manual* and, therefore, recommends *to accredit* the study program for a duration of **three years** with a number of 95 students to be enrolled in the program.

4. APPENDICES (if available)

1. A
2. B
3. C



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Expert Team

Chair

Elene Jibladze

25.06.2021

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