UNIVERSUM COLLEGE
Professional Bachelor in Digital Journalism

ACCREDITATION

REPORT OF THE EXPERT TEAM

Zagre, 10 May 2021

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Context

The field of digital journalism studies within communication science is built on questions that disrupt everything previously taken for granted concerning media, journalism, and public spheres and this is also reflected in the very young and untested area of educating future digital journalism professionals. Many questions to which the previous media professionals easily knew the answers including the most obvious one: What is journalism and who are journalists, are now relativized. It is not clear who is a journalist. Theoretically, everybody can be a journalist as the means are at the disposal of majority of the earth. So, in this new context of debating the question what is journalism in this complex media and information ecosystem of the 21st century it is a challenge to define who media professionals journalists are, let alone educate them. On the other hand, the need for these professionals is great, is growing, it is what the market needs, and it only makes sense that HE institutions have taken initiative to start this new line of media and communication science education.

This ET report is based on Self Evaluation report (SER) by Universum College (UC), the extensive documentation provided to accompany the SER and the panel discussions held during the virtual site visit with the management, faculty, staff and stakeholders.

It must be pointed out from the start that the extensive documentation accompanying the SER, which has obviously been prepared during a longer time of operation of UC, speaks of very precise and meticulous following of the rules and regulation that are implemented on a generic level in high education (HE) institutions in EU. In addition, SER is 183 pages long, very detailed, document in format not strictly following the order of standards, but, nevertheless, providing numerous , data and information that are requested in KAA report format.

In addition, apart from web site of UC which also gives a number of useful information for various stakeholders, students included, ET was given access to an eight minutes long video of premises in Prishtina which is impressive in a sense that it gives a detailed view of what appears to be a very modern and well equipped HE institution covering all aspects of student life, from professional labs and advanced equipment to areas for studying, meetings, consultation, recreation, social life, both indoor and outdoor. It is a carefully designed and highly quipped HE institution and, presumably, a substantial investment into premises and equipment at a time. Comparing this investment, which it is not clear whether that was indeed

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in that particular shape in the very beginning, does pose some questions about the stability of business case (as the tuition is app 2000 EUROS a year up to somewhat higher for master level). However, business case is not the purpose of this report, the capacity of institution to host a particular program according to KAA standards is. In fulfilling this task ET will, therefore, rely fully on SER, on what the UC has at its disposal now that could guarantee the program being evaluated to succeed, including the content and the syllabi proposed, and how UC performed in general in other programs, not on this one because it does not exist in practice yet.

Sources of information for the Report:

- Self Evaluation Report
- UNIVERSUM COLLEGE Virtual Campus Tour
  - Regulations and guidelines for internal review of academic program
  - Program Advisory Board)
  - Statuti
  - Regulations of Internal Mobility
  - Examination point attribution
  - Various evaluation forms
- Memorandum; various contracts
- Syllabi
- CV faculty

Additional document requested and received:
- Accreditation Report Example
- Board Meeting Minutes Business Department
- Department Report
- Non-discrimination report
- Professors' KPIs
- Semestral evaluation of professors

Criteria used for program evaluation:

1. *The core principles of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area:*
2. *Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance;*

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3. *Quality assurance responds to the diversity of higher education systems, institutions, programs and students;*
4. *Quality assurance supports the development of a quality culture;*
5. *Quality assurance takes into account the needs and expectations of students, all other stakeholders and society.*

The following principles:

- *Public accountability: Higher education institutions need to demonstrate the quality of the education to all stakeholders and public at large, through the following:*
- *achieving quality levels that respond to the expectations of students and employers;*
- *underlining higher education as a public good;*
- *communicating consistent, clear and coherent information to the public at large about the real results obtained and the intentions of improvement.*
- *European reference: the higher education system and institutions in Kosovo belong to the European Higher Education Area and ensure quality levels in line with and competitive at the European and international level. For this purpose, both the recognized accreditation providers, as well as higher education institutions commit to benchmark their institutional processes against comparable institutions at international level;*
- *Institutional responsibility: the responsibility for and the management of quality lie with each higher education provider, in accordance to institutional autonomy;*
- *Improving quality: quality is not an end in itself. Continuous improvement and institutional management of quality is the primary objective of the external evaluations;*
- *Fitness for purpose: quality assurance process should be defined and designed specifically to ensure their*

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fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them;

- *Institutional diversity: diversity of institutions, their mission and goals is respected and encouraged by external quality assurance;*

- *Transparency: a key concept helping to build mutual trust and better recognition of qualifications, programs and other provision. At systemic level, transparency does not only increase the trust in the quality assurance structures operations, but also in the education itself. Institutionally, transparency encourages engagement of the entire academic community and development of quality culture.*

- *Focus on results: learning outcomes and performance in research lie at the core of quality assurance. External quality assurance imply that higher education institutions demonstrate their results and performance in learning and in research as well as their correspondence with the actual reality of the institution, including verification of student activity in relation to the stated standards;*

o *Stakeholder engagement: internal stakeholders should develop and implement quality assurance policies through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders;*

o *Quality enhancement: continuous improvement of quality and institutional management is the primary objective of the external evaluation. Every self-evaluation document must present the particularities of quality culture across the higher education institution and ensure the continuous performance improvement*

1.2. Site visit schedule

Programme Accreditation Procedure at Universum College, Digital Journalism, BA Professional

Date: 30th of March 2021

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Expert Team

- Dr. Majfa Tafra-Vlahović –Rochester Institute of Technology, Croatia

Coordinators of KAA

- Naim Gashi, Executive Director of KAA
- Shkelzen Gerxhaliu, Senior Officer for Evaluation and Monitoring
- Arianit Krasniqi, Senior Officer for Evaluation and Accreditation
- Leona Kovaci, Senior Officer for Evaluation and Monitoring
- Ilirjane Ademaj, Senior Officer for Evaluation and Monitoring

Site Visit Program

30th March

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 – 10:30	Meeting with quality assurance representatives and administrative staff - Joint session
10:30 – 11:15	Lunch break
11:15 – 12:15	Meeting with the heads of the study programme Dental Hygiene, BA Professional - Separate session
12:20 – 13:00	Meeting with teaching staff – Separate session

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13:05 – 13:45   Meeting with employers of graduates and external stakeholders – Separate session

13.50 – 14:00   Internal meeting of KAA staff and experts – Joint session

14:00 – 14:10   Closing meeting with the management of the faculty and program – Joint session

No	Study programs	Experts	Responsible persons of the program
1	Digital Journalism, BA Professional (Accreditation)	Dr. Majda Tafra-Vlahović	Arbenita Hoxha Naser Thaçi Afet Bela Venera Radoni Sami Shala

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

Universum College was established in March 2004, in Prishtina, and Ferizaj, two largest, most economically developed cities in Kosovo, and, as stated in the SER at the beginning of the report which appears to be an executive summary of the whole text, it is stated that UC aims at providing high quality, accessible and affordable educational opportunities to students in Kosovo and beyond, through teaching excellence, lifelong learning, applied research and partnership. These characteristics are further elaborated in SER. UC currently offers four Bachelor level and two Master level programs: BA in Business and Management, BA in Political Science, BSc. in Computer Science, BA in English and MA in Management and MA in Diplomacy. In addition, they offer two professional programs accredited by Pearson Plc. – Level 5 in Nursing and Level 5 in Integrated Design. Professional Bachelor in Digital Journalism would, therefore, be the fifth offered program on BA level.

While BA and MA level programs are all in the wide area of social sciences, two professional programs are focusing on rather different profiles. As explained in the panel

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discussion, diversifying is following the needs of Kosovo market, which is very dynamic and, expanding, the same argumentation being used also for the elaboration of the need for Bachelor in Digital Journalism program. As it has been learned by this expert who has recently acquired a lot of new information on media market in Kosovo, this market apparently keeps growing and as there is a wide coverage of Internet in Kosovo the need arises for various media resources which are not best met by existing media specialists who have no immediate competence in digital media journalism and management.

It makes sense, therefore, to assume that the market in Kosovo does need professionals with focus on media digital technology and that is why UC has decided to launch this program. Whether there might be a saturation of the market in a number of years, is not easy to predict. What is probably more likely is that the media technology development will continue in great speed also impacting the market, particularly in the country with such high percentage of very young population (unlike majority of EU states where the population in average is much older). That might mean that in future there will also be a need for lifelong learning which, as we read, is one of the strategic directions of UC.

2. PROGRAM EVALUATION

2.1. Mission, objectives and administration

The mission of UC, as stated in SER, is to support the students to become good citizens, successful and broad-minded leaders and thrive in the Revolution 4.0, the digital and globalized era. According to the elaboration of the mission this is being implemented by providing one-on-one academic & life coaching, by putting the students and learning at the center in an innovative, digitally enhanced environment that fosters creativity, inquiry, team-work and satisfactory knowledge.

UC mission is building upon five strategic pillars (Student and Learning at the Center; Quality Improvement; Innovation and Entrepreneurship; Digital Transformation; Internationalization) each of which is elaborated in more details in SER. Many of these are rather ambitious if compared with usual practice at universities, i.e., making students part of the decision-making process or implementing student-oriented policies that prioritize students in every service, bureaucratic procedures or resource development. The link between mission and strategic pillars which are indicators of strategic direction and, therefore, orientation for planning future development of UC, including the introduction of the program proposed here, are designed to create a tangible mechanism that allows the

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institution governing body to monitor the progress on short or medium term. Throughout SER there are indications of a developed awareness of the importance and value of incorporating monitoring and evaluation components into strategic plans and operational procedures which can be considered an achievement in managing a HE institution and is a link to a number of standards stipulated in KAA manual.

The measures of supporting the pillar of Quality Improvement, which will be discussed in more details in quality section, are all listed, some of them generic (i.e. enabling the academic freedom that fosters innovation in teaching or adopting a continuous quality improvement by policies, actions, practices and habits the build a culture), and some operational and tangible (i.e. Developing KPIs) that contribute to better assessment and feedback for students and staff including conducting regular and systematic internal and external evaluation).

The pillar of Innovation and Entrepreneurship is based on the recognition of the crucial importance of innovation and entrepreneurship in the development of the country and the value of involvement of young people in the social development. Particularly relevant in that sense is the awareness of the social responsibility of high education institutions for developing the entrepreneurial skills that foster innovation. As a result, it is stated in SER and has been repeated in the panel discussions that UC is known to be the most entrepreneurial HEI in Kosovo. The evidence to support the claim is the fact that UC has developed companies like Universum Hub (an entity within the institution composed of students and staff that helps students to develop projects), Kosovo Business Angels Network (established by UC and BiD Network in Holland).

Of particular importance is Digital Transformation strategic pillar, whereby UC is committed to concrete actions following digital transformation in order to improve and enhance the learning experience (i.e. integrating Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality, Mixed Reality into curriculum, especially in the Computer Science Department, Business Department and Design Department and, it can be expected, will also be used in Digital Journalism program; increasing the number of smart classrooms; integrating gaming as teaching resource). All these activities listed in the SER are also crucial for keeping up the momentum in an ambitious program like DJ as the success of such a program will also depend on the accessibility of adequate updated technology. From what could be seen in the video mentioned in the introduction, UC is well equipped and full management awareness of crucial value of digitalization for the overall teaching process is certainly an advantage in developing Digital Journalism program.

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The value of the strategic pillar of internalization is supported by an impressive number of mobility agreements and Ka1 and KA2 projects which speaks of efficient internationalization commitment targeting one of institutional objectives being to continue development of dual-study programs with local and international companies.

The mission of the proposed DJ program complies with this vision of UC and is obviously developed to meet the market needs, and in the market, digital journalism has already been developed as a separate area of study, and thus of high education too. It has been recognized as an extremely fast growing and changing area, not easy to study or tech, but an area that is a must, as it is quite obvious that digital journalism has been replacing what is known as traditional journalism at a greater speed than it can be scientifically digested and defined within frameworks of a study area. News and information creation has completely changed and opportunities given to every company and individual for that matter to become some kind of journalist, content creator and information producer, which definitely affects plans of HE institutions faced with the question of responsibility in supporting these processes by educating new generations to be able to meet the needs of this volatile and somewhat unpredictable market. Sure, that is not all about technology but rather about adaptability and competence to not only adapt but innovate, and the impression is that of high awareness about the role of teachers in this process in a society dominated by young people who will be creators and consumers of digital media. In that sense the extensively developed elaboration of the rationale behind the purpose of this program is the mission well elaborated and in line with the mission of UC itself.

Argumentation developed relies on the economic role of digital journalism, significantly impactful to the jobmarket in Kosovo and abroad. Jobs that are related to the proposed degree would include job titles like journalist, media writer, digital writer, multimedia writer, reporter, investigative reporter, broadcaster, editor, photojournalists, critics, social media bloggers and vloggers social influencers and many others, and that would end the list as these students might be competent for the new professions nobody knows what they would even look like. Many of the professions mentioned here were not known ten or so years ago. So, what UC states as mission for this program that will educate future experts is an academic program aims that develops multi-disciplinary skills of independent, multitasking professionals. This should be achieved by developing the golden triangle such is skills,knowledge and competence of students.

Regarding the Standard 1.2 which stipulates that relevant academic and professional advice best considered when defining the intended learning outcomes which are consistent

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with the National QualificationsFramework and the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area, according to SE it is in compliance with National Qualifications Framework and the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher EducationArea.

SWOT analysis points out a number of advantages (i.e. easily available resources, International comparability of the program and UC Reputation with guidelines and regulations already in place) and opportunities (i.e. new technology and software to learn, and international practices and partnership opportunities) but also some weaknesses (i.e. increased student drop-out rate , which could be related to economic situation in the country and low purchase power; and lack of funding and limited assets for recruiting new students which is probably also related to economic situation but also contradict the easily available resources.

Standard	Compliance	
	Yes	No
Standard 1.1. The study program mission is in compliance with the overall mission statement of the institution.	X	
Standard 1.2. Relevant academic and professional advice is considered when defining the intended learning outcomes which are consistent with the National Qualifications Framework and the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.	X	
Standard 1.3. The study program has a well-defined overarching didactic and research concept.	X	
Standard 1.4. There are formal policies, guidelines and regulations dealing with recurring procedural or academic issues. These are made publicly available to all staff and students.	X	
Standard 1.5. All staff and students comply with the internal regulations relating to ethical conduct in research, teaching, assessment in all academic and administrative activities.	X	

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| Standard 1.6. All policies, regulations, terms of reference and statements of responsibility relating to the management and delivery of the program are reviewed at least once every two years and amended as required in the light of changing circumstances. | X | |

Compliance level: Fully compliant

ET recommendations:
1. *The planned number of students to be the first generation of the program needs to be reconsidered in line with the SWOT analysis reference to lack of funds/resources and dropout rate.*

2.2. Quality management

As pointed out in the mission of the organization, quality management is an integral part of UC strategy and the quality management mechanism developed and implemented to involve all stakeholders, therefore, also staff who should participate in self-evaluations and cooperate with reporting and improvement processes in their sphere of activity according to KAA standards. The mechanisms and procedures are developed by management and teaching staff in line with stated commitment to uphold the mission and objectives of UC.

SER and the discussion panel with the internal stakeholders, management and faculty, illustrate the readiness of teaching staff to be involved in evaluation and quality assurance process which strengthens the legitimacy of the process and ensures limiting of potential resistance. What comes out of the SER and the discussion is that these processes, including planning for improvement, are indeed integrated into regular planning processes, particularly since capacity building trainings are delivered to build internal capacities of the institution to comply with the standards set forth by the KAA.

A number of examples is given to illustrate various how quality assurance and improvement processes integrated in various programs, both in the planning stage and in the delivery stages, are being supported by the resources within the institution. Presumably, it will also concern the program of DJ since this is, in fact,

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not a big institution and all the resources that the institution possess are shared among departments and programs. Impression was during the discussion that, probably also because of the size, but also thanks to leadership initiatives in pursuing quality standards, internal employee engagement, spirit of cooperation and support are more present than silos culture which can be often seen in similar institutions of high education.

KAA standard which deals with various levels of quality evaluation in all inputs, processes and outputs, with particular attention given to learning outcomes for students is illustrated by different aspects of program and delivery and various steps undertaken to ensure achievement of the learning outcomes like: Academic Program Internal Report; External Review of Program; Site Visit; Programmatic meetings between Academic Program staff; Academic Program Board and UC Administration; Program Response to Review and Action Plan; Student surveys administered at mid semester and the end of each semester; Students evaluation through dialogue/focus groups; Statistics from the annual periodic review; Staff Evaluations/Assessments, Peer-to-peer evaluation; Enforce of recommendations from KAA accreditation reports; Evaluation from Pearson (this mainly for the Pearson Programs, but the recommendations improve the quality of the institution as a whole).

SER gives the detailed description of each of these mechanisms pointing out that UC does a great job in ensuring that required standards are met, and that programs are not static, rather continually adapting to the needs of the market. Though quality assurance is conducted on both level (institutional and program level), UC employs a more centric approach towards quality assurance. Moreover, other accredited programs in addition to the management team, also have an Industry Advisory Board.

Detailed description of each of these mechanisms is described in SER. Of a particular interest for this ET report is the External Review Program which is implemented also in the case of DJ program. The plan is that the program be reviewed by an external panel which provides a feedback. The panel consists of faculty from higher education institutions, other departments, alumna and representatives from the industry. It is not clear whether this has already been the part of the process of program elaboration or it is something to follow but, in any

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case, the commitment is stated to have these reviews and site visits are integrated in strategic planning and program evaluation.

This bachelor program in Digital Journalism, according to SER and the panel discussion held with management and faculty as well as external stakeholders, will follow the same strategy as other programs, which means that upon accreditation an industry advisory board will be formed. Reference is taken to the recent success with dual-studies program where local companies have been involved in creation and evaluation of the program, so that the management expects that 5-10% of freshman DJ students would be financed directly by the industry to ensure educated professionals in digital journalism industry.

The goal of the self-assessment to be done periodically is planned to create an overview of the Digital Journalism program based on existing relevant and accessible data to serve in strategic planning. In addition, management plans to organize weekly meetings to evaluate the data gathered by professors and administration (i.e., attendance, teaching methodology, assessment, passing rate, problematic courses, tuition payment, etc.) which should serve to plan and perform necessary improvements already in the current academic year. According to SER, this has proven to be a successful practice during the pandemic as well, where the necessary adjustments needed to be made to ensure the quality of the teaching process.

The process of compiling, reassessing, feedback and inclusion of recommendations based on the compiled evaluation report is described in detail. So as to public availability of the results of evaluations based on survey data collected from students, graduates and employers, it is implied in the description of the process and in statements in the panel discussion, survey results are being used in discussions on improvement of courses held with faculty and staff. In parts of SER describing mid-semester evaluation and student survey administered at the end of the semester, it is visible that discretion is practiced in discussing teacher effectiveness on one-on-one meetings with department heads, so, the same principle is practiced regarding public availability of these data.

Special attention is paid to peer-to-peer evaluation where each peer uses a structured form to evaluate the course and colleague. The process lasts throughout the course, and the evaluation form is delivered to the Academic Director along with a copy to QAO with the purpose form. According to SER it has been successful

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also in including future improvements in the course planning and delivery which might be one of the evidence of a collaborative corporate culture, since peer to peer evaluation is not very welcome among teachers in general.

When we talk about evaluating teacher effectiveness, the value of courses and student evaluations, teachers often become defensive and not necessarily cooperative, so it takes a collaborative and supportive corporate culture to ensure synergistic results of this multiple and penetrating evaluations throughout the teaching process. SER also describes focus groups, informal gatherings and other qualitative evaluation tools implemented systematically which add value to the quality improvement area as well as the contribution of Industry Advisory Board (an important external stakeholder view). In addition, UC has BTEC, an external half a year evaluation by Pearson BTEC center which also provides various support materials. It is pointed out that UC employs two QA different approaches which are in compliance with both national and international standards.

Weaknesses listed in SER SWOT analysis include limited financial resources and employability of graduates affected by the unfavorable financial situation of Kosovo and threats listed are decrease in the number of incoming students, increased migration of youngsters, fast and difficult-to-predict changes in the country, political crisis and instability, political nepotism excluding qualified students to get a job and limited qualified human resources which is related to migration.

Standard 2.2. Evaluation processes and planning for improvement are integrated into normal planning processes.	X	
Standard 2.3. Quality assurance processes deal with all aspects of program planning and delivery, including services and resources provided by other parts of the institution.	X	
Standard 2.4. Quality evaluations provide an overview of quality issues for the overall program as well as of different components within it; the evaluations consider inputs, processes and outputs, with particular attention given to learning outcomes for students.	X	

Standard 2.5. Quality assurance processes ensure both that required standards are met and that there is continuing improvement in performance.	X	
Standard 2.6. Survey data is being collected from students, graduates and employers; the results of these evaluations are made publicly available.	X	
Standard 2.7. Results of the internal quality assurance system are taken into account for further development of the study program. This includes evaluation results, investigation of the student workload, academic success and employment of graduates.	X	
Standard 2.8. The institution ensures that reports on the overall quality of the program are prepared periodically (eg. every three years) for consideration within the institution indicating its strengths and weaknesses.	X	
Standard 2.9. The quality assurance arrangements for the program are themselves regularly evaluated and improved.	X	

Compliance level: **Fully compliant**

ET recommendations:

1. *Consider increasing the number of student tuitions paid by industry by increasing the role of industry experts in planning and delivery of courses (teaching, mentoring, advocacy)*
2. *Consider empowering students to take active role in creation of non-corrupt democratic society by including civil society experts in program delivery and advocacy through practical work in digital media*
3. *Consider using available resources in collaboration with industry partners to launch lifelong learning forms of capacity building in various areas of digital journalism based on assessment of needs of industry organizations including both open courses and custom tailored smaller formats for capacity building of employees.*

2.3. Academic staff

The candidates for teaching and staff jobs are hired based on job description and conditions of the job, reflected in the publications for engagement at UC and the contracts which are signed by both parties. Vacancies are advertised in public

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channels and made accessible to potential candidates in the country and abroad. SER provides detailed table of all employed academic staff in sections presented in columns with the name, last name, professional qualification, academic tittle, and duration of their contract, workload of teaching, exams, consulting and research, and the information on employment status: Full Time (FT) or Part Time (PT).

According to these data the academic staff are in line with all the legal requirements of the professional positions included in the Administrative Regulations for Accreditation. The obligatory compliance with work coverage is clearly indicated in contracts and in various relevant policies. According to internal regulations and policies in line with national education regulations, one faculty can only hold one full-time status in a given institution and can only be engaged part time in other institutions throughout one academic year. That also means that no academic member can hold two full-time positions within the same or different institutions.

The total number of academic staff is 33 out of which number twelve staff members are part-time employees, whereas 21 other members are full- time employees which accounts for 63.7% of the staff to be full-time members. The class coverage by full time academic staff accounts to more than 72%. D J program has 180 ECTS and has five leading staff which is in compliance with the Administrative Instruction of KAA. In the case of Digital Journalism programs, UC is not required to hire full-time staff with a PhD in the field, but qualified staff with relevant MA/MSc is considered sufficient if the institution has signed an agreement with another institution with more experience which in case of UC is an agreement with Kajaani University of Applied Science in Finland.

In line with the strategic pillar of strong internationalization UC has developed a widespread network of international partners, and has, in fact, an impressive list of signed ERASMUS + contracts, alongside the other partnering projects and other forms of collaboration. It gained UC the reputation of the leading institution in Kosovo regarding exchanges for students and staff with international partner universities through the Erasmus + mobility framework. So far, 72 professors have been sent to European universities as lecturers in their field, the total number of bilateral agreements is currently at 115. As staff exchange grant is increased to 205, which means that in 2021 UC will be able to send 205 (mainly faculty) to different capacity building events organized in EU partner institutions.

In capacity building projects academic staff are trained in curricula modification and adopting new strategies of teaching, assessment and research. Capacity building projects elaborated within ERASMUS+ framework are particularly valuable for the development of academic staff and their internal promotion and titles requirements. SER gives an impressive list of current collaborative projects

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some of which, like for instance, projects REBUS and CONSUS, have been successfully implemented and evaluated by EU commission representatives. UC is currently actively involved in seven other capacity building projects, which provide opportunities to the development of academic staff. It is pointed out that priority is always given to faculty with little experience and in need of support.

Special attention is paid to raising capacities and components of academic staff, particularly those who might have difficulties in keeping up with the academic requirements. These requirements differ among departments and academic areas, but a spectrum of skills is a requirement for all in line with the commitment to excellence. For this reason, UC offers various training and other capacity building events making them obligatory in many cases. The training opportunities are designed and developed in cooperation with industry partners which will be important in developing competencies of staff teaching in DJ as this is an area that will require constant learning and adjustments.

Reference is taken to new training activities organized each year in addition to regular ones, and examples are given of capacity building aiming at hindering the negative impact of COVID 19 into the education processes. Recent training activities provided were: Induction training and achieving academic outcomes in Covid-19 crisis; Training on digital tools in teaching; Training on online assessment methodology; Training on Big Blue Button platform - BBB.

Furthermore, subscription to Coursera courses is not left only to an individual teacher initiative but is fully supported and financed, certificates being taken as one of measures of academic improvement and life-long learning.

There is an awareness about social responsibility of HE institution and commitment to dedicate resources to contributing to the community and social development of professionals that are also responsible citizens. Community work is required from full time academic staff who are voluntarily engaged in improving the quality of teaching and education in Kosovo. Moreover, UC held free of charge trainings to primary school teachers and high school lecturers on a yearly basis addressing the issues identified jointly with other institutions, for instance, online training in addressing various issues resulting after shifting to online teaching due to the pandemic crisis.

In line with the required academic staff assessment evaluation procedures within one academic year are implemented in three ways: Mid-semester and semester evaluation by students; Evaluation by professional parties and regular evaluation by the Head of Department.

In the SWOT analysis advantages are: Well qualified academic staff; Advanced policies implemented and regulations in recruitment and evaluation process;

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Sufficient additional hours for consultancy, research and exams for students; committed academic staff to improveand advance teaching curricula of theprogram; staff is trained by Pearson.

Weaknesses listed are both internal and external: limited research funds; limited available literature in Albanian and staff with this degree on high demand which relates to the threat of losing qualified staff to industry where they can get much better income. While threats like visa regimes and staff immigration are not under control of UC, recognized threats like other luring employment opportunities and even unpredicted circumstances and acts of God, such as the Covid-19 situation.

Standard	Compliance	
	YES	*NO*
Standard 3.1. Candidates for employment are provided with full position descriptions and conditions of employment. To be presented in tabular form data about full time (FT) and part time (PT) academic/ artistic staff, such as: name, qualification, academic title, duration of official (valid) contract, workload for teaching, exams, consulting, administrative activities, research, etc. for the study program under evaluation.	X	
Standard 3.2. The teaching staff must comply with the legal requirements concerning the occupation of teaching positions included in the Administrative instruction on Accreditation.	X	
Standard 3.3. Academic staff do not cover, within an academic year, more than two teaching positions (one full-time, one part-time), regardless of the educational institution where they carry out their activity	X	
Standard 3.4. At least 50% of the academic staff in the study program are full time employees, and account for at least 50% of the classes of the study program.	X	
Standard 3.5. For each student group (defined by the statute of the institution) and for every 60 ECTS credits in the study program, the institution has employed at least one full time staff with PhD title or equivalent title in the case of artistic/applied science institutions.	X	

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Standard 3.6. Opportunities are provided for additional professional development of teaching staff, with special assistance given to any who are facing difficulties.	X	
Standard 3.7. The responsibilities of all teaching staff, especially full-time, include the engagement in the academic community, availability for consultations with students and community service.	X	
Standard 3.8. Academic staff evaluation is conducted regularly at least through self-evaluation, students, peer and superiors' evaluations, and occur on a formal basis at least once each year. The results of the evaluation are made publicly available.	X	
Standard 3.9. Strategies for quality enhancement include improving the teaching strategies and quality of learning materials.	X	
Standard 3.10. Teachers retired at age limit or for other reasons lose the status of full-time teachers and are considered part-time teachers.	n.a.	

Compliance level: Fully compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *Consider using capacity of the new DJ department to engage students from the start in collaborative applied research in digital media involving industry partners and other HE institutions sphere that have a closer access to EU funds.*

2. *Initiate debates on potential new models of collaboration with industry partners that would second qualified staff in specialized areas to UC which would be a cost-effective innovation in the business model.*

3. *Consider integrating crisis management into overall strategic and operational plans to mitigate potential risk and raise preparedness of teachers to ensure work continuation in especially difficult circumstances.*

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2.4. Educational process content

The main rationale behind setting up DJ program is the trend (supported by the recent relevant data) of citizens of Kosovo increasingly moving to online platforms and outlets which had an impact on the number of people writing and publishing online content. The market demand is, therefore, big and not adequately met as Kosovo has a small number of young, competent, and skillful journalist. SER claims that current workforce consists of journalists who have been subject to conventional journalism programs based on theory and obsolete means of information flow and who lack the practice with technological means, adaptability, and digital media literacy. The increasing migration of young and well-educated journalist trend who seek work in well paid jobs in global companies did not help either, thus, there is a pressing need to offer potential students a high-quality program that would enable them to be employed in Kosovo journalism and media sector. According to SER the journalism field in Kosovo still lacks the basic consideration of solid information, data protection, protection of identity and sensitive information, ethical and adequate information as well as data gathering and reporting.

The number of professions related to digital journalism is increasing and has initiated creation of new jobs that cannot be adequately filled with current educated professionals. While this has always been the problem with education in journalism, and journalists were entering the profession from various areas of education (sometimes turning out to be better journalists than those who got their education in specialized journalism studies), that is now changed. What was needed to excel then was talent, effort and creative management, while today the whole structure of the traditional journalism has changed, and the foundations in creativity and high rationality do not suffice because technology has altered the structure, models, actually the whole system. Not to mention competition which is now global. New job titles and descriptions have been appearing in vacancy notices and it is very likely that the trend will continue. Some of the jobs that are related to the students who with a degree in digital journalism include: journalist, media writer, digital writer, multimedia writer, reporter, investigative reporter, broadcaster, editor, photojournalists, and others. Furthermore, technological advances with the passing of time are expected to add to the diversity of occupations associated to with the program of digital journalism.

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The primary goals of DJ program at UC are to prepare skilled and versatile workforce that can revolutionize, improve, and diversify the journalism and media fields in Kosovo. That is in compliance with the criteria of multidisciplinary aspects referring to adequate employment needs, developing student personality and contributing to the civil society. The last one is not particularly mentioned as an equal area within general social structure, rather under the term of community service. It would be advisable to consider including components related to digital journalism practiced by various civil society organizations in current proposed program where feasible, since public and private sectors seem to be of primary interest. It is worth considering also because civil society sector will continue to grow related to the global movements in line with the adoption of Sustainable Development Goals on the global scale, also, because there is a lot of financial and human resources in that sector and finally, the digital journalism and public relations on platforms are activities this ever growing sector has been increasingly practicing so, it can easily be assumed, that civil society sector will also be in demand of highly educated professionals.

The DJ program curricula and courses are designed to meet the standards of the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education (EHEA) and National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The aim is to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and behaviors to ensure future professional approach to work or vocation and develop transferable skills useful for work and higher education, including research skills.

The study program consists of 180 ECTS and it is carried out through full-time studies lasting six semesters, with each semester counting for 30 credits. Program mode of delivery and its composition is, according to SER, very advanced in comparison to other study programs in the Region and beyond. Learning outcomes grounded in the different components of the teaching process, reflect the objectives of qualification. There are four area: the core principles of ethical journalism; factors that impact quality of work, information and public coverage, safeguarding/protection of important information such as identity, background, and the source; ability to create and utilize technological content such as audio and visual.

The intended learning outcomes for this program are in line with the mission of the program and institution and are integrated throughout the structure of the curricula with clear and defined components, following a logical flow of their

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integration into the learning process as required. These are: To plan and implement journalism activities in variety of sectors; Integrate data, analysis and assessment in information; To manage and practice their profession in an organized and independent way; To provide reliable and resourceful information to society; To respecting diversity, culture and ethnicity; To educate their community for adequate and reliable consume of information; To demonstrate integration of knowledge, skills and professional attitudes through theuse of best practices; To communicate successfully with public, stakeholders and peers from other companies, institutions, agencies and sectors; To demonstrate communication and management skills and quality assurance inteamwork; To demonstrate skills in the use of technology, information technology system; To think critically, evaluate, and interpret information to a larger audience andstakeholders; To understand legal procedures and adhere to ethical standards related to confidentiality and right to privacy; To learn by independently, self-improve, and perform self-assessment activities fortheir own work performance.

These program outcomes and outcomes for each course are specified in syllabi included in in the SER and the versions formatted by KAA request are added in an attachment to SER. The format of these syllabi contains: Modul description; Learning outcomes; Pedagogical Methodology, Means of Assessment, Main Literature and Weekly Planning.

The language of instruction is Albanian, so that might rule out the need for previous training program to students provided, but as stated in SER, due to the lack of literature in Albanian students are required to seek textbooks, articles, etc., in other languages. Access to electronic libraries is made available to all our students, and professors are encouraged to help students with literature that is more suitable for relevant subjects. It might be worth considering including English as an obligatory course not an elective which it is now and focus on necessary vocabulary used in software production, media industry and digital journalism. The text is in compliance with criteria 4.5 as it is formulated in KAA Manual, but it might be worth considering this since proficient English is a must for professionals in digital journalism. The practical work might even be translating various needed guidelines, instructions etc. to English and use other means at the disposal of education institutions, maybe in collaboration with global companies and foreign diplomatic representative offices operating in Kosovo. The languages of the region might also be considered as an elective. Albanian being a unique language spoken in Kosovo

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and Albania and by Kosovo and Albania diaspora throughout the world, is nevertheless, a language of limited range and a number of native speakers. In all professions, but particularly in this profession, English is a must.

Considering that the program is a professional BA, a major part of the program is dedicated to practical work, where students are engaged in putting theory in practice in many ways which includes schoolwork such as writing assignments, group work, content creation for media outlets that UC has MOUs with, as well as internships in local and national media outlets starting from the second year of studies. An important component of each syllabus is the inclusion of non-academic partnering organizations. The external professionals are integrated within the course either as guest speakers, who are included in cases studies, help develop joint-research projects, study visits, etc. These dimensions link to practical work and learning outcomes, particularly the elaboration related to the comprehension of students, should all be elevated in line with the standard 4.11 in practice. Based on SER it can be concluded that, indeed, it will be, and that the practical stages of learning are allocated ECTS credits, and the work of students is monitored, reported on and academic staff tutors are tutoring students, in other words, that they should not be there left at the mercy of businesses and on their own,

The induction is well organized for freshmen on a welcome day and on „Lectures 0", event organized by professors, where the information about the facilities, services and the organization of the study programs are explained.

In line with the objective of focusing on practical aspects of study, according to SER, UC is the only HEI in Kosovo that conducts an annual employment barometer to adjust its curriculum to the market needs. Furthermore, UC also conducts surveys with alumni and employers to inquire about the practical aspects of the study program. In was pointed out in the discussion that, for example for the job of specialist journalist in public TV, a journalist needs to spend seven years in training on the job, while UC will be able to deliver these specialists in three-year study program. The idea behind the program is that graduated professionals employed in the media also become educators within their media and raise competencies of other media professionals employed which would raise competence in the overall sector.

DJ program will also be using the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching which supports, promotes, and enhances teaching effectiveness and

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student learning; encourages modernization of teaching and learning; communicates the importance of teaching and learning to various audiences; and serves as a catalyst for learning-cantered education.

SER also contains an extensive description of current teaching practices, including challenging Conventional Teaching and various project implementation, including CONSUS ("Connecting Science-Society Collaborations for Sustainability Innovations") project, which was developed with the aim of developing a framework to assist the process of creating new learning materials and/or teaching resources and has developed a resource handbook which is the result of partnership of thirteen institutions from Albania, Kosovo, Austria, Germany and Ireland, UC included. Assessment methods are widely discussed in SER and guidelines given of assessment methods criteria.

In SWOT analysis, under weaknesses or opportunities to improve, UC listed new and not well-established program, newcomer, increased students' drop-out rate and limited infrastructure and lack of instruments for measuring learning outcomes. While limited infrastructure may be related to the ever increasing need to include new hardware and software as their tangible assets, which is always a business aim, pointing out lack of instrument for measuring learning outcomes would need additional elaboration referring to the standards 4.3 and 4.9, because according to SER there might be a controversial point there. It is perhaps related to a specific methodological instrument the need of which should be specified if that is indeed the case.

Moreover, the threats specified as lack of specialists for regional courses; insufficient number of eligible students and limited number of students with satisfactory language skills, also already noted in the ET report would request inclusion/adaptation in the current program that would mitigate them. It would include also supplying the institution with adequate software and measures for dealing with potential plagiarism taking into consideration that what is available on the market does not maybe cover diverse portfolio of media journalism, but it might be a start. Also, if there is insufficient number of eligible students, the ambitious goals of inscribing 200 might be reconsidered, as it has already been recommended.

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Standard	Compliance	
	Yes	No
Standard 4.1. The study program is modelled on qualification objectives. These include subject-related and interdisciplinary aspects as well as the acquisition of disciplinary, methodological and generic skills and competencies. The aspects refer especially to academic or artistic competencies, to the capability of taking up adequate employment, contributing to the civil society and of developing the students' personality.	X	
Standard 4.2. The study program complies with the National Qualifications Framework and the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. The individual components of the program are combined in a way to best achieve the specified qualification objectives and provide for adequate forms of teaching and learning.	X	
Standard 4.3. The disciplines within the curriculum are provided in a logical flow and meet the definition and precise determination of the general and specific competencies, as well as the compatibility with the study programs and curricula delivered in the EHEA. To be listed at least 7 learning outcomes for the study program under evaluation.	X	
Standard 4.4. The disciplines within the curriculum have analytical syllabuses which comprise at least the following: the discipline's objectives, the basic thematic content, learning outcomes, the distribution of classes, seminars and applicative activities, students' assessment system, the minimal bibliography, etc. The full course description/ syllabuses of each subject/ module should be attached only in electronic form to the self-assessment report for the study program under evaluation.	X	
Standard 4.5. If the language of instruction is other than Albanian, actions are taken to ensure that language skills of both students and academic staff are adequate for instruction in that language when students begin their studies. This may be done through language training prior to the commencement of the program.	n.a.	
Standard 4.6. The student-teacher relationship is a partnership in which each assumes the responsibility of reaching the learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are explained and discussed with students from the perspective of their relevance to the students' development.	X	
Standard 4.7. Teaching strategies are fit for the different types of learning outcomes programs are intended to develop. Strategies of teaching and assessment set out in program and course specifications are followed with flexibility to meet the needs of different groups of students.	X	

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Standard 4.8. Student assessment mechanisms are conducted fairly and objectively, are appropriate for the different forms of learning sought and are clearly communicated to students at the beginning of courses.	X	
Standard 4.9. Appropriate, valid and reliable mechanisms are used for verifying standards of student achievement. The standard of work required for different grades is consistent over time, comparable in courses offered within a program, and in comparison with other study programs at highly regarded institutions.	X	
Standard 4.10. Policies and procedures include actions to be taken in to dealing with situations where standards of student achievement are inadequate or inconsistently assessed.	X	
Standard 4.11. If the study program includes practice stages, the intended student learning outcomes are clearly specified and effective processes are followed to ensure that those learning outcomes and the strategies to develop that learning are understood by students. The practice stages are allocated ETCS credits and the work of the students at the practical training organizations is monitored through activity reports; students during practice stages have assigned tutors among the academic staff in the study program.	X	
Standard 4.12. In order to facilitate the practice stages, the higher education institution signs cooperation agreements, contracts or other documents with institutions/organizations/practical training units.	X	

Compliance level: Fully compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *To consider including in the current proposed program components related to digital journalism practiced by various civil society organizations where feasible, since public and private sectors seem to be of primary interest as the civil society sector will also be in demand of highly educated professionals and there are specific, non-technical areas of journalism practiced in this sector.*

2. *Consider including English as an obligatory course not an elective which it is now and focus on necessary areas used in software production, media industry, digital journalism and related research.*

3. *To reconsider/elaborate pointing out lack of instrument for measuring learning outcomes and elaborate potential sources and means of acquiring these instruments, maybe through various project currently taking place in collaboration with various foreign high education institutions, taking into consideration digital journalism is a very young and underdeveloped area*

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of study within communication science.

4. *Consider supplying the institution with adequate software and measures for dealing with potential plagiarism.*

2.5. Students

As required by relevant standard, UC implements formally adopted procedures of requirements in its study programs in student section and it is the assumption on which this report is based, that it will also be used in the new program Digital Journalism. The usual minimum entry requirements for a candidate to be eligible for admission to the UC are set out in the General Entry Requirements contained in the Prospectus. The absolute minimum criteria for a student to be admitted to DJ program, is that all students are expected to have successfully completed high school and have passed the national test (Matura) as required by MEST.

Transfer of interested students from other accredited institutions is enabled and regulated by provisions of the policy on transfer of students, which is in full compliance with the higher education law of the Republic of Kosovo. The transfer is enabled only if the previous academic program is relevant, includes courses of similar nature and the relevant courses are acknowledged by the respective academic staff in consultancy hours dedicated to current, incoming and transfer students. They provide additional support for struggling students, clarification in academic process as well as the evaluation of transfer cases and compatibility of study programs. According to SER, UC attempts to target students of different backgrounds to create a diverse study environment.

The assumption is that majority of students who will enroll in DJ program consists of students aging from 18-20 years, from different socio-economic backgrounds, geographic and administrative divisions of Kosovo. Students coming from different educational backgrounds are also expected. Defined categories expected are: freshmen graduated high school students; unemployed graduates: any student with an undergraduate degree other than digital journalism who has not been able to find a job (in their relevant discipline); employed persons with another degree

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being employees who hold a degree and are employed working in a different field that does not fit their educational background; employed persons without a degree, who would be employed who have not completed their degree for different personal reasons and other employees who wish to get a promotion opportunity within the organization, or apply for better positions in other organizations, and finally, people passionate about journalism, art, writing, photography and willing to obtain a degree to work professionally. UC encourages vulnerable and minority groups suchas war veterans, ethnic minorities, physically disadvantage individuals, and LGBT society members to join UC offering additional support.

UC is flexible in adjusting to student needs and offers flexible study and lecture hours and the delivery mode of the courses, which has especially been implemented during the pandemic. Student rights are strictly protected and their right to appeal for any academic or administrative process is highly promoted, encouraged and regulated in internal polices as presented in SER. Appeals and feedbacks are treated as an area for improvement and continuously encouraged. The orientation week (in tabling event fashion) is organized on a yearly basis to inform newly registered students about resources that are available at UC

Student assessments are administered to ensure that all students are treated fairly and timely. UC equality policy requires that all students should have equal opportunity to access qualifications and assessments, and that qualifications are awarded in a way that is fair.

Feedback to students is regularly provided by academic and administrative staff. In case students need additional support and academic help than the course assistants and/or tutors are immediately informed and act accordingly. Effective assessment feedback is part of continuous guided learning. Results and performance indicators of students are stored, and academic staff and students can have easy access to the relevant information, also through DMIS or MOODLE. All work of students is stored and kept under the program filed and registrations.

Special attention is given to the authenticity of student's work so students must authenticate the evidence that they provide for assessment. Assessors ensure that evidence is authentic to a student through setting valid assignments and supervising them during the assessment period. The academic integrity of work and protection of individual work is assured through integrated software which check the plagiarism and authenticity of the work submitted.

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Most of the resources utilized by staff and students require provision of data and personal information, so, strict policies and regulations that prevent misuses and secure and protect the recorded data, information and privacy are in practice. Additional outsourcing companies are contracted to maintain and protect information and the software and the policy on data protection at UC is completely in line with the national polices and the legal framework of the Republic of Kosovo including any breach of policies and regulations be followed by legal actions and serious consequences. Software utilized are DMIS; MOODLE; E-C-ARRER. Moreover, librarians and students use a separate software for library search, administration of books and reviews.

Service of tutoring is provided to students that face difficulties in reaching their academic objectives. Tutors are well performing and excellent students in various subjects selected by the committee of academics. who practice and teach students (mainly freshmen) in various forms including those in conventional classes.

Health care services are also provided. UC employs a general practitioner nurse and a counsellor who are skilled and qualified to provide support and guide students in health matters.

Student clubs operate as an additional help and support to the students and are the sources of organizing recreational activities and help students in networking, socializing and fulfilling their hobbies and interests. As part of the activities organized in cooperation with Career and Welfare Office, Coffee Lectures are organized on a yearly basis, as a platform to introduce and invite successful individuals to share their experiences and journey to success which is very well received by students as it has been a great tool for networking and socializing and has included students in meaningful debate and open communication. Only in one year more than fifteen entrepreneurs and professionals from various sectors have participated, including the Minister of Defense of the Republic of Kosovo who has been one of the key speakers. Given the positive feedback plans are to double the number of speakers in these lectures. UC plans to decentralize all operations by transferring the responsibility to student club board to oversee all the activities related to clubs and organizations which will be an opportunity for students to engage in development and implementation practices. The database is being developed to keep track of students registered to

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respective clubs which will help the board to learn more about student behavior and interests. General club policies and procedures are also in the process of design.

All students are members of Student Association, a body with its own governing structure, which is elected once in two years to represent the interest of students in decision making at institutional level and to advocate in favor of student policies and provides additional support.

Academic misconduct and dishonesty are also regulated in the Misconduct Procedure, which is provided to the students at the beginning of their studies. Furthermore, all the rules and regulation, most importantly concerning their rights as students are made available at the Home Page of the LMS "Moodle". SER brings detailed description of procedures that apply in specific misconduct. There is also an Appeals Policy for occasions student of dissatisfaction or a belief to have been disadvantaged with an assessment consisting of four stages which are described in detail in SER.

The Career and Welfare Office helps students to engage in career planning and experiential education, to pursue educational opportunities and achieve professional success. The purpose of this center is to empower students in job searching and offer equal employment opportunities for all. UC has incorporated "CareerOrientation" module in the academic curriculum as a mandatory course for all junior year students which earns students 4 ECTS. An internship is an undividable component of the course. The in-class work and internship are practiced simultaneously. The service of this office provided to all students of UC includes career counselling; training & workshops; networking (employer connection]; psycho-social counselling and services for alumni. As an example, for the care for wellbeing of students, SER points out inviting a professional psychologist for an open discussion with students to address issues such as: stress, anxiety, the effects of COVID on students and the stigma associated with mental health in Kosovo. The plan is to invite two to three mental health professionals every semester. Moreover, as it has been noticed that majority of freshmen students struggle to adapt to the new learning environment, a new module, called study skills, is being provided to all first-year students to prepare them for college and introduce them to topics specific to higher learning education. According to student feedback, more than 95% of students agree that the information shared

through study skills has been very useful. Students also proposed various additional lecture topics which will be considered for inclusion into the syllabus.

SER elaborated in detail how in line with Student Success Strategy (SSS) student learning experience is being built in the program. UC has set up a Student Success Center that provides additional academic counseling by developing a system that tracks down student progress and identifies students that are facing problems and helps them make individual academic achievement plans and refer them to the campus offices for help and guidance. Tools and activities to reach these objectives are described in detail in SER, forms included.

In SWOT analysis the evaluation of compliance with the standards is summarized in a number of strengths: diverse student composition; student empowering policies/ procedures; strict recruitment criteria ensuring the best flexibility offered for studies of this BSc program; student affiliation with different sectors which opens new perspectives and students team working.

While weaknesses listed as limited knowledge of students in digital journalism and limited travel opportunities for students do not seem to be the problems UC could not be able to deal with in future, the lack of employment opportunities under Threats (among various threats that are not within reach of UC like economic hardship, visa regime, or increasing migration) seem somewhat in contradiction with the information of blooming media market and great market needs for digital journalist professionals in Kosovo, pointed out in the SER and in discussion. It would be advisable to reconsider how to turn these threats into opportunities for UC.

Standard	Compliance	
	Yes	No
Standard 5.1. There is a clear and formally adopted admission procedure at institutional level that the study program respects when organising students' recruitment. Admission requirements are consistently and fairly applied for all students.	X	
Standard 5.2. All students enrolled in the study program posses a high school graduation diploma or other equivalent document of study, according to MEST requirements.	X	

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Standard 5.3. The study groups are dimensioned so as to ensure an effective and interactive teaching and learning process.	X	
Standard 5.4. Feedback to students on their performance and results of assessments is given promptly and accompanied by mechanisms for assistance if needed.	X	
Standard 5.5. The results obtained by the students throughout the study cycles are certified by the academic record.	X	
Standard 5.6. Flexible treatment of students in special situations is ensured with respect to deadlines and formal requirements in the program and to all examinations.	X	
Standard 5.7. Records of student completion rates are kept for all courses and for the program as a whole and included among quality indicators.	X	
Standard 5.8. Effective procedures are being used to ensure that work submitted by students is original.	X	
Standard 5.9. Students' rights and obligations are made publicly available, promoted to all those concerned and enforced equitably; these will include the right to academic appeals.	X	
Standard 5.10. The students' transfer between higher education institutions, faculties and study programs is clearly regulated in formal internal documents.	X	
Standard 5.11. Academic staff is available at sufficient scheduled times for consultation and advice to students. Adequate tutorial assistance is provided to ensure understanding and ability to apply learning.	X	

Compliance level: Fully compliant

ET recommendations:
1. *Consider possibility of having an impact on the development of Kosovo media market by initiating/joining associations and similar organizations of SMEs in developing custom tailored programs for employees working in media which are part of the lifelong learning and target UC alumna and other employees.*

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2. *Consider extending assistance (financial/logistical) to student who travel through solidarity schemes, corporate or public sector donations.*

2.6. Research

UC is not a research-intensive institution, but it sees itself as a teaching institution with well-developed taught degrees, as stated in SER. Applied research is used to strengthen study programs by keeping their curricula up to date. An integrated teaching, research and staff development policy is implemented currently by making it obligatory for staff to spend a greater proportion of their time conducting research. In DJ, the primary focus will be on applied research, especially concerning reporting, storytelling, importance of digital media, digital campaigns, fake news, etc.

One of the challenges UC faces is to impart relevant job specific and appropriate transferable skills, including research-specific skills. The undergraduate curriculum includes research activities designed to move students from being recipients of knowledge to becoming collaborators in its production which provides students with opportunities to gain practical research experience through courses.

Employers also require applied research skills, and there is a suitable employer engagement within the degree program which makes it easier to plan a feasible research component of the content. New approaches in the field of DJ increase the need for frequent re-evaluation of the program done by the teachers, the process, where, as pointed out in SER, results of research work are approached through filtering the social and industrial theory by taking into consideration the market needs. The integration of research into teaching activities in UC has been informed by growing demand from employers for problem-solvers with developed research skills.

Research activities in curriculum of all departments are based on the following approaches: research-led teaching; research-oriented teaching; research-tutored teaching; research-based teaching, research-informed teaching and teaching-influenced research, all clearly defined and explained in SER.

A selection of activities available for integration in all study programs according to their applicability is listed in SER integrated in all study programs, as per their applicability. Academic writing and research methodology, following the research-oriented approach, are offered as elective courses for every program and for the BA in Digital Journalism as well.

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Research projects as an assessment method, is the research-based and research-tutored teaching approaches where students are required to conduct supervised group or individual research on particular topics within the framework of a course and submit it for assessment. Some of the courses in which research projects are used as main assessment method within the Digital Journalism program are Intro News, Online and Social Media Strategies, Press and Society, Internet Law and Policy.

Students Scientific Journal and Conference is organized in cooperation with public and private HEIs from Kosovo and the Region, where academic staff members of all study programs are required to either mentor teams of students in conducting research on the topics selected for that year's volume topics or serve in the Evaluation and Editorial Committee of the journal, resulting articles to be published in the journal. There is also Acasol (initially derived from Business Problems-Academic Solutions) research-based teaching approach where academic staff and students collaborate with individual companies/institutions/organizations to identify their industry's most troubling problems and to provide academic solutions for them. This activity requires a higher-level of understanding of research processes, and better research skills and field specific theoretical and practical knowledge which is why it is mainly implemented in courses of the fourth semester and above.

The Annual Thematic Research, conducted and published in various areas of interest with data collected and processed by students and standardized into six research projects is to be conducted annually in areas corresponding to study programs.

Participation in Erasmus + Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE) is illustrated in SER as increasing UC internal capacities in its efforts for offering research-led and research-informed teaching, UC participates in CBHE projects in partnership with public and private HEIs and other education related institutions.. Various projects are listed by names in SER: KALCEA; STEPS, DRIVE, STEMedu. Participation in Erasmus + International Credit Mobility has also positively contributed to research capacities of academic staff, and as already mentioned previously in this report, the number of agreements with international institutions is impressive.

The Digital Journalism study program has defined assignments with research objectives as part of BA program, reflected in the overall curriculum. Human resources allocated to the research objectives of the program are comprised of the teaching staff engaged at the BA program, with various respective topics. The staff will work in compliance with the research strategy with the logistic support provided from the designated administrative and financial

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resources. Engagement in research activities of teaching staff will be taken into consideration in staff evaluation processes and recommendations for potential promotion will be considered. CELT will provide training on the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Researchers which requires one joint paper authored by junior teaching staff under the mentorship of a senior colleague published annually. In addition, the Instruction developed will contain recommendations by the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA) for trusted publishers. There will be improvement in the instruction for research. UC has already requested support from the Computer Science Department faculty to develop a database for academic staff members to record their research publications, and individual research success will be assessed during the periodical UC staff evaluation process. Research papers will be validated through peer- reviews by fellow teaching staff of the specific fields of study. The implementation of the Academia Platform, the first software dedicated to the identification of plagiarism in the Albanian language, integration of which is financially supported by the US Embassy in Kosovo, is also operational and mandatory for all research produced by UC academic staff and students.

SER elaborates extensively a problem of a national scope that is related to the quantity and quality of research, namely, the lack of research produced by faculty, and relates this to the quality of PhDs being produced in Kosovo, and especially those who have completed their studies in the Region in the past fifteen years. The characteristics of the PhDs have changed, acceding to SER, and the degrees not seen as an opportunity to contribute academically, but rather as a financial gains because of the abundance of opportunities given to them. PhDs of any field are in high demand, so they often set the rules, and, ssometimes, they have turned their role into a teaching position where research is a burden and if pushed too hard, they may terminate their contracts and endanger the academic programs. SER points out this is a national challenge that cannot be fixed by individual institutions, suggesting that national authorities should develop mechanisms that would allow HEIs to enforce their contracts and sanction those who do not comply by the rules.

According to Article 10, Point 10 of the Employment Contract, each faculty in UC is obliged to produce one publication per year, and include UC as the main institution. Academics in need of financial support to pay the publication fees will submit the request with relevant authorities. The Research Committee will review the request and decide to either cover the fees fully or partially. UC encourages the academic staff to incorporate their research into teaching and encourage the participation of the students.

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UC will conduct its research and publication activities based on the domestic legislation on ownership of intellectual property, in line with internationally recognized standardsand procedures. Regulation on research work also provides a specific provision on academic integrity, protection of intellectual property as well as support provided by the legal office at UC. Incase of misuses or theft of intellectual property published by UC students or staff, legal office at UC provides the necessary support and guidance.

While Strengths section of SWOT analysis provides a summary of structures and processes elaborated in SER, Weaknesses section lists a number of potential opportunities some of which are under direct control of UC like: limited funding; low number of research staff for the program; infrastructure/office space; time allocation amongst staff for academic/teaching and research. When assessed in the context of the lack of qualified academic staff with PhD in general, these definitely require concrete actions on the part of UC, including the one on lack of national monitoring tools, such as software and databases for publications in "fake" journals, an issue for which HE institutions, UC included, need to be lobbying through representative bodies on national level. Threats like migration and brain drain, potential lack of qualified PhD's in the field of research; a non-regulated environment of academicinstitutions; plagiarism and limited staff with research experience, also deserve looking for partnerships and strategic alignments for longer term goals.

Standard	Compliance	
	Yes	No
Standard 6.1. The study program has defined scientific/applied research objectives (on its own or as part of a research centre or interdisciplinary program), which are also reflected in the research development plan of the institution; sufficient financial, logistic and human resources are allocated for achieving the proposed research objectives.	X	
Standard 6.2. Expectations for teaching staff involvement in research and scholarly activities are clearly specified, and performance in relation to these expectations is considered in staff evaluation and promotion criteria.	X	
Standard 6.3. Clear policies are established for defining what is recognized as research, consistent with international standards and established norms in the field of study of the program.	X	

Standard 6.4. The academic staff has a proven track record of research results on the same topics as their teaching activity.	X	
Standard 6.5. The academic and research staff publish their work in speciality magazines or publishing houses, scientific/applied/artistic products are presented at conferences, sessions, symposiums, seminars etc. and contracts, expertise, consultancy, conventions, etc. are provided to partners inside the country and/or abroad.	X	
Standard 6.6. Research is validated through: scientific and applied research publications, artistic products, technological transfer through consultancy centres, scientific parks and other structures for validation.	X	
Standard 6.7. Each academic staff member and researcher has produced at least an average of one scientific/applied research publication or artistic outcome/product per year for the past three years.	X	
Standard 6.8. Academic and research staff publish under the name of the institution in Kosovo they are affiliated to as full-time staff.	X	
Standard 6.8. Academic staff are encouraged to include in their teaching information about their research and scholarly activities that are relevant to courses they teach, together with other significant research developments in the field.	X	
Standard 6.9. Policies are established for ownership of intellectual property and clear procedures set out for commercialization of ideas developed by staff and students.	X	
Standard 6.10. Students are engaged in research projects and other activities	X	

Compliance level: Fully compliant

Compliance level: Fully compliant/Substantially compliant/Partially compliant/Non-compliant

ET recommendations:

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1. *Consider partnering with other HE institutions to lobby for regulatory means to deal with the problem of regulation related to research, academic staff contracts etc.*
2. *Consider stimulating students with visible research potential to continue studies on postgraduate level by subsidizing tuitions with the help of industry partners.*
3. *Consider initiating donor awareness raising on value of research on current and future needs of graduates and post-graduates for the overall economic and social development of Kosovo.*
4. *Strengthen the applied research component to raise interest for research funding in private sector in the country and beyond.*

2.7. Infrastructure and resources

The infrastructure of UC includes facilities that, according to SER, provide a conducive atmosphere for a good learning and living experience. There is an assurance that, because of the projected growth in academic and research programs, student enrolment, and faculty positions The Board of Trustees would allocate financial resources and investments in order to ensure thatall the human resources, equipment and infrastructure is available for the long-term continuity of the DJ program. A strategic financial plan has been developed and finances allocated.

UC College owns sufficient space for the delivery of the program. Spaces available are fullycomplying with the requirement. The adequate facilities include modern campus with adequate number of rooms and seats to host large number ofstudents; laboratories furnished with necessary equipment for research & certification purposes; licensed software automatizing learning, study processes and administration; rich library with literature in Albanian and English.

Rooms are equipped with tech devices and are inclusive and accessible for students with disabilities and special needs. Well ventilated and equipped central library in the campus iscomputerized with rich collection of latest reference books, journals, periodicals, newspapers, magazines and e-journals in Albanian and English. There is a computer lab with internet facilities.A departmental library in the college is also available.

The campus in Prishtina is a newly added capacity with a large, modern and a comfortable interior area of 4550 m2 consisting building A and buildingB, as well as a vast area of 9000 m2 exterior. It is equipped with conference rooms, different labs, study rooms, classes and with high tech infrastructure including rhe Robotics and Electronic Lab, a separate high-tech lab with sophisticated VR (Virtual Reality) equipment. For the outdoor activities campus has football and basketball recreational fields, an outside amphitheater suitable for outdoors lectures, activities

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and study groups, as well as an organic agricultural farm growing various fruits and vegetables

The campus in Ferizaj is 1500 m2 in the internal area, 2500 m2 in the internal supplement area and 3700 m2 in the outside area. This campus offers recreational spaces which are open and accessible for all the students of UC regardless of which campus they are in. There are large conference rooms, hangout spots and canteen and a space of 400 m2 pool area with the swimming pool of 50 m2, which is built foe the whole year utilization. During the winter and cooler seasons, the pool can be turned into closed and heated environment with warm water thanksto an internal heating system. Additionally, this campus incorporates outside basketball and football fields enabling students to discharge their stress and enjoy a perfect break.

The Campus of Gjakova has a space of 1200 m^2, providing a sufficient space for the number of students enrolled in studies. This campus is located in the center of Gjakova, enables accessibility to numerous students who reside in the considerable distances to Prishtina. Gjakova campus is accessible for interested students from the western region of Kosovo respectively from Peja, Prizren and Decan.

Facilities at UC, regardless of their location are open for all UC students and staff. Moreover, UC organizes collective transportation for staff and students for various activities (i.e., sport events, public lectures, lab trainings, group studies, quizzes, competitions).

So as to the equipment maintenance, UC employs sufficient staff to assure the proper work, and quality of electronic andelectric equipment and additional electric installation, or general maintenance of campuses and equipment. So as to software and online learning system UC has an agreement with Microsoft, specifically Azure for Education to use its software free of charge for r students and staff. The software is for educational and research purposes and is directly applicable to the majority of curriculum courses. This software is primarily geared towards Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) courses.

UC also has its own e-learning system (Moodle) where students gain information regarding their courses. Here, they can access course materials, submit their work and communicate with their teachers. Big Blue Button, mentioned already in this report, is the platform used for online lectures with many interactive features. During the Pandemic period Coursera has been introduced for all students and staff with free access and no tuition fees.

All the services provided to students and academics as well as requests and deliveries are automatized through the implementation of various software and online tools. Currently, UC employs seven software that are utilized on regular basis, capacities which are to be increased in the near future since UC and its HEI partners

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have recently submitted ten more capacity building projects to the EU commission under the ERASMUS + K2 frame, upon the approval of which additional software, funded by EU commission, is expected.

UC Library is growing in content. The Campus in Prishtina has approximately 4000 books and 1500 titles in Albanian, English, Serbo-Croatian, and other languages. Access to electronic libraries is also provided. It subscribes to worldwide electronic libraries. Beyond electronic subscriptions UC is subscribed to leading journals of the fields of studies offered in UC. The Library System Project with the objective to ensure provision of much needed books for students, staff and future students, is described in details, with a focus on description of the deficit of books and challenges of high education young Kosovo state is faced with after decades of occupation, aggression and destruction of national cultural heritage and shortage of needed books and qualified people. UC believes to play its part with this innovative project that counts on capacity of Kosovo diaspora and foreign friendly nations and individuals as well as collaboration within Kosovo, and appear to have awareness of its own responsibility in the long-term process of recovery and development of Kosovo high education, digital journalism included.

Standard	Compliance	
	Yes	No
Standard 7.1. The adequate long-term implementation of the study program is ensured in quantitative terms as regards premises, human resources and equipment. At the same time, it is guaranteed that qualitative aspects are also taken into account.	X	
Standard 7.2. There is a financial plan at the level of the study program that would demonstrate the sustainability of the study program for the next minimum three years.	X	

Standard 7.3. The higher education institution must demonstrate with adequate documents (property deeds, lease contracts, inventories, invoices etc.) that, for the study program submitted for evaluation it possesses the following, for the next at least three years: a) owned or rented spaces adequate for the educational process; b) owned or rented laboratories, with the adequate equipment for all the compulsory disciplines within the curriculum, wherever the analytical syllabus includes such activities; c) adequate software for the disciplines of study included in the curriculum, with utilisation licence; d) library equipped with reading rooms, group work rooms and its own book stock according to the disciplines included in the curricula.	X	
Standard 7.4. The number of seats in the lecture rooms, seminar rooms and laboratories must be related to the study groups' size (series, groups, subgroups); the applicative activities for the specialty disciplines included in the curricula are carried out in laboratories equipped with IT equipment.	X	

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		X
Standard 7.5. The education institution's libraries must ensure, for each of the study programs: a) a number of seats in the reading rooms corresponding to at least 10% of the total number of students in the study program; b) a number of seats in the group work rooms corresponding to at least 10% of the total number of students in the study program; c) their own book stock from Albanian and foreign speciality literature, enough to cover the disciplines within the curricula, out of which at least 50% should represent book titles or speciality courses of recognised publishers, from the last 10 years; d) a book stock within its own library with a sufficient number of books so as to cover the needs of all students in the cycle and year of study the respective discipline is provided for; e) a sufficient number of subscriptions to Albanian and foreign publications and periodicals, according to the stated mission.		
Standard 7.6. The infrastructure and facilities dedicated to the implementation of the program is adapted to students with special needs	X	

Compliance level: Fully compliant
ET recommendations:

1. *To consider extended lobbying and cross-sector partnership to increase investment in library capacities*

3. OVERALL EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATION OF THE ET

This expert wishes to give credit to UC faculty and staff for preparing a very extensive and detailed Self Evaluation Report which clearly indicated compliance with standards requested by KAA.. In addition, the staff are to be congratulated for their commitment in facing the challenges of high education in Kosovo which is obviously expanding in range and depth as the nation recovers and develops and that recovery, as pointed out in SER, is never fast. Evaluating UC this expert has also learned a lot about circumstance of life and work in high education in Kosovo.

Finally, some caution is advised regarding childhood illnesses all new projects face. As the title of the program and syllabus show, it is something new and unique, in Kosovo HE market and beyond. Digital journalism is an adventure in itself, so is teaching this newborn area of communication science. It was brave and innovative step by UC to launch this program, so, the next couple of years will be challenging. This expert is convinced UC is up to this challenge.

The results of evaluation are as follows.

Standard	Compliance Level
Mission, objectives and administration	Fully compliant
Quality management	Fully compliant
Academic Staff	Fully compliant
Educational Process Content	Fully compliant
Students	Fully compliant
Research	Fully compliant
Infrastructure and resorces	Fully Compliant
Overall Compliance	**Fully compliant**

In conclusion, the Expert Team considers that the study program *Digital Journalism* offered by *Universum College* is *Fully compliant* with the standards included in the *KAA Accreditation manual* and, therefore, recommends *to accredit* the study program for a duration of *3 years* with a number of *100* students to be enrolled in the program.

Expert Team

Chair

Majda Tafra-Vlahović

25. May 2021

(Signature)   (Print Name)   (Date)

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