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## **AAB COLLEGE**

### **BA PAINTING AND VISUAL ARTS**

### **REACCREDITATION**

### **REPORT OF THE EXPERT TEAM**

31 March 2022 (Revised 12 April 2022)



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. CONTEXT

This reaccreditation of the BA Painting and visual arts programme was conducted via an audio and visual Microsoft Zoom link between a number of teams comprising AAB management, teaching staff, students and employers located in Kosovo and the External Experts in the United Kingdom and in North Macedonia.

Another event, the accreditation of a new BA in Gaming Design and Animation programme, was conducted coincidentally and in a similar manner. There was a degree of overlap in terms of staff, teaching and content between this existing BA Painting and Visual Arts and the proposed new BA programme-Gaming Design and Animation.

#### **Date of event**

Wednesday 23 March 2022.

#### **External Experts (EE)**

Professor Alan Brickwood, independent higher education adviser  
Marija Vasilevska, PhD Student from Skopje, North Macedonia

The External Experts (EE) had some familiarity with AAB College, having previously participated in re/accreditation events.

#### **Coordinators from the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA)**

Mr. Shkelzen Gerxhaliu, Senior Officer for Evaluation at KAA  
Ms. Leona Kovaci, Senior Officer for Evaluation at KAA

#### **Sources of information for the Report and criteria used**

The EE were provided, in advance, with a Self-Evaluation Report (SER) comprising an evaluation of the existing programme since its most recent re/accreditation event in 2016, curriculum vitae (CVs) for the teaching team, a near-complete set of completed programme module pro-formas and a short video showing the students' working environment.



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Other information provided in advance included copies of the latest version of KAA's Accreditation Manual. This together with a template for the production of reports and a sample report provided the basic criteria used in the evaluation.

Additional information was requested by the EE at the close of the event. This comprised:

- Clarification of the date of the most recent re/accreditation event.
- Clarification of the intended maximum student study places (year 1 intake and all years).
- A copy of the Semester 6 Thesis Module pro-forma.
- Budget planning for the next three years
- Template surveys for student and employer surveys.
- Report for administration and students support services
- The Code of ethics.

Due to restrictions in place, to prevent the spread of the global pandemic and remote nature of the event, it was not possible to undertake any physical review of learning resources available to students and teaching staff for this programme. It was equally not possible to examine any examples of student work, for similar reasons.

During the whole event, a representative from KAA was present to check the accuracy of the provided information from the meeting participants to the external experts.



## 1.2 EVENT SCHEDULE

Wednesday 23 March 2022

	<b>Event</b>	<b>People</b>
09.00 – 09.40	Meeting with the management of the faculty.	Bujar Demjaha Fitim Aliu Elisa Nikolla
09.40 – 10.20	Meeting with quality assurance representatives and administrative staff.	Medina Spahiu Saranda Rifati
10.20 – 12.20	Meeting with the heads of the study programmes.	Dita Ethem Hektor Vokshi Fitim Aliu Elisa Nikolla  Clirim Vokshi Festa Celina Leart Zogiani
12.20 – 13.00	Lunch break	
13.00 – 13.40	Meeting with teaching staff.	Shyqri Nimani Bujar Selimi Luan Tashi Agon Nimani Liridona Abdullahu Enver Hoxhaj Musa Kalaveshi Zake Prelvukaj Hajrush Fazliu
13.40 – 14.20	Meeting with students	Alsea Ymeri Esmeralda Bilbilaj Altina Mehmeti Suela Gori Eriglen Skeja



		Aurora Aliji Evelina Markaj Vjosa Spahija
14.20 – 15.00	Meeting with graduates	Nerxhivane Ferizi Qendrim Isufi Diona Ymeri Roni Shishko Shukrije Sejdiu Shpetim Mehmeti
15.00 – 15.40	Meeting with employers of graduates and external stakeholders	Naim Spahiu <i>Galerija kombtare KS -</i> Hyrije Shaqiri <i>Atelje HB</i> Rita Kelmendi <i>Galerija Figura</i> Vala Gerguri <i>Trokit</i> <i>Karrota</i> Nita Qena <i>PEXI adv</i> Shpetim Ibrahimimi, Visar Spanca, <i>Zonda Creative</i>
15.40 – 15.50	Internal meeting of KAA staff and experts	
15.50 – 16.00	Closing meeting with the management of the faculty and programmes.	



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### 1.3 A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE INSTITUTION AND PROGRAMME UNDER EVALUATION

AAB College describes itself as the largest non-public institution of higher education (HE) in Kosovo. It was established in 2002 and has grown exponentially over the past 20 years comprising 14 faculties with study programmes at both BA and MA levels. AAB's start was with their unique program in Journalism and Mass Communication after which they went on to secure further accreditation in the field of forensic sciences in cooperation with the Public University of Sarajevo. Nowadays, AAB College offers teaching at its main campus in Prishtina and two other locations in Gjakova and Ferizaj.

As a consequence of this growth, AAB has invested heavily in the digitisation of academic and administrative data and processes creating a comprehensive management information system and student resource. This has facilitated a process of decentralisation and devolvement of responsibilities from the Rectorate down to Deans of Faculties across a wide range of academic and administrative functions. This includes quality assurance, personnel selection and management, students' projects and feedback and the management of resources to include finance.

AAB claims to have achieved a high degree of institutional maturity in terms of organisation and the manner in which it conducts its operations. It also prides itself on how it has created an academically free, stable and secure community of supportive academic and administrative staff. The SER cites a high proportion of its staff to be employed full-time.

The Faculty of Arts was created in 2005 and currently offers the following five accredited bachelor programmes and one study programme at Masters level.

- BA Graphic Design and Visual Arts Programme
- BA Fashion Design
- BA Painting and the Visual Arts
- BA Musicology
- BA Choreography
- MA Graphic Design.



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These study programs aim to contribute towards development of students` individual visual intelligence and understanding of the arts through information and critical attitude, related to the context of their creative and intellectual needs through providing practical work and quality teaching, as prescribed in the SER. Moreover, the Faculty aims to create professional curricula and literature followed by new teaching methodologies, in accordance with the latest trends in the arts` field. In addition to this, the programs aim towards internationalization through capacity building of the faculty`s academic staff and contribution in the community via the organization of various activities and events in different fields of art.

In response to questions on the faculty`s strategic planning, senior management confirmed that there were no future developments anticipated that might significantly impact upon this programme.

## **2. PROGRAMME EVALUATION**

### **2.1 MISSION, OBJECTIVES AND ADMINISTRATION**

The current three-year (6 semester) BA Programme in Painting and Visual Arts shares a common mission and set of strategic objectives that are entirely consistent with those of the Faculty, College and KAA more broadly. It aims to deliver a teaching and learning experience for its students that is practice-based, high quality and vital to the communities and industries for which the programme is designed.

In addition to being trained as fine art painters and visual artists, graduates of the programme were also described as being able to work more broadly as curators, gallery owners, heads of art studios and mediators in cultural and artistic institutions both as employees and in a freelance capacity. This was confirmed during meetings held with graduates, employers with experience of recruiting graduates from the programme and other external stakeholders.



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These objectives and outcomes are evidenced by a balance of studies of around 60/40% between practice and theory, respectively, and in the control of teaching group sizes. This is consistent with other programmes internationally with similar objectives and which are similarly committed to maintaining a balance between teaching and learning that retains, and favours, a predominance of teaching with regular student support.

Detailed discussions with students, graduates and employers of graduates provided additional confirmation of how the programme worked in practice and of outcomes typical of the intellectual, practical and transferable skills expected of a graduate from higher education embodied in the National Qualifications Framework and the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

#### **Compliance level**

The study programme is entirely consistent with the overall mission of the College. It has a well-defined overarching didactic and research content and its rationale is well founded on relevant external academic and societal best practice and advice. It is Fully Compliant with Standards 1.1 to 1.3.

There is a comprehensive range of formal policies, guidelines and regulations referred to in the SER dealing with responsibilities relating to management and the delivery of programmes, behaviour and to recurring procedural and academic issues. These cover academic integrity, responsibility and public accountability that includes a requirement of everyone within AAB to conform to a set of moral and ethical principles and to the principles of scientific and artistic truth. These include codes of ethics and disciplinary procedures.

These arrangements are established at institutional level with an increasing number delegated to the faculty for administration and implementation. The particular structure put in place by the faculty, post decentralisation, mirrors those established centrally. It comprises a mixture of committees and posts to cover both policy and managerial matters under a senior Scientific Teaching Council, which has a membership to include all academic staff and representation from students and administrative staff.



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The EE considers the systems in place to be comprehensive and thorough with clear measures to ensure appropriate ‘follow through’ and feedback occurs. The EE assumes that a summary of these arrangements is made available in a handbook given to students at induction.

**Compliance level**

The EE is satisfied that these measures are full embraced at faculty level. They are Fully Compliant with Standards 1.4 to 1.6.

## 2.2 QUALITY MANAGEMENT

AAB is a long established and mature institution with quality assurance (QA) standards and practices established over the past 20 years according to the Bologna Process and regulations laid down by KAA – which, in turn, draws heavily upon participation and advice from teams of advisers and experts drawn from across the world. This to ensure a comparability of standards internationally and the promulgation of up-to-date thinking and ‘best practice’.

At institutional level, there is a comprehensive and thorough system of common requirements for the design of new programmes, modification of existing ones and for the processes of monitoring, review and formal evaluation. The Regulations on Quality Assurance, the Quality Assurance Guidelines, and AAB’s Strategic Development Plan are the main documents regulating the quality management system in AAB.

Operationally, much of this is now delegated to faculties, having in mind that each Faculty has a Quality Assurance Coordinator.

These arrangements demand a clear articulation of what programmes are setting out to achieve (aims and objectives); the attraction, selection and recruitment of suitable students that can benefit from programmes; effective outcomes; and fair assessment for the purposes of monitoring and feedback to students, progression, final award and also for when things go



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wrong. These systems also include the collation of information on the workload of students and staff; student, staff and employer feedback and the destination of graduates.

Digitalised questionnaires are used for collection of feedback from students, academic staff, employers and graduates on the quality of the whole study cycle. The students complete the questionnaires before each exam whilst the employers and graduates do so once every two years. The Quality Assurance Office explained how they used to have a problem collecting feedback from the students and how they changed the timeline. They are now expecting the response rate to be higher.

EE reviewed the templates of questionnaires used by the faculty and was satisfied that they did include the collection of feedback for the overall program as well as that of different components within it. The SER also describes how quality management arrangements utilise a variety of different methods for the collection of feedback from focus groups, working meetings and ad hoc meetings.

Programmes are reviewed on a two-year cycle and it is at this point that the QA process can be used to inform, from evidence it has gathered, the desirability or need for change.

Whilst the material supplied satisfied formal requirements, the EE found the documentation disappointing, it tending to focus more upon processes and less upon actual outcomes and performance. The EE, for example, heard much from students, graduates and employers on how the programme was successful in preparing students for 'life after college' but little to no information had been provided of those successes in the papers provided to them before the event. There was no information, for example, on the employability and destination of graduates, despite the fact that there is a questionnaire for the graduates from where such data can be collected for further analysis.

As a means to further cultivating a quality culture, the Quality Assurance Office has started to issue short news sheets containing information that outlines findings, and conclusions that can be drawn, from the collection of survey data.



The analysis of gender balance for the institution was sound and unsurprising but it was disappointing not to see a similar cohort analysis in the SER for more important statistics that could have provided a quick and simple indication of how the programme was fairing. Applications compared to enrolments serve as a useful indicator of the popularity of the programme and choice for recruiters – were, for example, the 18 enrolments drawn from 50 applications or just 18? At one point, we were told of one intake where 20 were enrolled from an application of 37 but it was unclear to which cohort those statistics applied? Similarly, how many students progressed at the end of each year into the next year, and hence attrition rates, and how many successfully graduated. These simple performance indicators or the lack of them in any evaluation can be very significant. The table provided in the SER on page 7 was unclear.

The EE pointed to the absence of any information on the Semester 6 Thesis Project and a number of other more minor errors in the initial documentation they received that should have been avoided.

Despite these comments and a view that the preparation of the documentation could have been better, the EE found the processes to have been applied appropriately at Faculty level, within the devolved arrangements, with reasonable discretion both in the design and intended operation of the programme. This includes the important need for students to understand what is required of them and for this to be regularly refreshed and updated.

**Compliance level**

The EE is satisfied that the required quality assurance processes are in place and appropriately applied to the programme. They are Substantially Compliant with Standards 2.1 to 2.9.



### **Recommendations:**

- 1. The Faculty of Art should use the data gathered from their internal quality management system for improvement and their future planning. A simple cohort analysis would be invaluable.*

### **2.3 ACADEMIC STAFF**

The full-time teaching staff team is strong and able. It comprises people that are well qualified, competent, experienced as teachers and motivated.

The SER lists 6 full-time and 5 part-time teaching staff dedicated to the programme by qualification, title, tenure and by the amount of time they are allocated to spend on teaching, assessment and on providing academic counselling to students. Similar information is provided for part-time and visiting staff.

The overall staffing position is stable and secure with 97% of its staff on full-time contracts.

Full-time teaching staff have contracts for between 1 – 3 years with the possibility of extensions within a framework of legal requirements for the minimum number of teachers required and their workload. The latter being 8-10 contact hours, depending upon their seniority and includes the supervision of internships. Upper limits are also stipulated for tutorial contact conducted via the College's electronic e-professor system. The faculty has ensured that most of these full-time staff only teach at AAB and that they cover more than 70% of the teaching.

Upper limits for student teaching groups are set at between 15-20 for practical course work and 50 for group lectures.

All staff are aware of what is expected of them and are subject to annual review via anonymous questionnaire surveys of opinions from students, peers, line managers and from self-evaluation. The results of these reviews are made available publicly.



Opportunities and support for the development of staff is described to be more related to training by the College on internal quality assurance, teaching methods and on e-learning curriculum developments.

Weaknesses and threats in a SWOT analysis refer to continuing very common problems, beyond AAB, arising from the loss of corporate knowledge from age-related retirement, a lack of free movement and limitations on collaboration outside Kosovo.

The EE found no reference that the faculty has any system for checking the originality of the students' work, which can be extremely important. As reported in the SER, the academic staff has several addresses available through which they are testing the originality but without specifically pointing out which are they and whether all academic staff are using those.

Teaching staff were not forthcoming with any examples of how the quality assurance system had been instrumental in bringing about changes and improvements.

**Compliance level**

The EE is satisfied that the arrangements in the faculty are appropriate and Fully  
Complaint with Standards 3.1 to 3.10

## 2.4 EDUCATION PROCESS CONTENT

The EE was generally satisfied with the programme objectives. They are clearly appropriate as evidenced by the high level of endorsement by students, graduates and employers.

It was refreshing to learn from student and graduates of the high value of 'transferable skills' they had gained from what is largely a broad-based and non-vocational fine art and visual arts programme. Graduates spoke well of how they had been able to apply these intrinsic skills to a variety of personal goals and applications in their 'life after college'.



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Both the SER and additional information requested, whilst compliant with KAA requirements, were considered minimal by the EE who would have preferred to have been given more examples of how the different parts of the programme had been working over the past 5 years. Clearly, from feedback from students and employers, there has been much success and it would have assisted the EE for that to have been shared with them. Evidence of how aims had been met; content, delivery, balances in the programme and assessment – both tailored to demand and especially satisfactory outcomes. This the EE considered to have been a lost opportunity.

The EE was informed of continuing difficulties incurred by a lack of appropriate preparedness for programmes of this kind in the school curriculum and how this had been identified as a major cause of students' underperformance and drop-out. A number of actions, involving close and individual tutoring by staff was claimed to have been hugely successful in reducing the drop-out rates by 30%.

The EE was also very pleased to see an increasing use of language in the SER illustrating an appreciation of a need to define 'levels of understanding'. It is easy to identify additional topics for the curriculum of a broad and practice-based programme. It is not so easy to decide what to remove or reduce to make room and, any lengthening the duration of the programme or time spent on individual subjects, is unlikely to be practical. Prioritising subjects by 'levels of understanding' can be highly effective. There are, for example, many subjects where 'mastery' or 'competence' may not be necessary to achieve the programme's objectives and a more modest 'awareness' or 'familiarity' would suffice.

The syllabuses are shared with the students in person at the beginning of every part of the programme and through the e-student software, as EE learned. Students were very complimentary about this process during the EE's meeting with them.

The topic of teaching and learning, or more controversially, 'teaching versus learning' was introduced and it was made clear by both the heads of studies and teaching teams that the balance of delivery for this programme was upon conventional teaching along with regular student support - not upon any notion of student-centred learning, that left students having to fend for themselves.



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On the question of English language proficiency, it was confirmed that all study programmes at AAB are delivered in the Albanian language but almost all students spoke English, largely as a consequence of their secondary education and there were English language modules in semesters 1 and 2 in the first year.

AAB College has an Industry Board that serves to facilitate the involvement of the industry in study programmes. Specific cooperative agreements, contracts of other links with institutions, organisations, and research or training units were not initially supplied nor reviewed by EE. However, during the meeting with the employers EE learned that they shared positive impressions about the work of the particular program.

**Compliance level:**

The EE is satisfied that the education process, content and subject balance are thorough and appropriate to this programme's aims and objectives. They are substantially compliant with Standards 4.1 to 4.12.

## 2.5 STUDENTS

The meeting with students, representing all years of the programme was delightful. They were very forthcoming in their praise for the programme and what they had got from it. They were confident, bold and highly articulate about their reasons for choosing to study at AAB, what the programme had given them both in terms of preparedness for the occupations they intended to follow and of more general transferable skills for 'life after college'.

They spoke of the thoroughness of information given to them by AAB prior to submitting their application and of the very high reputation of the programme, both amongst their own peer groups, and more generally. They all had unqualified praise for the teaching team with statements that included the staff always being "*committed and responsive*", being like "*second parents*" and "*willing to go an extra mile*" for them.



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As reported in the SER, the admission of students to the Painting and Visual Arts Program is regulated by AAB and based on open public competition.

No students reported any difficulties with the student satisfaction surveys.

Graduates were equally complimentary. They spoke of high standards and of the high reputation and calibre of the teaching staff. All expressed satisfaction with their experience at AAB and described how it had been highly appropriate for preparing them for what they had been doing since leaving college. This included running a studio; gallery ownership; organising artistic events; the teaching of young children and management of a domestic products company. All had maintained a relationship with their teachers at AAB. EE would like to recommend formalizing the cooperation and involvement of the graduates in the work of the faculty through the establishment of an alumni club.

Employers were equally very positive of their experience in offering short-term work experience to students and of the quality of graduates they had employed. That employment ranged across a wide spectrum to include The National Gallery; a global advertising agency with clients in 16 countries; TV advertising; an art gallery that embraced disabled children, and; a marketing agency with 22 staff, of which 11 including their most senior designer, were graduates from AAB.

The SER provides comprehensive information on institution-wide arrangements for student admission, participation in decision-making, rights of representation, feedback, what students can expect, what is expected of them and support for them when difficulties arise. These arrangements are very thorough and have been developed from experience, drawn widely upon best practice from elsewhere and subjected to continuous improvement – a characteristic of effective QA systems. In all instances they are delegated, mirrored and adopted at faculty level to suit local circumstances and needs within prescribed limits.

It was not possible to inspect any student work but the description by students of their experiences on the programme was impressive and reassuring.



#### **Compliance level**

The EE were impressed with the thoroughness and flexibility of arrangements for students and of the students' high level of satisfaction with them. The EE is satisfied they are Fully Compliant with Standards 5.1 to 5.6

#### **Recommendations:**

- 1. The faculty should purchase its own software, specific to fine and visual arts, for checking the originality of the students' work.*
- 2. The faculty should consider establishing an alumni club and involve its members regularly in the teaching and learning process and in extra curriculums activities that support the programme's learning objectives.*

## **2.6 RESEARCH**

Whilst AAB has to date maintained its commitment to being a 'teaching institution' it has also been taking major steps to enhance its 'research and scholarly activity' knowledge base. This has been strongly evident since the establishment of its 5-year plan in 2018 supported by State-driven resources to stimulate and support staff research, practice and other relevant scholarly activities.

The language used in the SER remains ambiguous with regard to definitions. 'Scientific terminology' continues to prevail at the expense of artistic 'practice' but how the various initiatives and support are applied is certainly not biased. The evidence presented in the SER continues to demonstrate flexibility and inclusion of other forms of appropriate professional development related to this programme. From the SER and CVs provided, the EE were able to see commendable examples of staff development across a wide range of activities from conventional refereed articles through to more practice-based residences, installations and 'one-man-shows'. These being more typical and appropriate within a fine art and visual arts context and equally beneficial to the quality and vitality of the teaching and learning process.



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The Budget plan 2022-26 does include funds for supporting research projects by academic staff and students.

The EE is pleased to see a good sustained level of staff research and development appropriate to fine art and the visual arts and both the flexible interpretation of institutional research initiatives and support from the College.

#### **Compliance level**

The EE is content with the continuing improvements in the level of research and staff development activity in the faculty and especially with the flexible interpretations being taken of AAB's policies and practices in this field of knowledge and practice. The arrangements at institutional level and at faculty level are Fully Compliant with Standards 6.1 to 6.10.

## **2.7 INFRASTRUCTURE AND LEARNING RESOURCES**

The College claims to have the most modern infrastructure and best study conditions for students and for the conduct of staff research. Certainly, the descriptions in the SER appear highly satisfactory in terms of volume and quality of general and dedicated space, equipment, administrative support (including the electronic e-platform) and learning resources.

A short video, approved by KAA, was supplied to the EE, which showed what appeared to be a modern, clean and well-arranged environment.

The SER also provided information on the suitability of that accommodation for access by persons with debility and special needs. Students, staff and heads of studies expressed their satisfaction with the facilities including equipment and the learning resources available in, and via, the two libraries.

Unfortunately, due to restrictions imposed as a consequence of the Covid pandemic and the remote nature of the event, it was not possible for the EE to physically inspect the spaces and facilities available to this programme nor assess the demands made upon them.



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The EE welcomed the reporting of AAB's continuing financial stability from which it can be concluded that the budget plan is in a healthy and positive state with the highest amount of monies to be spent over the period 2023-26 on infrastructure, similar spending on management and other provision for exhibitions, research and external collaboration discussed during the event.

The Faculty collects most of its funds from tuition fees, administrative fees and other payments made by students; payments for commercial and other services; funds of the Ministry of Budget of Kosovo for teaching and scientific-artistic research of general interest; donations, gifts and grants; the use of AAB intellectual property; contracts with national, international, public or private organizations in the field of teaching, scientific research, art; and any other source permitted by the laws in force in Kosovo.

**Compliance level**

Infrastructure and learning resources for this programme appear to be fully compliant with Standards 7.1 to 7.6.

### 3 FINAL RECOMMENDATION OF THE EXPERT TEAM

The External Experts are grateful to the faculty's management and teaching team, its students on the programme, graduates and employers for their open and highly constructive contributions to the event, and wishes them well for the future.

The three-year BA Painting and Visual Arts programme at AAB continues to maintain high standards and is clearly successful in delivering above expectations for its students and for the communities and industries for which it has been designed.

Those responsible for compiling and submitting documentation for events of this kind would be well advised to pay closer attention in future to ensuring actual outcomes and performance, and especially factors that contribute to success, difficulties and changes that have occurred are recognised, recorded and can be viewed alongside descriptions of process.



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**In conclusion, the External Experts consider the BA Painting and Visual Arts programme offered by the AAB College to be Substantially Compliant with the Standards included in the current KAA Accreditation Manual and therefore recommends the study programme continue to be accredited for a further 3 (three) years with a similar maximum number of 50 enrolled students, as currently approved.**

Professor Alan Brickwood, External Expert  
6 April 2022

Marija Vasilevska, External student Expert  
6 April 2022