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Republika Kosova - Republic of Kosovo



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

**AAB COLLEGE
FACULTY OF MASS COMMUNICATION**

MASS COMMUNICATION AND JOURNALISM (MA) PROGRAM

RE-ACCREDITATION

REPORT OF THE EXPERT TEAM

9 May 2022, Zagreb, Croatia



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Context

Date of site visit: 8 April 2022.

Expert Team (ET) members:

- *Dr. Damir Jugo*
- *Christoph Back (Student Expert)*

Coordinators from Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA):

- *Arianit Krasniqi, KAA Officer*
- *Ilirjane Ademaj Ahmeti, KAA Officer*

Sources of information for the Report:

- *Self-Evaluation Report AAB College, Faculty of Mass Communication, Mass Communication and Journalism BA Program, January 2022.*
- *KAA Accreditation Manual, 2021.*
- *The Manual for External Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions, February 2021.*
- *Syllabi of the Study Programme Courses.*
- *Staff CV's (Full Time).*
- *Regulation for the Organization of Master Studies, AAB College, July 2017.*
- *Code of Scientific Research of AAB College (no precise date).*
- *Regulation on the description and systematization of the workplace, AAB College, June 2019.*
- *Regulations for Scientific-Research Activities, AAB College, December 2021.*
- *Rregullore për Avancim të Personelit Akademik, AAB College, January 2013.*

Additional Documents:

- *AAB College Strategic Plan 2022-2026, AAB College, January 2022.*
- *Independent Auditor's Report of AAB College, BDO Kosova L.L.C., 19 April 2019.*
- *Independent Auditor's Report of AAB College, BDO Kosova L.L.C., 10 April 2020.*
- *Independent Auditor's Report of AAB College, BDO Kosova L.L.C., 7 April 2021.*
- *Cooperation Protocol between AAB College and Radio Televizionit te Kosoves (RTK), September 2021.*



- *Cooperation Protocol between AAB College and Institut Demokraci per zhvillim, September 2021.*
- *Cooperation Protocol between AAB College and ATV Prishtine, September 2021.*
- *Cooperation Protocol between AAB College and Klan Kosova, September 2021.*
- *Cooperation Protocol between AAB College and Kosovo Journalist Association, September 2021.*
- *Cooperation Protocol between AAB College and Zero Positive Publicies, October 2021.*
- *Cooperation Agreement between AAB College and Municipality of Fushe Kosove, June 2018.*
- *Cooperation Agreement between AAB College and Municipality of Gjakova, September 2018.*
- *Cooperation Agreement between AAB College and Municipality of Mitrovica, June 2018.*
- *Cooperation Agreement between AAB College and Municipality of Peja, May 2018.*
- *Cooperation Agreement between AAB College and Municipality of Gjilan, May 2018.*
- *Cooperation Agreement between AAB College and Municipality of Prizren, May 2018.*
- *Formal Performance Appraisal Example, AAB College, Faculty of Mass Communication, September 2021.*
- *Student Internship Assessment Form, AAB College, Faculty of Mass Communication, January 2022.*
- *Meeting Minutes from the Consultation Process with the Alumni, AAB College, Faculty of Mass Communication, January 2021.*
- *Meeting Minutes from the Consultation Process with the Industry Representatives, AAB College, Faculty of Mass Communication, January 2021.*
- *Sample of the Employment Contract (Professor), AAB College, 2022.*
- *Sample of a Student Assessment for the Academic Staff, Language Culture Course, AAB College, Faculty of Mass Communication (no precise date).*

Criteria used for institutional and program evaluations

- *Standards and Performance Indicators for external quality assurance; Accreditation Manual of KAA, 2021.*



1.2. Site visit schedule

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| Programme Re-accreditation Procedure at AAB College | |
| Programme: | Mass Communication and Journalism MA (Reaccreditation) Media production, Bachelor professional (Accreditation) |
| Online site visit on: | April 8, 2022 |
| Expert Team: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. Damir Jugo • Christoph Back • Dr. Majda Tafra |
| Coordinators of the KAA: | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Arianit Krasniqi, KAA Officer 2. Ilirjane Ademaj Ahmeti, KAA Officer |

| Site Visit Programme | | |
|----------------------|---|--|
| Time | Meeting | Participants |
| 09:00 – 09:45 | Meeting with the management of the faculty where the programmes are integrated | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prof. Hasan Salihu - Prof. Shemsedin Vehapi |
| 09:50 – 10:35 | Meeting with quality assurance representatives and administrative staff | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Furtuna Mehmeti - Nysret Bilalli - Albulena Ramadani |
| 10:40 – 11:40 | Meeting with the heads of the study programme: <i>Mass Communication and Journalism MA</i> (Dr. Damir Jugo and Christoph Back) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resul Sinani - Xhevahire Izmaaku - Bujar Tafa |
| 11:40 – 12:20 | Lunch break (provided at the evaluation site) | |
| 12:20 – 13:20 | Meeting with the heads of the study programme: <i>Media production, Bachelor professional</i> (Dr. Majda Tafra) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kushtrim Koliqi - Zija Rexhepi - Valon Jakupaj - Fatos Berisha |
| 13:25 – 14:05 | Meeting with teaching staff | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Luan Tashi - Albin Xharra - Valjet Rexhepi - Ardita Recic - Mimoza Shahini - Gazmend Abrashi |
| 14:15 – 14:55 | Meeting with students | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ardiana Thaci - Erza Matoshi - Albulena Mavraj - Njomza Pillana - Ardit Ramadani - Silvana Bardhi |



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|---------------|--|--|
| 15:00 – 15:40 | Meeting with graduates | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Besian Beha- Lamir Thaci- Mustaf Mehmeti- vjollca Jashanica- Abdurahman Bejtullahu- Lumira Kelmendi |
| 15:45 – 16:25 | Meeting with employers of graduates and external stakeholders | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Leart Hoxha- Xhymret Velu- Gazmend Syl- Agron Vula- Emina Hyseni Shala- Basri Shala |
| 16:25 – 16:30 | Internal meeting of KAA staff and experts | |
| 16:30 – 16:40 | Closing meeting with the management of the faculty and program | |



1.3. A brief overview of the institution under evaluation

AAB College is the largest non-public institution of higher education in the Republic of Kosovo and in the region. It was established in 2002, initially with a unique program in Journalism and Mass Communication and continued further with the accreditation of study programs in the field of forensic sciences in cooperation with the Public University of Sarajevo. AAB College continued to expand as an institution of higher education by continuously offering study programs in various fields, thus, becoming a relevant academic institution in the country and in the region. Currently, AAB consists of a total of 14 faculties with study programs at both BA and MA levels. AAB College offers teaching in its main campus in Prishtina, and in the two branches in Gjakova and Ferizaj, as accredited by decision of KAA and licensed by MEST.

The Faculty of Mass Communication (FKM) is an academic unit within AAB College that offers study programs of bachelor level (BA) and master level (MA), respectively level 6 and level 7 according to the NQF. At the BA level, FKM offers a study program: 1). Mass Communication - Journalism, with a duration of 3 years and 180 ECTS, of level 6 NQF. At the MA level, FKM offers two study programs: 1) the two-year Mass Communication and Journalism program, with 120 ECTS, level 7 according to the NQF and the two-year master program in Media Production with 120 ECTS, level 7 of NQF (for which we are not applying for reaccreditation). The BA and MA programs in Mass Communication were accredited by the Accreditation Agency in 2009 and then re-accredited in 2010, 2013, 2016 and are now in the process of re-accreditation after the last five-year accreditation (2016-2021).

As can be learned from the SER, FKM has developed the following strategic objectives:

- To provide students with contemporary teaching for advanced and specific interdisciplinary theoretical knowledge related to the field of journalism, media production and studies in media and communications;
- To provide qualified and specialized academic staff in the field of media and communications;
- To increase scientific knowledge in the field of media and communications through publications, conferences and scientific projects;
- To offer students the best conditions to follow professional practices in both AAB media and other media in Kosovo;



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- To prepare students for employment and career advancement in local, regional and international media markets;
- To enable students to apply theoretical knowledge and practical skills independently in practicing the profession;
- Create opportunities and involve students to actively attend discussions and scientific conferences and creative products;
- Involve students in discussions on public issues through the organization of discussions with media and social actors;
- To enable student's participation in international activities and projects related to communications and to enable mobility;
- To engage students in local and community projects for the application of academic knowledge and practical skills as a contribution to society.

As noted in the SER, the main institutional aim of FKM is to prepare journalists and media operators with advanced knowledge and skills as well as public communication experts with specific knowledge and skills, who by entering the labour market would contribute daily to the betterment of society.



2. PROGRAM EVALUATION

2.1. Mission, Objectives and Administration

According to the SER, the mission of the MA program in Mass Communication and Journalism is “to prepare specialized professionals for the media market, for institutions and organizations in Kosovo and beyond, with specific knowledge and skills, to succeed as professionals and critical thinkers and to become productive citizens in society through scientific research“. The intention of the program is further noted in the SER as “to help improve the practice of journalism through research, teaching and related service“.

Based on the information provided from the SER and received during the site visit, it is possible to state that the mission of the evaluated study program follows the overall mission statement of the HE institution.

When analysing the consistency of the program with the NQF and the Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA, it is possible to note that the study program was subjected to a detailed review procedure since its first accreditation. The SER notes that the institution’s Teaching Council formed a working group to review and update the study program in 2021. The result of the working group was the general conclusion that the program was in line with contemporary trends in journalism and mass communication, but nevertheless suggested several courses to be renamed. The SER also notes that several external assessments from various media managers and communication experts were received. During the site visit, the management of the HE institution as well as the heads of the study program, graduates and employers of the graduates provided enough information for the expert panel to conclude that this process was done systematically and thoroughly. After the site visit, the HE institution provided the expert panel with detailed evaluation forms as well as meeting minutes of the external review evaluation process which confirm that the review process was executed in a methodically correct and thorough manner.

Regarding the didactic and research concept, the SER contains rather general statements related to the combination of theoretical and practical knowledge, through theoretical lectures, seminars, tutorials, individual scientific work, guest lectures, debates etc. At the same time, the syllabuses provided together with the SER declare a certain level of diversity within the teaching and evaluating methods that are used throughout the study program. Further sufficient



information on how the achievement of relevant theory-practice model is successfully implemented was received from the representatives of the HE institution's management and teaching staff during the site visit.

The SER contains brief but precise information on formal policies, guidelines, and regulations regarding procedural and academic issues. The key documents provided and referred to in the SER (*Regulation for the Organization of Master Studies, Code of Scientific Research*) are available to all key stakeholders of the institution (students, academic staff and administrative staff), as well as all interested external stakeholders as stated in the SER – they are published online on the AAB College website. Meetings with the program directors, professors and students provided the expert team with the impression that a good level of understanding of the internal regulations regarding the organization of the academic process at the institution and within the study program is achieved.

Regarding reviewing policies, regulations, terms of reference and statements of responsibilities, it is possible to state that the HE institution (AAB College) publishes all relevant documents and regulations on its website. The management of the institution noted during the site visit that the HE institution deliberately does not publish certain documents like business plans, long-term academic or financial plans as well as detailed quality assessments and related documents online since Kosovo and its HE environment is still not mature enough for complete transparency of private HE institutions. The SER notes that policies, regulations, terms of reference and various statements of responsibilities are reviewed in regular intervals, not less than once in three years. The SER also briefly specified cases when these documents are changed, primarily by the decision of the HE institution's Senate. The SER also notes that the latest broader process of evaluation and review of key regulations was undertaken during 2021., a process which was described to the expert panel more in detail during the site visit.

| <i>Standard</i> | <i>Compliance</i> | |
|--|-------------------|-----------|
| | <i>Yes</i> | <i>No</i> |
| <i>Standard 1.1. The study program mission is in compliance with the overall mission statement of the institution.</i> | <i>X</i> | |



| | | |
|---|----------|--|
| <i>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.</i> | <i>X</i> | |
| <i>Standard 1.3. The study program has a well-defined overarching didactic and research concept.</i> | <i>X</i> | |
| <i>Standard 1.4. There are formal policies, guidelines and regulations dealing with recurring procedural or academic issues. These are made available publicly to all staff and students.</i> | <i>X</i> | |
| <i>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.</i> | <i>X</i> | |
| <i>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.</i> | <i>X</i> | |

Compliance level: Fully compliant.

ET recommendations:

- To make the process of harmonizing the study program with the needs of the labour market even more regulated the HE institution is advised to adopt an official procedure in a form of regulation for checking, testing and harmonizing the study program and its courses with the need of the labour market. This regulation should precise the exact procedure, intervals and stakeholders (employers, experts, institution's alumni) that will be included in the process.*



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2. *The study program should develop an (action) plan on how to improve and define the didactic and research concept more clearly to (potential) students and external stakeholders.*
3. *The administrators of the study should work on communication with students who finished their BA or BSc level studies outside the institution and develop procedures that would improve their understanding of key regulations relevant for their studying.*



2.2. Quality Management

The program is integrated into the overall Quality Assurance system of the FKM and the AAB. The functionality and the framework for the Quality Assurance system is stated in the *Regulation on Quality Assurance*, the *Quality Assurance Guidelines* and in the *Strategic Development Plan*. The Quality Assurance Office of AAB is managing the QA and QM overall. On faculty level, the Quality Assurance Coordinator is responsible for the implementation of the QM processes in close cooperation with the Quality Assurance Office. The QA of AAB and FKM provides extensive processes for the collecting and monitoring of data. Evaluations via surveys are conducted periodically for all necessary stakeholders. Students have to fill out questionnaires about the teaching process and administrative services after each semester. The academic staff has to fill out a survey and a self-evaluation once a year. The industry and employers are asked to fill out a survey every two years. And last but not least, the graduates are also asked every two years to fill out a questionnaire. Within these surveys all necessary data is collected. This includes the workload for students, the academic success and the employment of graduates while also the evaluation of services and resources provided by other parts of AAB are also included.

With the help of all these data, FKM has a good overview of the performance, issues and developments regarding to the QA. The Quality Assurance Officer uses this survey data to summarize reports which are sent to the Dean and the Quality Assurance Office. The decisions for adjustment in the program are made with the help of this reports. In this way it is assured, that the evaluation processes and planning for improvement are integrated into the normal planning process.

The Expert Panel was not able to find the survey data public available.

With the described evaluation procedures, FKM is able to ensure that the minimum quality criteria (defined in the *Quality Assurance Regulation of AAB College* and the national legislation on Quality Assurance and Accreditation) is met and that continuous improvement of the quality of the study program is achieved. The objectives for improvement are stated in the *Strategic Development Plan of AAB College*.

With the information from the documents and the explanations in the interviews, the Expert Panel confirms that the QM of FKM is able to assure that the standards are met and a continuing improvement in performance takes place.



A more detailed *Self Evaluation Report* (SER) is prepared prior to every KAA accreditation, every 3 or 5 years. Within the SER, the recommendations of prior KAA accreditations are stated and the actions of FKM to fulfil these recommendations are described. A SWOT-Analysis for all KAA Standards is included in the SER. Involved in the writing process of the report is the Quality Assurance Office, the Quality Assurance Coordinator and the heads of the study program.

The Quality Assurance arrangements of FKM are evaluated and improved on a regularly base. The Quality Assurance Office is reviewing the arrangements and processes based on the circumstances created within the FKM and based on the changing needs and requirements of the academic community.

During the interview ABB College was able to credibly assure that this reviewing process is working. Examples of revised regulations and adjustments in the surveys could be provided. Also, the quick implementation of a survey regarding to online education, which was needed because of the pandemic situation, could be explained to the Expert Panel.

| <i>Standard</i> | <i>Compliance</i> | |
|---|-------------------|-----------|
| | <i>Yes</i> | <i>No</i> |
| <i>Standard 2.1. All staff participate in self-evaluations and cooperate with reporting and improvement processes in their sphere of activity.</i> | <i>X</i> | |
| <i>Standard 2.2. Evaluation processes and planning for improvement are integrated into normal planning processes.</i> | <i>X</i> | |
| <i>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.</i> | <i>X</i> | |
| <i>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.</i> | <i>X</i> | |



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| <i>Standard 2.5. Quality assurance processes ensure both that required standards are met and that there is continuing improvement in performance.</i> | <i>X</i> | |
| <i>Standard 2.6. Survey data is being collected from students, graduates and employers; the results of these evaluations are made publicly available.</i> | | <i>X</i> |
| <i>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.</i> | <i>X</i> | |
| <i>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.</i> | <i>X</i> | |
| <i>Standard 2.9. The quality assurance arrangements for the program are themselves regularly evaluated and improved.</i> | <i>X</i> | |

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

- 1. For more transparency, the FKM should publish the aggregated and anonymized data from the surveys.*
- 2. More benchmarks or quality indicators should be introduced to make the development of the quality better measurable.*



2.3. Academic Staff

It is evident from the SER, as well as the discussions during the site visit, that the analysed HE institution is able to deliver the level of teaching and learning experience for students which is required for a master level study program. From the available documentation besides the SER, mainly the Regulation for Systematization of Jobs (June 2019), example of work contract with professors that was provided after the site visit, as well from the feedback provided by the employed staff during the site visit, it is possible to conclude that detailed job descriptions for all positions, including academic ones are provided and available to potential candidates as well as to currently employed staff. The HE institution hires its teaching staff mostly by publishing vacant teaching posts, but also through direct communication with high profile members of the academic society and among its best student graduates.

The SER also includes a tabular form data with all necessary information about the academic staff profiles and their workload. The number of teaching staff is harmonized with the Administrative instruction on Accreditation which requires an HEI to have 1 fully employed full time professor for every 60 ECTS credits within the study program. It is also clear from the provided data in the SER that the teaching load for each member of the academic staff averages 2-4 teaching hours within the program. Also, it is noted in the SER, that none of the teaching staff members has a teaching engagement in another HE institution.

Regular or fully employed teaching staff covers 100% of the teaching hours on courses included in the study program curriculum. It can be noted that the staff-student ratio within the study program is 1:8 for each academic year, which can be pointed out as an important indicator of more than sufficient level of attention that professors can address to each enrolled student. The necessary number of teaching staff is corresponding also when student groups are analysed.

Teaching staff in the HE institution is provided with a vast amount of education opportunities. The SER lists 10 trainings that were organized for the FKM staff on various academic topics such as internal quality assurance systems, research-based teaching, academic integrity and publishing strategies in WoS and Scopus. From the feedback received by the teaching staff of the HE institution, AAB College does not cover costs of the Ph.D. studies for their employees without the Ph.D. degree. The interviewed teaching staff pointed this out as something that could be improved regarding their work environment and career advancement.



The SER contains links to the AAB College website as well as other online channels that provide articles and photos of the organized trainings. In addition to their teaching engagements, members of the academic staff are expected to participate in different aspects of the academic process, such as planning, preparation and implementation of projects in their field of expertise, such as organizing debates or awareness raising among students regarding important social issues. Student consultation process is explained in detail in the SER, as well as during the site visit.

According to the SER, academic staff evaluation by the students is organized regularly, on a semester basis. At the same time, a six-performance factor analysis is conducted by the dean's office. Based on such evaluation, activities are organized to advance the teaching process, especially for the teaching staff that was badly graded by students.

The management of the HE institution explained to the expert panel during the site visit how the procedure of regular quality assessment or evaluation of the teaching staff is conducted. After the site visit, the expert panel was provided with examples of the Dean's evaluation of the teaching staff which indicates a serious level of commitment to improvement of individual employees. Also, the expert panel was provided with the Strategic Development Plan of the AAB College from which it arises that the institution has a coherent strategic approach or strategy in general for quality enhancements of the study program and the HE institution as a whole.

| <i>Standard</i> | <i>Compliance</i> | |
|---|-------------------|-----------|
| | <i>Yes</i> | <i>No</i> |
| <i>Standard 3.1. Candidates for employment are provided with full position descriptions and conditions for 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 services, research, etc. for the study program under evaluation.</i> | <i>X</i> | |



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| <i>Standard 3.2. The teaching staff must comply with legal requirements concerning the occupation of teaching positions included in the Administrative instruction on Accreditation.</i> | <i>X</i> | |
| <i>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.</i> | <i>X</i> | |
| <i>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.</i> | <i>X</i> | |
| <i>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 Ph.D. title or equivalent title in the case of artistic / applied science institutions.</i> | <i>X</i> | |
| <i>Standard 3.6. Opportunities are provided for additional professional development of teaching staff, with special assistance given to any who are facing difficulties.</i> | <i>X</i> | |
| <i>Standard 3.7. The responsibilities of the teaching staff, especially full time, include the engagement in the academic community, availability for consultations with students and community service.</i> | <i>X</i> | |
| <i>Standard 3.8. Academic staff evaluation is conducted regularly at least through self-evaluation, students, peer, and superior's evaluations, and occur on a formal basis at least once each year. The results of the evaluation are made publicly available?</i> | <i>X</i> | |
| <i>Standard 3.9. Strategies for quality enhancement include improving the teaching strategies and quality of learning materials.</i> | <i>X</i> | |



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| <i>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.</i> | <i>X</i> | |
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Compliance level: Fully compliant

ET recommendations:

- 1. Proceed with meticulous evaluation of the teaching process and its improvement through student and other evaluation processes.*
- 2. Although a 100% coverage of the teaching hours with fully employed staff throughout the study program is commendable, the expert team suggests that the HE institution includes more external teachers in the process, especially in the form of practical experts from the field of media, public relations and marketing communication.*
- 3. Develop clear procedures for tackling negative professor evaluations depending on their severity and make them publicly known to all teaching staff in advance.*
- 4. Develop procedures that would stimulate fully employed teaching staff that has no Ph.D. to obtain their Ph.D. degrees. It is understandable that it is impossible to cover these costs for all employees, but a program could be developed to co-finance at least a certain percentage of most promising employees.*



2.4. Educational Process Content

The Mass Communication and Journalism MA program covers a broad range of qualifications that enable its graduates to work as journalists in different media outlets, as well as different public and non-public organization in the fields of public relations, public communication, and political communication. Being a Master program, it offers a solid interdisciplinary approach to mass communication offering modules such as media and digital culture, social psychology, marketing communication and organizational communication. With the assumption that students enrolled in this study program already obtained specific skills and knowledge in specific areas of media industry and journalism such as TV, Radio, Print and Online journalism on the BA level or in practice, this Master program offers them a solid range of interdisciplinary knowledge that broadens their horizons in the field. However, the general remark of the expert panel could be that the program could include more applied / practical knowledge-based learning outcomes as well as similar courses.

The learning outcomes of the study program are in line with the indicators of the level 7 of the NQF and the EQF framework. However, the curriculum contains some issues regarding two specific fields; Management and Public Relations. It is visible from the study plan that the program lacks courses in the field of management that could be useful to graduates who will advance through their careers in the mass media market and take on positions such as editors, managing directors or even publishers of media outlets. Therefore, the study program administrators should consider including at least one management course with practical learning outcomes that could fill the gap the program currently has in this field. At the same time, the “Public Relations” course bares the same name as the course that is being taught on the pre-graduate level of the same HE institution. Although the learning outcomes are different and appropriate, it would be justified to consider renaming this course and set it clear that this is a different course then on the BA study program that for example focuses on advanced content such as PR strategies, crisis communication etc.

Although there is no detailed explanation in the SER on how and why the program structure is defined, both the definition of learning outcomes of the program, as well as knowledge, skills and competencies that the students are being taught within the study program corresponds to level 7 of the European Qualifications Framework in general. Modules and disciplines that found their place in the curriculum are composed in a logical flow and they meet the



competencies that a future professional in the mass media and journalism industry should possess.

The syllabuses provided together with the SER mostly offer active verbs for defining learning outcomes at the course level. Course descriptions are inclined to be written in a traditional way, however all of them clearly differ between three aspects: knowledge, skills and personal responsibilities and attitudes that the students are expected to demonstrate upon its completion. It is worth noting that practical tasks that the students are expected to undertake within courses tend to be more academic than practical. For example, in the Public Relations course they are expected to prepare 6-15 pages essay in which they will analyse a certain PR issue or activity, while instead this could be a practical issue where students could write, create or draft a Public Relations strategy or a campaign for a specific organization, product or a person.

When addressing student assessment mechanisms, it is possible to say they are presented in a logical and comprehensive way, both in the SER and in the attached syllabuses provided. The SER notes that the evaluation strategy includes different components such as standard written exams, individual written reports, case studies, oral presentations, reflective reports as well as dissertation, internship, consultancy, or simulation in the final semester. No information about the objection of students against inadequate or inconsistent assessment was provided in the SER, but at the same time a very detailed procedure is described for monitoring student success rates for each course within the study program. The SER clearly describes the procedure what happens if the achievements of students are not satisfactory or adequate.

It can be noted that one of the issues that could be improved within the study program is the internship system. The SER provides the claim that the internship is an integral part of the MA program, but instead of providing detailed data on how it is organized it explains that the most practical part of the study program is the Seminar for the Master Thesis. This is not the ideal stance while preparations for the Master Thesis should not be confused with the internship or work placement that it is referred to in certain academic institutions. Although FKM and AAB College maintain and develop relations with key media outlets in the country, the study program does not offer mandatory internship for its students that it should.

This issue was addressed with stakeholders during the site visit. Although the received feedback related to this issue noted that they consider this study program to be more research than practice oriented, the HE institution's vision as a teaching institution, as well as the very



practical field of the study program implies that more practical approach could bring better skills for its graduates. The program should seek to resolve this issue as soon as possible, to arrange to award ECTS credits for internship, as well as to organize these internships for most of enrolled students, especially the ones that have no practical experience or that are not employed while studying.

| Standard | Compliance | |
|---|------------|----|
| | Yes | No |
| <i>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.</i> | X | |
| <i>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.</i> | X | |
| <i>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.</i> | X | |



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| <i>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.</i> | <i>X</i> | |
| <i>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.</i> | <i>n/a</i> | |
| <i>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.</i> | <i>X</i> | |
| <i>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.</i> | | <i>X</i> |
| <i>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.</i> | <i>X</i> | |



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|--|----------|----------|
| <i>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.</i> | <i>X</i> | |
| <i>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.</i> | <i>X</i> | |
| <i>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 organisations is monitored through activity reports; students during practice stages have assigned tutors among the academic staff in the study program.</i> | | <i>X</i> |
| <i>Standard 4.12. In order to facilitate the practice stages, the higher education institution signs cooperation agreements, contracts or other documents with institutions/organisations/practical training units.</i> | <i>X</i> | |

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. Consider including at least one management course since today's work in mass media and public communication top tier such as editing, managing teams often requires advanced management skills.



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2. *Consider renaming Public Relations course that bears the same name as a course on the pre-graduate level. This course is clearly more advanced, so the name “Strategic Public Relations” could be appropriate.*
3. *Include more practical learning outcomes within all study program courses; instead of analytical assignments such as writing essays, the syllabuses should contain real practical assignments such as strategy or campaign creation etc.*
4. *Internships must be integrated in the program itself as a mandatory course, should have learning outcomes formulated accordingly, should award ECTS credits to students and should be organized for the students by the HE institution itself.*



2.5. Students

Applicants for the study program must provide a bachelor diploma with at least 180 ECTS. An applicant who has obtained a degree outside of Kosovo, must have an equivalent nostrification decision in Kosovo (by NARIC) and possess personal documentation such as school certificates.

If the bachelor's degree of an applicant is another than journalism and communications (and has a comparability lower than 50 percent), but is within the social sciences, differential examinations (stated in the *Regulation on the organization of Master studies*) have to be passed. The evaluation and comparison are made by the Faculty Council which examines each case separately of those applicants and decides that differential exams these students need to undergo are Journalism Genres, Investigative Journalism and Media and Society.

Within the *Statute of AAB College* it is defined, that the decision for admission and registration of new students must be taken by the Senate of AAB. The competition for the admission of new master students is announced in July at the latest every year by AAB. The criteria for admission are determined based on the *Statue of AAB College* and on the legal regulations established by MEST and KAA. The Expert Panel did not find any indications, that the admission procedure is not consistent and fairly applied to all students.

After admission, all new students are provided with an e-mail account and access to the e-service platform. The e-service platform is the central place for the students to get information. They can find regulations, the syllabi, their grading overview and more. The rights and obligations for students are also available for the students within the platform. During the interview with the students, the Expert Panel was able to obtain valuable information and evidence regarding the teaching process, the administration and the general conditions at FKM.

Within the program the study groups of a module never exceed 60 students for lectures and 30 students for exercises. If a bigger study group takes place, FKM manages to split this group in two smaller ones. This enables an effective and interactive learning process. The students explained to the Expert Panel that the communication between them and the academic staff is good. They are satisfied how the teachers handle their requests and issues. If a student needs consultation or advice he can go to the counselling hours. Every teacher is obligated to hold at least 2 counselling hours per week for the students.



The exam results are normally provided within 7 days after the exam took place. An academic record can be downloaded by each student from the e-service platform at any time. During the interview with the teaching staff, explanations about flexible treatment of students in special situations could be delivered. The procedure on how a student has to submit a request for these situations could be explained with the help of examples. Furthermore, how this flexible treatment is working could also be provided. Because of the small study groups in the program an individual solution can be found for every student in need.

The monitoring system of AAB collects the data of each exam period. The student completion rates are used to summarize a report for the Office of the Vice-Rector for Teaching and the Quality Assurance Office. If needed, issues are discussed with the Dean of FKM. The Expert Panel was not able to find out if (and if yes, which) quality indicators are used in the evaluation and analysis of the reports.

To avoid plagiarism AAB introduced rigorous policies which are stated in the *Code of Ethics of AAB College*. The teachers are obligated to enlighten the students about the topic of academic integrity. An anti plagiarism software (“Turnitin”) is available to check if work submitted by students is original.

The regulation for the transfer between higher education institutions for students can be found in the *Statute of AAB College*. The process is clearly defined and everything the students need to know is available (including deadlines). A transfer student must spend at least one academic year at AAB College prior to their graduation.

| 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 organizing students' recruitment. Admission requirements are consistently and fairly applied for all students | X | |
| Standard 5.2. All students enrolled in the study program possess a high school graduation diploma or other equivalent document of study, according to MEST requirements. | X | |



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| <i>Standard 5.3. The study groups are dimensioned so as to ensure an effective and interactive teaching and learning process.</i> | <i>X</i> | |
| <i>Standard 5.4. Feedback to students on their performance and results of assessments is given promptly and accompanied by mechanisms for assistance if needed.</i> | <i>X</i> | |
| <i>Standard 5.5. The results obtained by the students throughout the study cycles are certified by the academic record.</i> | <i>X</i> | |
| <i>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.</i> | <i>X</i> | |
| <i>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.</i> | <i>X</i> | |
| <i>Standard 5.8. Effective procedures are being used to ensure that work submitted by students is original.</i> | <i>X</i> | |
| <i>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.</i> | <i>X</i> | |
| <i>Standard 5.10. The students' transfer between higher education institutions, faculties and study programs is clearly regulated in formal internal documents.</i> | <i>X</i> | |
| <i>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.</i> | <i>X</i> | |

Compliance level: Fully compliant

ET recommendations:

- 1. FKM should introduce quality indicators for the evaluation and analysis of the student completion rates.*



2.6. Research

AAB College who Faculty of Mass Communication is a part of, profiled itself mainly as a teaching institution. However, it is noted in the SER that part of its vision is to become a scientific centre as well, which is defined as a strategic objective in the Scientific development Plan. The SER also notes that AAB College formulated a new Regulation for Scientific Research in December 2021 and that it promotes the publication of scientific research in journals indexed in WoS and Scopus. However, the SER does not contain sufficient information on the existence of a strictly defined research objectives or research plan for the AAB College, Faculty of Mass Communication or the evaluated study program itself.

When assessing individual approach to the employed teaching staff, the SER notes that scientific research activities are obligatory for all regular staff members at AAB College and that even employment contracts stipulate that each member of the academic staff is obliged to produce at least one scientific paper within a year and to engage in other scientific projects. It is however unclear what happens if an individual fails to deliver its proscribed minimum level of published scientific papers or research work. The HE institution also has a Regulation on the election, re-election and advancement of the academic staff which regulates academic staff advancement and promotions within the institution and the AAB College which it is a part of. The discussion with the academic staff during the site visit showed that they are familiarized about the criteria for evaluating and promoting staff and finds them realistic and achievable.

The SER addresses 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.*) very briefly and does not provide enough information for the expert team to conclude that the HE institution is compliant with its demands.

It is visible from the SER that the HE institution publishes its double-blind peer reviewed scientific journal *Thesis*. Also, the institution regularly organizes scientific conferences on topics closely related to the field of the evaluated study program. It also participates in organization of joint conferences with HE institutions from the region. It is also worth noting that all the activities from the field of organizing such events are documented and publicly communicated which is important for the public recognition of the institution as a scientific-oriented one. The SER includes a list of all conferences organized by the institution as well as those where the institution participated as an organizational partner.



An analysis of the publication topics published by fully employed staff in their CV that were provided together with the SER, shows their scientific work and research is in line with the field of the evaluated study program, as well as courses they teach within it. It can be said that their research is validated mainly through various scientific and applied research publications, as well as different scientific conferences that the HE institution organizes or co-organizes together with other relevant HE institutions, mainly from the broader region.

Statistical overview of the number of published papers of the employed staff shows that only three of them (Hasan Saliu, Resul Sinani and Gent Begolli) produced the required average number of one publication per year for the last three years. It is therefore necessary for the HE institution to tackle this issue and to develop ways on motivating fully employed staff to publish their scientific or applied research to fulfil these criteria.

Policies for ownership of the intellectual property are clear and simple; the fact they belong to the HE institution is included in the work contract of the fully employed staff. At the same time, it is possible to conclude that the students are included in the various research activities of the institution and the study program. The list of such activities with links to the news published on the AAB College's website are provided in the SER. At the same time, it is unclear from the SER how the teaching staff is encouraged to include their research in their teaching. Although the heads of the study program mentioned a couple of examples of how they include their research and even the research they undertake with their students in their own lectures, it seems that this issue is handled individually by responsible and scientifically active teaching staff and that it is not a part of a systematic approach.

It is also worth noting that students as well as the study program graduates emphasized and explained in detail how their professors motivate and include them in different scientific and research activities, as well as provided concrete examples of such activities.

| <i>Standard</i> | <i>Compliance</i> | |
|-----------------|-------------------|-----------|
| | <i>Yes</i> | <i>No</i> |



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|---|---|---|
| <i>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.</i> | | X |
| <i>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.</i> | X | |
| <i>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.</i> | X | |
| <i>Standard 6.4. The academic staff has a proven track record of research results on the same topics as their teaching activity.</i> | X | |
| <i>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.</i> | X | |
| <i>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.</i> | X | |



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| <i>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.</i> | | X |
| <i>Standard 6.8. Academic and research staff publish under the name of the institution in Kosovo they are affiliated to as full-time staff.</i> | X | |
| <i>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.</i> | | X |
| <i>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.</i> | X | |
| <i>Standard 6.10. Students are engaged in research projects and other activities.</i> | X | |

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

- 1. FMK should create and adopt official research priorities and research plan which would result with a clear focus of research activities in a specific field such as mass communication, journalism, or public relations.*



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2. *The HE institution should continue to organize regular scientific conferences and similar events on its own as well as together with other relevant scientific and HE institutions in the region and from abroad.*
3. *The HE institution should develop a clear action plan on how to increase the number of published papers and other publications, with the main aim of achieving the requested number of average published publications per person per year.*
4. *Provide clear policies for defining what is recognized as research, consistent with international standards and established norms in the field of the study program.*
5. *Provide clear policies that will encourage teaching staff to include their published and conducted research in their teaching process.*



2.7. Infrastructure and Resources

Because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic situation the Expert Panel was not able to travel to Pristina. The procedure was conducted via ZOOM platform. The information for this chapter was provided by AAB and KAA in the form of a video and documents.

FKM operates at the main campus of AAB in Pristina. AAB provides an impressive infrastructure with very good conditions for students and the academic staff. The long-term implementation of the study program is ensured by sufficient rooms for lectures and exercises and enough human resources. Furthermore, the e-service platform of AAB is well designed and supports the students in many ways. ATV television, the second largest tv-channel in Kosovo, is operating from the AAB main campus in Pristina. This gives the students in the field of journalism and communication a unique opportunity.

Several revenue sources of AAB are mentioned in the SER, but a financial plan at the level of the study program is not provided. However, it is stated that the budget planning of AAB College is regularly audited by 2 auditing companies (BDO and KCFR). AAB was able to provide the latest auditing report from BDO. The Expert Panel accepts this as evidence for the security of funding for the study program.

AAB College owns all premises, classrooms, laboratories, software, equipment and libraries at the main campus in Pristina. No obligations toward third parties exist. As above mentioned, the campus is providing very good conditions for learning and teaching.

The number of seats in the lecture and seminar rooms are sufficient for the study groups of the program. Adequate IT equipment for the program is provided as well. There are 2 libraries on the main campus of AAB in Pristina. The number of seats and books in the libraries are sufficient for the study program. Furthermore, several resources for e-books can be used by the students and academic staff.

Flat entrances, elevators and special toilets ensure that the infrastructure and facilities on the main campus of AAB College can be used by students with special needs without any inconveniences.



| Standard | Compliance | |
|--|------------|----|
| | Yes | No |
| <i>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.</i> | <i>X</i> | |
| <i>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.</i> | <i>X</i> | |
| <i>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:</i> <i>a) owned or rented spaces adequate for the educational process;</i> <i>b) owned or rented laboratories, with the adequate equipment for all the compulsory disciplines within the curriculum, wherever the analytical syllabus includes such activities;</i> <i>c) adequate software for the disciplines of study included in the curriculum, with utilisation licence;</i> <i>d) library equipped with reading rooms, group work rooms and its own book stock according to the disciplines included in the curricula.</i> | <i>X</i> | |
| <i>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 speciality disciplines included in the curricula are carried out in laboratories equipped with IT equipment.</i> | <i>X</i> | |
| <i>Standard 7.5. The education institution's libraries must ensure, for each of the study programs:</i> <i>a) a number of seats in the reading rooms corresponding to at least 10% of the total number of students in the study program;</i> <i>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;</i> | <i>X</i> | |



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| <i>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;</i> <i>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;</i> <i>e) a sufficient number of subscriptions to Albanian and foreign publications and periodicals, according to the stated mission.</i> | | |
| <i>Standard 7.6. The infrastructure and facilities dedicated to the implementation of the program is adapted to students with special needs</i> | <i>X</i> | |

Compliance level: Fully compliant

ET recommendations:

1. -



3. FINAL RECOMMENDATION OF THE ET

The Expert Team can commend the evaluated HE institution regarding the SER as well as the conduct during the site visit that was organized online. The SER as a document was written in a very professional manor and in very good English language with almost no grammatical, technical or formatting errors. Also, it is possible to note that the atmosphere during the online site visit was very optimistic, with a notable sense of teamwork and sense of belonging to the HE institution and its program. All that seems very promising for the current and the future students of the study program and the HE institution as a whole. Having considered the provided documentation and after the discussions with all stakeholder groups during the site visit, the Expert Team recommends the following assessment:

| Standard | Compliance Level |
|--|-------------------------|
| Mission, objectives and administration | Fully Compliant |
| Quality Management | Substantially Compliant |
| Academic Staff | Fully Compliant |
| Educational Process Content | Substantially Compliant |
| Students | Fully Compliant |
| Research | Substantially Compliant |
| Infrastructure and resources | Fully Compliant |
| Overall Compliance | Fully Compliant |

The overall compliance level is assessed by the experts at the level of Fully compliant.

Following recommendations need to be considered in relation to the program accreditation:

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1. *The Faculty for Mass Communication should adopt an official procedure (perhaps in form of a Regulation) for checking, testing and harmonizing the content of the study program with the needs of the labour market in regular intervals (maybe every two years). The procedure should include HE institution's all relevant stakeholders such as employers, experts in the field of media and public communication as well as institution's alumni. This kind of procedure would have a positive impact on the study program's content and its constant compatibility with the needs of the labour market.*
2. *The expert teams suggest to the HE institution to consider making slight changes / improvements in the study program in the next period of reaccreditation. It should include a course in the field of management as well as social networks and replacing a certain number of analytical assignments in particular courses with practical ones such as strategy or campaign developments. The most important suggestion to the study program's content concerns including internships in the program itself in form of a mandatory course that has clearly defined learning outcomes as well as an appropriate level of ECTS points.*
3. *The HE institution should also develop a clear action plan on how to increase the number of published papers and other publications, with the main aim of achieving the requested number of average published publications per person per year. One of the approaches could be to start a comprehensive process of creating individual development plans for each of the fully employed academic staff, that would include research, publication publishing and conference participation plan for each fully employed professor or other member of the teaching staff.*

In conclusion, the Expert Team considers the Master of Arts in Mass Communication and Journalism study program performed by AAB College's Faculty of Mass Communication is Fully compliant with the standards included in the KAA Accreditation Manual and, therefore, recommends accrediting the evaluated study program for a duration of five years with 60 students to be enrolled yearly to the program.



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