



Republika e Kosovës  
Republika Kosova - Republic of Kosovo



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

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***UNIVERSITY OF PRISHTINA  
FACULTY OF MATHEMATICS AND NATURAL SCIENCES  
Department of Biology***

***MASTER OF SCIENCE IN BIOLOGY***

***Study programme re-accreditation***

**REPORT OF THE EXPERT TEAM**

*The 22<sup>nd</sup> of June, 2022, Prishtina*



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Context

**Date of site visit: June 02, 2022**

#### **Expert Team (ET) members:**

- Professor *Mladen Krajacic*, PhD
- Ms. *Lali Giorgidze*, student expert

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

- *Leona Kovaçi*, Senior Officer for Evaluation and Monitoring

#### **Sources of information for the Report:**

- Self-evaluation report by the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences
- Syllabus Documents
- Teaching Staff CV Documents

#### **Evidence requested additionally by the ET:**

- A selection (3-4) of assessments of students works with attached feedback (anonymized)
- A selection (3-4) of student records (anonymized)
- Questionnaires and reports (from any feedback gathering activities) related to QA
- List of organizations where current students undertake internships/practical component
- Reports on evaluations of students' practical work/internships (if any)
- Link of the web-page where students can find information on admission to the programme
- Sample of the English Language test (if available) for identifying the levels of knowledge of English of students
- Financial plan of the programme and/or consideration of sustainability for future resources



## Criteria used for programme evaluation

- Standards and performance indicators for external evaluation according to the KAA Accreditation Manual
- Compliance with the overall mission statement of the Faculty, and the University
- Consistency with the National Qualifications Framework
- Consistency with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area

## 1.2. Site visit schedule

### The 2<sup>nd</sup> of June, 2022

Time	Meeting and Participants
09:00 – 09:50	Meeting with the management of the faculty where the programme is integrated Professor <b>Idriz Vehapi</b> (Dean of the Faculty) Professor <b>Avni Berisha</b> (Vice-dean for learning and student issues) Professor <b>Kajtaž Bllaca</b> (Vice-dean for finances) Professor <b>Sefer Avdiaj</b> (Vice-dean for quality assurance and science) Professor <b>Jeton Hyseni</b> (Secretary)
09:55 – 10:35	Meeting with quality assurance representatives and administrative staff <b>Ilir Mazreku</b> (Faculty coordinator for quality assurance)) <b>Besnik Loxha</b> (University office for quality assurance)
10:45 – 11:45	Meeting with the heads of the study programme Professor <b>Fedije Zhushi-Etemi</b> Professor <b>Bekim Gashi</b>
11:45 – 12:30	Meeting with teaching staff Professor <b>Linda Grapci-Kotorri</b> Professor <b>Kimete Lluga-Rizani</b>
12:30 – 13:30	Lunch break
13:30 – 14:15	Meeting with students <b>Mimoza Sahiti, Albina Ahmeti, Kaltrina Popova, Libade Rudi</b>
14:20 – 15:05	Meeting with graduates <b>Dea Luzha, Diellëza Panxha</b>
15:10 – 15:50	Meeting with employers of graduates and external stakeholders <b>Afrim Berisha</b> (Head of Department, Agency for environment protection) <b>Liridon Mulliqi</b> (Director of Gymnasium “Loyola”) <b>Enver Sulaj</b>
15:50 – 15:55	Internal meeting of KAA staff and experts
15:55 – 16:00	Closing meeting with the management of the faculty and program



### 1.3. A brief overview of the institution under evaluation

The university of Prishtina is the largest public higher education in Kosovo. The studies in mathematics and natural sciences started in 1960 at the Faculty of Philosophy. Since the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences was founded in 1971, the five departments of the Faculty have been responsible for research and higher education activities in mathematics, physics, chemistry, geography and biology. This is the only research and higher education institution in maths and natural sciences in the country.

Following the establishment of the Republic of Kosovo, the Faculty has changed study programmes trying to follow the European standards. Accordingly, an agreement with the Bologna Declaration was achieved in 2001. All the formal policies, guidelines and regulations are in agreement with the University of Prishtina Statute.

Study programmes offered by the Department of Biology, a constitutive unit of the Faculty, encompass:

- Bachelor study programme in
  - Biology
  - Ecology and environmental protection

- Master study programme in
  - Biology
  - Ecology and environmental protection

and

- PhD study programme in Biology of organisms and ecology

The Department of Biology has applied for re-accreditation of the ***Study Programme in Biology – Master Level***. The last accreditation of the programme was accomplished in 2019. The study programme was considered substantially compliant with the standards included in the KAA Accreditation Manual, and re-accredited for a duration of 3 years with a number of 30 students to be enrolled in the programme.

## 2. PROGRAM EVALUATION

*The institutional evaluation consists of 7 subheadings through which the administration, organisation and management of the institution, as well as teaching and research are assessed.*

### 2.1. Mission, Objectives and Administration

In concordance with the Faculty mission and objectives, the Department of Biology develops academic education and scientific research in the field of biology.



Bachelor's study programmes in both General Biology, and Ecology and Environmental Protection, equip students with a general knowledge and basic proficiency in a range of fundamental biology disciplines, or bring subjects focused toward ecological and environmental topics, respectively.

The Master Study Programme in Biology has to enlarge and improve knowledge acquired at the bachelor's study level. It should provide advanced scientific knowledge and professional skills in botany and zoology, including ecological aspects and environmental protection. The aim of the programme is to make students fully competent for professional careers in governmental and non-governmental organisations, as well as private enterprises. The graduates are expected to deal with biological processes, structures and systems, by interpreting and evaluating biological data, as well as resolving practical problems in the respected field. Moreover, the programme should enable students to develop relevant research skills and prepare, at least some of them, for further doctoral education. There is no doubt about the necessity for biology, ecology and environmental protection professionals in Kosovo society.

The aim of the programme is properly presented in the Self Evaluation Report. Intended learning outcomes are consistent with both national and European qualification frameworks. The Department of Biology proclaims permanent improvement by increasing the quality of studies. No matter the employability of bachelors, which is uncertain, an adaptation in line with the Bologna agreement (2001) was a step forward in approaching European standards and increasing cooperation with European universities.

The programme follows institutional (Faculty/University) policies and regulations. Procedural and academic issues comply with general ethical principles in research, teaching and other academic and administrative activities. They are publicly available to both staff and students.

Some recommendations, addressed in the previous accreditation processes, have been taken into account, making the progress obvious.

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



<i>Standard 1.5.</i> All staff and students comply with the internal regulations relating to ethical conduct in research, teaching, assessment in all academic and administrative activities.	X	
<i>Standard 1.6.</i> All policies, regulations, terms of reference and statements of responsibility relating to the management and delivery of the program are reviewed at least once every two years and amended as required in the light of changing circumstances	X	

**Compliance level:** Fully compliant

**ET recommendations:**

*No recommendations.*

## 2.2. Quality Management

The quality management function of the programme is supported by number of structural units of the university; these are the Senate, Rector, Central Committee of QA, Office of Academic Development, Dean of the faculty and the committee for QA of the faculty. According to the Self-Evaluation Report, it seems that management structure in charge of quality management is fully developed, encompassing all the regular elements at the university, faculty and department levels; quality management structure also includes offices and committees that are particularly focusing on development of quality assurance policies for the programme. These are Coordinator for academic development, Committee for quality assurance, Programme heads responsible for the respective study programme. Several members of the faculty have done efforts to work on fulfilment of the recommendations made by experts in previous programme review. The ET requested to be provided of evidences (e.g., reports) that could indicate involvement of all academic staff members of the programme in quality assurance of the programme. But the ET could not see clear evidences of this. It was possible to see involvement of individual academic staff members in quality assurance of the programme but it would be advisable to empower and encourage all academic staff members to be involved in QA work of the programme and give them more ownership on quality outcomes of the programme. This could be done through provision of formal opportunities for reflecting on own teaching and reporting on QA outcomes of teaching and learning by academic staff members, along with providing of opportunities for facilitated discussions and collaboration of all staff on improvement of the quality of teaching and learning.

As claimed in the SER-Documents, results of the internal quality assurance are respected and considered for further development of the study programme. Each external evaluation process is followed by an action plan, in which experts' recommendations are recognised as milestones for the next five-year development.

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Procedures and mechanisms for quality assurance evaluation are set at the central level and are supposed to be implemented by the structural units of the university. In spite of all the structure-elements being formally established, it is not always certain if they fulfil their proclaimed obligations, thus raising the doubts in relation to implementation of quality assurance evaluations by different structural units. For example, the ET was not able to find the evidence that all staff participate in self-evaluations and cooperate in the reporting and improvement process. The office for Academic Development is in charge of the process of distribution and publication of the evaluation report activities but the ET did not have access to these reports. The ET did not have access either to the questionnaire for university administrative staff and the report developed based on this survey that could be useful for collecting information relevant to improving administrative support of the programme, along with improvement of working conditions for academic staff. Further, the quality assurance processes should deal with all aspects of program planning and delivery, including services and resources provided by other parts of the institution. Thus, the quality assurance is expected to encompass not only the teaching process, but also research activities, student administration support, internationalisation, infrastructure and other support services. The ET would like to highlight importance of introducing evaluation of research performance, and encourage further efforts to enable another step towards a research-intense biology department. A demand for higher research performance, along with supporting it would be the most powerful trigger of an overall academic development and progress.

The existing QA framework makes greater focus on inputs and processes but the focus on evaluation of outputs is somewhat missing. There are no defined target benchmarks for quality assurance indicators that may be making it difficult to evaluate the quality assurance outputs. Quality assurance evaluations do not take into account evaluation of teaching and learning outputs with particular attention to learning outcomes achieved by students. It would be beneficial for the programme to introduce evaluation of the learning experiences designed for achieving learning outcomes from the perspectives of all relevant stakeholders – students, academic staff, graduates etc.

The current QA framework does not consider evaluation of quality of placements, by this the programme misses the opportunity of continuously improving practical component of the programme. So, it would be beneficial for the programme to align it in a way that it allows to ensure that the required standards in relation to students' placements are evaluated and continuously improved. The ET commends that the faculty plans to develop plan for fulfilling recommendations produced as a result of the current review; this will support the faculty to continuously improve performance, on the other hand it also indicates that the faculty is committed to improvement of students' experiences and of quality outcomes of the programme.

The main QA tool for the programme is collecting feedback from students. The feedback has not been yet collected from the alumni of the programme as the programme does not yet have graduates. The ET has also observed that involvement of employers' representatives in the quality assurance of the programme is not well embedded in the programme. It has become





evident that there is no communication between the academic staff of the programme and employers' representative. The faculty could significantly enhance student learning by institutionalising engagement with employers and alumni of the programme. It is true that the faculty has made memoranda of understanding with several organizations, where students can undergo placements but the ET noted that the current state of partnership with employers' representatives is not yet comprehensive one and the opportunities of strategic partnership of the programme with employers is not yet fully exploited. The reports on quality assurance are not yet made publicly available.

The faculty mainly considers the feedback from students and from external reviews for developing quality of teaching and learning experiences for students in the programme. These mainly include feedback from students collected from surveys.

The report on the overall quality of the programme has not been developed by the faculty so far. Implementing periodic programme reviews as a developmental process could be beneficial for the programme. This kind of periodic reviews may be aiming for the promotion of enhancement of quality of the programme; they can also assist the staff in evaluating the effectiveness and appropriateness of the programme over the recent past; periodic reviews can be used as useful mechanisms for reflection on how the programme can be improved for future and for planning and implementing relevant changes.

There are quality assurance arrangements developed for the programme but their updated in recent years based on their review could not be observed by the ET. It would greatly benefit the programme to reflect and discuss periodically on overarching aim and fitness to purpose of quality assurance arrangements for the programme. It would be particularly useful to implement review of quality assurance procedures by involving external and internal stakeholders including students. Additionally, even though students are represented in committees where they can participate in the development of quality assurance process design, it would be useful to support students' active engagement in quality assurance by providing training opportunities for them, so that they can develop relevant competences and engage in QA work meaningfully.

<i>Standard</i>	<b>Compliance</b>	
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<i>Standard 2.1.</i> All staff participate in self-evaluations and cooperate with reporting and improvement processes in their sphere of activity.		X
<i>Standard 2.2.</i> Evaluation processes and planning for improvement are integrated into normal planning processes.	X	
<i>Standard 2.3.</i> Quality assurance processes deal with all aspects of program planning and delivery, including services and resources provided by other parts of the institution.		X
<i>Standard 2.4.</i> Quality evaluations provide an overview of quality issues for the overall program as well as of different components within it; the evaluations		X



consider inputs, processes and outputs, with particular attention given to learning outcomes for students		
<i>Standard 2.5. Quality assurance processes ensure both that required standards are met and that there is continuing improvement in performance.</i>		X
<i>Standard 2.6. Survey data is being collected from students, graduates and employers; the results of these evaluations are made publicly available.</i>		X
<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>	X	
<i>Standard 2.8. The institution ensures that reports on the overall quality of the program are prepared periodically (e.g., every five years) for consideration within the institution indicating its strengths and weaknesses.</i>		X
<i>Standard 2.9. The quality assurance arrangements for the program are themselves regularly evaluated and improved.</i>		X

**Compliance level:** Partially compliant

**ET recommendations:**

- 1. Consider providing formal opportunities for all members of the programme academic staff for reflection, facilitated discussions and collaboration on improvements of quality of teaching and learning in the study programme;*
- 2. Introduce mechanisms for assuring quality of practical work/placements and of student support services;*
- 3. Ensure that quality assurance process encompasses not only teaching and learning, but also assuring quality of research activities;*
- 4. Consider introducing quality assurance mechanism for evaluating teaching and learning outputs with particular attention to learning outcomes achieved by students;*
- 5. Institutionalise strategic engagement with employers' representatives and alumni of the programme for enhancing the quality of the programme and make respective quality assurance reports publicly available;*
- 6. Introduce the practice of reviewing the quality of the programme not only through surveys but through periodic overall quality reviews of the programme, by involving internal and external stakeholders;*
- 7. Provide training opportunities for students, so that they can develop relevant competencies for meaningful involvement in periodic update of QA arrangements*



### 2.3. Academic Staff

The Department of Biology provides sufficient full-time teaching staff, ranking from assistant professor to full professor position, to supply the study programme. Their teaching workload (6 hours per week) makes most of them feel comfortable, leaving enough time for research, and administrative activities. However, during the on-line meeting with the Faculty representatives, we learned that some staff members are overloaded. It would be more acceptable, if that concerned older professors (primarily full professors), but it was uncertain if there were also some assistant professors and assistants who had too much working hours per week.

The academic staff comply with the legal requirements, regulated by the university statute and related acts. However, the formal criteria for selection, hiring and advancement of the academic staff have obviously been far too low (if there have been any). The number of full professors (9) and associate professors (6) significantly dominates the number of assistant professors (2) and assistants (8). This *up-side-down* pyramid represents an unnatural and improper personal structure of the Department of Biology. There is a big difference among full professors, concerning the quality of their CV documents. A scientific productivity of the best ones would be competitive even in a much stronger research environment. But the worst ones have published just a few papers in local irrelevant journals, or have not published anything but conference proceedings and abstracts.

Older professors, who have not faced promotion criteria in their career, could not be expected to change anything. On the other hand, the Department (as well as the Faculty, and the University) is expected to change a lot. The promotion criteria have to be changed dramatically.

As considered above (2.2), quality assurance should also cover selection, hiring and advancement procedures in relation to research quality, and not only the teaching process. In the past, the system has obviously failed to ensure that.

There are only 8 assistants at the Department. Thus, the question has to be raised, on:

- assistants' teaching workload, and their ability to properly participate in research or/and
- quality of the practical work, potentially organised in too large groups

In spite of some negative observations, it has to be emphasised that things move forward. A growing share of an advanced teaching staff is undoubtful. The younger employees, proficient in English, skilled in contemporary research, and experienced in international collaborations, are continuously getting more and more represented. As we have learned from the SER-document, two assistants are going to be promoted to assistant professor positions. These promotions would demonstrate if the Department of Biology has shaped its own promotion criteria, that are selective enough to ensure further progress towards European research and higher education standards.



<i>Standard</i>	<b>Compliance</b>	
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<i>Standard 3.1.</i> Candidates for employment are provided with full position descriptions and conditions of employment. To be presented in tabular form data about full time (FT) and part time (PT) academic/ artistic staff, such as: name, qualification, academic title, duration of official (valid) contract, workload for teaching, exams, consulting, administrative activities, research, etc. for the study program under evaluation.	X	
<i>Standard 3.2.</i> The teaching staff must comply with the legal requirements concerning the occupation of teaching positions included in the Administrative instruction on Accreditation.		X
<i>Standard 3.3.</i> Academic staff do not cover, within an academic year, more than two teaching positions (one full-time, one part-time), regardless of the educational institution where they carry out their activity.	X	
<i>Standard 3.4.</i> At least 50% of the academic staff in the study program are full time employees, and account for at least 50% of the classes of the study program.	X	
<i>Standard 3.5.</i> For each student group (defined by the statute of the institution) and for every 60 ECTS credits in the study program, the institution has employed at least one full time staff with PhD title or equivalent title in the case of artistic/applied science institutions.	X	
<i>Standard 3.6.</i> Opportunities are provided for additional professional development of teaching staff, with special assistance given to any who are facing difficulties.	X	
<i>Standard 3.7.</i> The responsibilities of all teaching staff, especially full-time, include the engagement in the academic community, availability for consultations with students and community service.	X	
<i>Standard 3.8.</i> Academic staff evaluation is conducted regularly at least through self-evaluation, students, peer and superiors' evaluations, and occur on a formal basis at least once each year. The results of the evaluation are made publicly available.	X	
<i>Standard 3.9.</i> Strategies for quality enhancement include improving the teaching strategies and quality of learning materials.		X
<i>Standard 3.10.</i> Teachers retired at age limit or for other reasons lose the status of full-time teachers and are considered part-time teachers.		X

**Compliance level:** Substantially compliant



#### **ET recommendations:**

1. *Quality assurance should encompass scientific productivity, and not only teaching*
2. *Expectations from younger and mid-edge teaching staff should be more demanding*
3. *Older teaching staff should be forced, at least, to develop a teaching content of their courses, and align it with contemporary knowledge in the field.*

#### **2.4. Educational Process Content**

“Classical” biology topics and related courses dominate across this study programme in Biology. The first semester brings general courses in cell biology, genetics, microbiology and general ecology. Following that introductory semester, in the next two semesters students are directed towards one of the two specialisations – botany or zoology – by offering them proper quantity, as well as proper ratio of compulsory and elective courses, in respective specialisation.

Although restricted to “traditional” biology disciplines, the study programme exploits resources of the Department of Biology in the best way. Taking into account that there is another study programme in Ecology and environmental protection, the teaching repertoire is not so narrow, and what is certainly the most important, it is properly shaped to match research proficiency of the staff.

Syllabuses, accompanied to teaching courses need to be reconsidered from time to time. Some of them should necessarily be revised right now to align them with those of research-intensive universities. Syllabuses of the courses, delivered by more successful researchers, are regularly better and their content is in alignment with the recent biological knowledge. In a number of syllabuses, descriptions of practical laboratory work do not reflect enough practice. Some descriptions do not specify what biochemical compound students are going to deal with, and some descriptions do not specify what procedure is going to be demonstrated.

The ET noted that some of the study literature in courses is in English which is to be commended as it allows the students in the programme to access cutting-edge research outputs thus enhancing their learning. However, it is also necessary to have effective measures in place to make sure that students in the programme have adequate English language skills. In the entrance exam test that was provided by the faculty, several multiple-choice test questions are in English but the ET noted that this may not be sufficient to assess fluency of English and reading comprehension of students required for studies and for reading the literature designated in courses of the programme.

In general, the study programme develops methodological and generic skills and competencies, contributing to students’ employability, but also to their personality.

There is no complaint on student-teacher relationship, student assessment mechanisms, or other mechanisms used for verifying student achievement. However, the ET has noted that assignments given in the syllabi do not explain for students, achievement of which learning outcomes are assessed by specific assignments. Even though there is no specific requirement



from the side of KAA in relation to this, building the feedback for students on the links between assessment methods and learning outcomes would make it clearer for students to understand the objective of specific assignments; this can also guide them on what to focus on when demonstrating their knowledge, thus enhancing their learning. Properly designed ECTS system, student workload and adequate number of examinations contribute to the academic feasibility of the programme.

<i>Standard</i>	<i>Compliance</i>	
	<i>Yes</i>	<i>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.	X	
Standard 4.2. The study program complies with the National Qualifications Framework and the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. The individual components of the program are combined in a way to best achieve the specified qualification objectives and provide for adequate forms of teaching and learning.	X	
Standard 4.3. The disciplines within the curriculum are provided in a logical flow and meet the definition and precise determination of the general and specific competencies, as well as the compatibility with the study programs and curricula delivered in the EHEA. To be listed at least 7 learning outcomes for the study program under evaluation.	X	
Standard 4.4. The disciplines within the curriculum have analytical syllabuses which comprise at least the following: the discipline's objectives, the basic thematic content, learning outcomes, the distribution of classes, seminars and applicative activities, students' assessment system, the minimal bibliography, etc. The full course description/ syllabuses of each subject/ module should be attached only in electronic form to the self-assessment report for the study program under evaluation.		X





Standard 4.5. If the language of instruction is other than Albanian, actions are taken to ensure that language skills of both students and academic staff are adequate for instruction in that language when students begin their studies. This may be done through language training prior to the commencement of the program.		X
Standard 4.6. The student-teacher relationship is a partnership in which each assumes the responsibility of reaching the learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are explained and discussed with students from the perspective of their relevance to the students' development.	X	
Standard 4.7. Teaching strategies are fit for the different types of learning outcomes programs are intended to develop. Strategies of teaching and assessment set out in program and course specifications are followed with flexibility to meet the needs of different groups of students.	X	
Standard 4.8. Student assessment mechanisms are conducted fairly and objectively, are appropriate for the different forms of learning sought and are clearly communicated to students at the beginning of courses.		X
Standard 4.9. Appropriate, valid and reliable mechanisms are used for verifying standards of student achievement. The standard of work required for different grades is consistent over time, comparable in courses offered within a program, and in comparison with other study programs at highly regarded institutions.	X	
Standard 4.10. Policies and procedures include actions to be taken in to dealing with situations where standards of student achievement are inadequate or inconsistently assessed.	X	
Standard 4.11. If the study program includes practice stages, the intended student learning outcomes are clearly specified and effective processes are followed to ensure that those learning outcomes and the strategies to develop that learning are understood by students. The practice stages are allocated ECTS 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.	X	
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.	X	





**Compliance level:** Substantially compliant

**ET recommendations:**

- 1. Further efforts would be recommended by preparing syllabuses in terms of making them more consistent; it is also needed syllabi to reflect enough practice, specify biochemical compounds that students will be dealing with;*
- 2. Ensure having effective measures in place to make sure that students in the programme have adequate English language skills before starting the programme;*
- 3. Ensure that syllabi explain for students, achievement of which learning outcomes are assessed by specific assignments; this can make it clearer for students to understand the objective of specific assignment; this can also guide them on what to focus on when demonstrating their knowledge, thus enhancing their learning.*

## **2.5. Students**

The admission procedure to the programme in Biology is regulated by the Statute of University of Prishtina and by faculty regulation of MA studies. Besides general requirements the programme sets out specific entry requirements too. Applicants who wish to apply to the programme should have a Bachelor's Degree (180 ECTS) in biology or similar programs. The ET noted that there are no requirements in relation to fluency in English. This may be raising concerns in relation to fairness of the admission process, since some study literature on the course is in English and students whose knowledge of English is not sufficient may be struggling with the progress in studies. The faculty administers the test of English to determine applicants' fluency in English but the ET found that the placement test sample that was provided by the faculty could not be used for the purpose it has as it failed to check skills of applicants in English, including reading comprehension skills. Another area of development of admission procedure is recognition of prior learning. If applicants of the programme have previously passed courses that are relevant to the programme they are applying to, should have possibility of recognizing those courses without need of passing them again, and information on this should be included in the admission procedure so that applicants of the programme are aware of prior learning recognition opportunity. This would approximate the admission procedure with the requirements of the Lisbon Convention and enhancing fairness of the procedure as such. To ensure clarity and transparency of admission procedure, it would also be advisable to include information on appeals policy and the process on the faculty website together with the general information on admissions.

The current student staff ratio on the programme allows effective dimension of groups and student staff interaction for supporting teaching and learning. There is, however, area of development in relation to providing feedback to students on their performance. The ET requested the faculty to see examples of completed assignments of students in an anonymized form accompanied with feedback. The provided samples of completed assignments only



involved identification of correct and wrong answers and developmental feedback encouraging and motivating students, along with providing reference to further reading was missing. Even though there are no patterns of students having difficulties in terms of academic achievements in the programme, it would be useful to have academic support mechanisms available for students who may be experiencing challenges in studies. Besides academic support the need of counselling and guidance service for students should not be underestimated. The aim of counselling services has to be supporting students in overcoming academic difficulties, as well as psychological/mental well-being problems in an appropriate manner.

The faculty administration ensures maintenance of records on courses passed by students and they are available in both – Albanian and English languages to students. Flexible treatment of students in special situations is also ensured in relation to completing exams. This is expressed in dates of the exams being negotiated with students.

The ET observed that there is area of development in relation to ensuring that the work submitted by students is original. One of the learning outcomes of the programme is that students apply basic ethical principles in biological research. But throughout studies insufficient effort is done to ensure that the work of students is original.

There are regulations outlining rights and obligations of students; students are familiarised with these during orientation week. Regulations regarding transfer are set out in internal regulations. The programme staff ensures provision of academic consultation for students when necessary.

<i>Standard</i>	<i>Compliance</i>	
	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
5.1 There is a clear and formally adopted admission procedure at institutional level that the study program respects when organising students' recruitment. Admission requirements are consistently and fairly applied for all students.		X
Standard 5.2. All students enrolled in the study program possess a high school graduation diploma or other equivalent document of study, according to MEST requirements	X	
Standard 5.3. The study groups are dimensioned so as to ensure an effective and interactive teaching and learning process	X	
Standard 5.4. Feedback to students on their performance and results of assessments is given promptly and accompanied by mechanisms for assistance if needed.		X



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

**Compliance level:** Substantially compliant

**ET recommendations:**

1. *Ensure provision of publicly available information on specific admission requirements (e.g., placement test requirements, or required levels of English fluency) for the Program;*
2. *Ensure inclusion of information on the opportunity of recognition of prior learning in admissions procedure, along with information on appeals procedure;*
3. *Where necessary ensure provision of feedback to students that is encouraging, motivating and/or indicating how the work of students could be improved;*



4. *Consider introducing support mechanisms particularly relevant to students who may be experience problems and challenges in terms of academic achievement within the programme;*
5. *Introduce mechanisms to ensure that the work submitted by students is original.*

## 2.6. Research

From the perspective of the European Research Area, the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, including the Department of Biology, would not be considered a research-intensive institution. Consequences of far too weak promotion criteria in the past can still be observed. In fact, the formal criteria are miserable even nowadays and could be considered a joke. Unfortunately, an inappropriate academic environment does not contribute to shaping proper research expectations from academic staff members. As long as the status quo has been maintained from above (university and ministry level), all the statements concerning European orientation could not be reliable at all. The research objectives proclaimed by the Faculty and the University, as well as all the policies established to support research activities, have failed due to inconsistent promotion criteria. Insufficient financial support is another threat that does not play in favour of research prosperity.

At the same time, it has to be emphasised that the Faculty, and the Department of Biology are certainly among the most internationally recognised institutions in the Country.

In spite of unfavourable conditions, some staff-members have made a significant step forward. They have succeeded in participating in some international collaborations, using project-funds to equip their laboratories and improve the learning environment for their students. They have published scientific papers in more prominent journals, and above all, they have included younger colleagues in their research projects. By mentoring them, they have supported, in due time, a development of their research skills. A number of successful collaborative research arrangements with colleagues from the international community have been developed.

We can witness very impressive scientific productivity of a number of professors. What is much more important, a number of papers have been published in more prominent journals, compared to those that had been prevalent earlier. The number of those journals is expected to be increased further, in relation to local, irrelevant journals (even those that are issued abroad). As we have learned from a majority of CV-documents, the academic staff started to differentiate articles, published in scientific journals, from easy-publishable conference proceedings, and especially abstracts. Some of them bring information on an impact factor of the respective journal. No doubt, the proper categorisation of scientific achievement is going to improve the research quality. The next step would be to recognise the real personal contribution of every author mentioned on the co-authors list. Of course, it could not be the same for every author mentioned on a longer (more than two or three) co-authors list.



Some important positive trends have been triggered, and a progress at the Department of Biology is appreciable. The positive movements are expected to be irreversible, in fact, the process is expected to be accelerated and intensified. Sufficient support from the University, as well as from overall Kosovo society, would significantly help further progress in the forthcoming years. However, the progress must not result from an individual enthusiasm of some staff members. It has to be institutionalised, at least by related regulations, established at the department level.

<i>Standard</i>	<b>Compliance</b>	
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<i>Standard 6.1.</i> The study program has defined scientific/applied research objectives (on its own or as part of a research centre or interdisciplinary program), which are also reflected in the research development plan of the institution; sufficient financial, logistic and human resources are allocated for achieving the proposed research objectives.	X	
<i>Standard 6.2.</i> Expectations for teaching staff involvement in research and scholarly activities are clearly specified, and performance in relation to these expectations is considered in staff evaluation and promotion criteria.		X
<i>Standard 6.3.</i> Clear policies are established for defining what is recognized as research, consistent with international standards and established norms in the field of study of the program.	X	
<i>Standard 6.4.</i> The academic staff has a proven track record of research results on the same topics as their teaching activity.		X
<i>Standard 6.5.</i> The academic and research staff publish their work in speciality magazines or publishing houses, scientific/applied/artistic products are presented at conferences, sessions, symposiums, seminars etc. and contracts, expertise, consultancy, conventions, etc. are provided to partners inside the country and/or abroad.	X	
<i>Standard 6.6.</i> Research is validated through: scientific and applied research publications, artistic products, technological transfer through consultancy centres, scientific parks and other structures for validation.	X	
<i>Standard 6.7.</i> Each academic staff member and researcher has produced at least an average of one scientific/applied research publication or artistic outcome/product per year for the past three years.		X
<i>Standard 6.8.</i> Academic and research staff publish under the name of the institution in Kosovo they are affiliated to as full-time staff.	X	
<i>Standard 6.9.</i> Academic staff are encouraged to include in their teaching information about their research and scholarly activities that are relevant to courses they teach, together with other significant research developments in the field.	X	



Standard 6.10. Policies are established for ownership of intellectual property and clear procedures set out for commercialization of ideas developed by staff and students.	X	
Standard 6.11. Students are engaged in research projects and other activities.	X	

**Compliance level:** Substantially compliant

**ET recommendations:**

1. *The progress, recognisable during several past years, is expected to be continued.*
2. *The majority of academic staff has significant scientific productivity, expressed in a number of publications. Next, the department of Biology has to aspire to further quality improvement and higher scientific significance of published papers.*
3. *Furthermore, the next step would be a recognition of the personal contribution of each one among a co-authors list in a publication. A first-author-status (for Assistant Professor position) and a main/corresponding-author-status (for Full Professor position) has to be crucial, even postulated in a promotion procedure.*
4. *Official promotion criteria, established by the Ministry, have to be significantly improved.*
5. *No matter what the official criteria are, the Faculty and the Department have to specify significantly higher expectations from the academic staff by announcing their own regulations. This is what characterises top-quality institutions.*

## 2.7. Infrastructure and Resources

Implementation of the study programme is substantially ensured concerning overall infrastructure and resources. Number of teaching and seminar rooms, as well as laboratories, is sufficient for students involved in the programme. Laboratory equipment supply has recently been increased, and chemical reagents seemed to be more available. Some parts of the Department do not look very fancy, but this is certainly not the crucial bottleneck in the study programme development.

There are some laboratories that look restricted in space, but fully equipped for both research and superb laboratory work with students. As stated above (*Academic Staff- and Research-chapter*), those positive examples resulted from individual achievements and enthusiasm of some outstanding staff-members, and unfortunately not from the overall system.

Technician staff are missing. At least some of them would be necessary at the Department, to ensure a wishful research-intensive environment.

A modest faculty library should have recent international titles (written in English), and those titles have to be included in the learning process, at least as additional courses-literature.





The University library, situated next to the Faculty in the scope of the campus, is probably not equipped with items necessary to support the study programme in biology.

The Department of Biology and the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences have to be recognised, and properly financed as important STEM components. A number of students cannot be an exclusive criterion for financing. Much more money should be allocated to basic research and the accompanying study programmes to support specific equipment and consumables expenses. The Faculty government is in charge to address much stronger demands to the University, to ensure fair allocation of income.

<i>Standard</i>	<b>Compliance</b>	
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<i>Standard 7.1.</i> The adequate long-term implementation of the study program is ensured in quantitative terms as regards premises, human resources and equipment. At the same time, it is guaranteed that qualitative aspects are also taken into account.	X	
<i>Standard 7.2.</i> There is a financial plan at the level of the study program that would demonstrate the sustainability of the study program for the next minimum three years.	X	
<i>Standard 7.3.</i> The higher education institution must demonstrate with adequate documents (property deeds, lease contracts, inventories, invoices etc.) that, for the study program submitted for evaluation it possesses the following, for the next at least three years: a) owned or rented spaces adequate for the educational process; b) owned or rented laboratories, with the adequate equipment for all the compulsory disciplines within the curriculum, wherever the analytical syllabus includes such activities; c) adequate software for the disciplines of study included in the curriculum, with utilisation licence; d) library equipped with reading rooms, group work rooms and its own book stock according to the disciplines included in the curricula.	X	
<i>Standard 7.4.</i> 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.	X	
<i>Standard 7.5.</i> The education institution's libraries must ensure, for each of the study programs: a) a number of seats in the reading rooms corresponding to at least 10% of the total number of students in the study program;		X





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

**Compliance level:** Substantially compliant

**ET recommendations:**

- 1. The Faculty has to be recognised as a component, necessary for development of STEM education, which is favourable according to EHEA (European Higher Education Area) standards. The University has to allocate much more money to support specific equipment and consumables expenses of natural sciences and the related study programmes.*
- 2. The Faculty government is expected to make additional efforts to ensure a proper allocation of income.*
- 3. Admission to international projects have to be encouraged and strongly supported.*



### 3. FINAL RECOMMENDATION OF THE ET

The Master Study Programme in Biology is compliant with the overall mission statement of the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, as well as the University of Prishtina. The programme is consistent with the National Qualifications Framework, and substantially consistent with European Higher Education Area standards. The Department has implemented a number of recommendations from the accreditation procedures that have been completed in the past decade.

In spite of unfavourable financial support, improvements have been made concerning research and educational content. There is a growing share of advanced research/teaching staff who have recently succeeded in achieving significant scientific productivity. In recent years, a number of research papers have been published in more prominent journals, compared to those that had been prevalent earlier. The syllabus documents are more precisely prepared and the educational content is more consistent with standards in contemporary biology. There was no complaint from students' representatives at the site visit. The obvious and continuous overall progress is highly appreciated by the expert team.

Some positive movements have been triggered. Further efforts could additionally increase the quality of Kosovo biology and shape the ranking of the Department, making it attractive for Albanian speaking students from the neighbourhood countries. An idea/intention of applying for a study programme in molecular biology and biochemistry, in collaboration with the Department of Chemistry and the Faculty of Medicine, sounds promising and could probably establish a positive environment for future progress.

Standard	Compliance level
1. Mission, objectives and administration	Fully compliant
2. Quality management	Partially compliant
3. Academic staff	Substantially compliant
4. Educational process content	Substantially compliant
5. Students	Substantially compliant
6. Research	Substantially compliant
7. Infrastructure and resources	Substantially compliant
<b>Overall compliance</b>	<b>Substantially compliant</b>

**Compliance level:** Substantially compliant

**Student quota recommended:** 30

**Three Years**



Republika e Kosovës  
Republika Kosova - Republic of Kosovo



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

In conclusion, the Expert Team considers that the **Study Program in Biology – Master Level**, offered by the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences – the Department of Biology is **substantially compliant** with the standards included in the *KAA Accreditation manual* and, therefore, recommends **to accredit** the study program for a duration of **3 years** with a number of **30 students** to be enrolled in the program.

### Expert Team

#### Member

(Signature)

**Mladen Krajacic**

(Print Name)

**22<sup>nd</sup> June 2022**

(Date)

#### Member

(Signature)

**Lali Georgidze**

(Print Name)

**22<sup>nd</sup> June 2022**

(Date)