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***UNIVERSITY OF PRISHTINA “HASAN PRISHTINA”
FACULTY OF MATEMATICAL NATURAL SCIENCE
Department of Geography
Geography MSc***

RE/ACCREDITATION

REPORT OF THE EXPERT TEAM

July 2022., online



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1. INTRODUCTION



1.1. Context

Date of site visit: Visit at the department was carried out as an all-day online interview on May 18 2022. Previously, all relevant material had been made available, including SER, CVs etc.

Expert Team (ET) members:

- *Associate Professor Thomas Theis Nielsen, Ph.D. Roskilde University, Institute of People and Technology.*
- *Juraj Bogat, student expert*

Coordinators from Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA):

- *Ilirjana Ademaj-Ahmeti, Senior Officer for Evaluation and Monitoring*
- *Arianit Krasniqi, KAA Officer*

1.2. Site visit schedule

Time	Meeting	Participants
09:00 – 09:50	Meeting with the management of the faculty where the programme is integrated	Idriz Vehapi (Dean) Vice deans Sefer Avdiaj Kajtaz Bllaca Avni Berisha
09.55 – 10.35	Meeting with quality assurance representatives and administrative staff	Besnik Loxha (Head of Office for Academic Development) Ilir Mazreku (coordinator of Academic development FMNS)



		Artan Alidema (IT)
10:45 – 11:45	Meeting with the heads of the study programme	Mimoza Dushi Fitim Humolli
11:45 – 12:25	Lunch break (provided at the evaluation site)	
12:25 – 13:10	Meeting with teaching staff	Ibrahim Ramadani Florim Isufi Ferim Gashi, Ferat Krasniqi Shpejtim Bulliqi Arsim Ejupi Valbon Bytyqi
13:15 – 13:55	Meeting with students	Qëndresa Zeneli Fjolla Neziri Rina Rama Florian Bivolaku Luftrim Dragobuzhda
14:05 – 14:45	Meeting with graduates	Leutrim Krasniqi Fatbardha Ukshini Genc Dervishi Amir Sogojeva Naim Kelmendi
14:50 – 15:30	Meeting with employers of graduates and external stakeholders	Marigona Lahu Burim Limolli



		Perparim Gashi Aferdita Thaqi
15:30 – 15:40	Internal meeting of KAA staff and experts	
15:40 – 15:50	Closing meeting with the management of the faculty and program	

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

The master programme in Geography is offered at the faculty of Mathematical Natural Sciences at the University of Prishtina. The geography programme is one out of 5 programmes at the faculty, the others being: Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and Biology.

The mission of the master programme in geography is listed in the SER as:

“The mission of this program is to prepare and develop professionals in the field of geography to ensure high quality professional services and science. It is in line with the mission and vision of the University, which is committed to creating, promoting and transforming knowledge. It will also serve society through study programs and academic research work in order to align with the needs of the community, stakeholders and European standards.”

The objectives and the specific objectives of the education are presented in the SER as:

- advanced knowledge on physical, social, economic geography, spatial and regional planning, environment, etc.
- the ability to use today's scientific and professional literature in the field of geography
- ability to work individually and as part of a (international) group, in solving geographical problems
- ability to present in writing and orally specific geographical processes and phenomena
 - ability for lifelong learning from geographical issues

While the specific objectives that are intended to be achieved with the completion of this program are:

- the ability to use the acquired knowledge to solve practical problems in the field of physical-geographical



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- ability to apply research techniques such as: GIS, Geostatistics, Informatics, Cartography, Remote sensing,
- ability to apply knowledge in the field of socio-economics, planning and regulation of space, environment, etc.

The programme is clearly structured and is presented in detail in the SER p 29. Here, it is presented that the first three semesters are made up of a variety of relevant courses where each semester has several optional courses. On semesters 1 and 3 the students write seminar papers and finally, the 4th semester is spent on the master thesis of 30 ECTS. A full Ma in geography consists of a total of 120 ECTS.

On an overall level, the programme is relevant and with many specialized courses and a clear focus on physical geography in line with the faculty association. The structure of the programme is a continuation of the bachelor's degree in geography and builds on competences acquired during the bachelor degree.

The expert team wishes to acknowledge the department and all the effort that has clearly been put into the production of the SER. The SER is a clear and approachable document which sheds light at the educational programme and it illustrates an educational programme with high levels of proficiency and professionalism.



2. PROGRAM EVALUATION

2.1. Mission, objectives and administration

According to the SER, upon completion of the study programme at master in Geography (MSc), students will be able to:

- collect and process physical-geographical and socio-economic data
- describe and explain the various problems of physical and social geography from the local to the global level,
- perform physical-geographical, socio-economic, spatial and statistical analyzes with modern methods (GIS, RS, SPSS)
- create projects on the application of knowledge gained in practice
- make development plans based on all geographical areas
- analyse different ways, methods and techniques of spatial planning
- introduce all from natural resource management and environment.

It is clear, that these learning outcomes differ from the objectives of the programme as listed above. According to the interviews, the learning outcomes on page 12 of the SER are the correct ones.

As the expert team has commented on in the review of the bachelor programme, the learning outcomes are clearly stated and are relevant to the programme. However, it is often difficult to follow the critical alignment of the various learning outcomes and objectives and hence it becomes difficult clearly to identify how overarching objectives and goals are met and thus how the educational programme of geography contributes to the objectives of the university. Hence, with a point of departure in the critical alignment as stated above, it seems appropriate to observe that some of the learning outcomes of the geography programme are not easily identified in the objectives of the university. Obviously, there cannot be a complete alignment between the objectives of the university and the learning outcomes of the individual academic programmes, but it seems appropriate to suggest some overlap between the two and possibly even to suggest that a geography program is uniquely situated to accommodate many of the more overarching outcomes of the university. This point is directly related to the SWOT analysis on p 14 stating that “The expected learning outcomes of the individual courses as well



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as entire program are in accordance with the level VI of the National Qualification Framework;”. While this is most certainly the case, it remains somewhat difficult to conclude.

Apart from this point on the formulation and critical alignment of objectives and learning outcomes, the expert group are happy to find a master programme with many self-identified strengths and opportunities and only few weaknesses and threats; most of which are out of the scope of the programme to deal with. Further, the expert team finds that all relevant standards are commented on and appear relevant.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

- 1. It is recommended that the geography management enters a dialogue in order to address the alignment of objectives and learning outcomes in order to enhance the competency profile of the programme as well as that of its graduates (see also recommendation 2.4.1)*



2.2. Quality management

According to the SER the master programme in geography has adopted relevant and necessary standards and procedures in relation to managing the quality of the education. All standards are commented and seem relevant. As above, the expert team find an academic programme well-structured and with relevant administrative procedures in place and the weaknesses and threats identified in the SER are large external; out of the scope of the programme to correct.

Yet, the expert team identifies two issues in the SER and the interviews that needs to be addressed:

- 1) In table 4 on p 49 in the SER student numbers are presented. Here, it is stated that a planned enrolment of 20 students each year is planned for. It has not been reached for some years, but realized numbers are acceptably closed to the plan. However, looking at the numbers of graduated bachelors from the bachelor program not all the enrolled can have a degree from the bachelor programme: in 2020/21 7F and 8M are enrolled, yet 1M and 4F seem to have graduated this same year. This raises a central question: What are the procedures for accepting students into the master programme without a bachelor's degree in geography? The discrepancies in the table seem unlikely to be explained only with reference to dormant students in the system.
- 2) With a yearly uptake (planned and realized) of around 20 students and allowing for longer studies due to dormancy during studies, it seems necessary to establish a broader understanding of where and how the students find employment after graduation. On p 24 in the SER several public institutions are listed as examples of relevant workplaces for geography graduates. While the expert team appreciates the identification of relevant places of employment, and recognizes several also from the interviews, we find it relevant to suggest that the programme establishes a broader understanding of the employment market for the graduates.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *The expert team recommends that a policy for the enrolment of non-geography bachelors be adopted to ensure that the planned number of students for enrolment into the master programme can be identified.*



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2. *Along the same lines, the expert team recommends identification of relevant procedures to deal with inflated student numbers. While these inflated numbers may be intrinsic to any educational programme in Kosovo (as indicated in the interviews), unreliable student numbers are a problem for the proper and precise planning of teaching as well as economy. Hence. The expert team want to encourage the programme to identify relevant ways of dealing with unreliable student numbers.*
3. *The expert team further recommends that the programme expands its understanding of relevant employment markets for the graduates and thus also addresses the issue of alignment between the learning outcomes and objectives of the education and the requirements from the labour market.*



2.3. Academic staff

As part of the work of this report, all relevant staff members have submitted their CV. The expert team have no further comments to the staff, their proficiencies or their portfolios.

It does however deserve attention, that many of the staff members find it difficult to communicate in the English language. While it remains a minor issue in relation to the work of his report, it must be recognized that this should be identified as part of the enclosed SWOT analysis. The lack of proficient English speakers among the staff will seriously limit the choice of literature to be presented to the students; it may be a stumbling block in the communication with the students concerning the content of academic articles and it may also hamper the mobility of students.

Compliance level: Fully compliant

ET recommendations:

- 1. The expert team recommends that the study programme discuss and adopt a policy to assist teachers at the programme to further their mastery of the English language and such ensuring that the students are presented with contemporary and relevant, international research. This may indeed be even more relevant for the master degree than for the bachelor degree.*



2.4. Educational process content

The expert team finds the master programme of geography to be well structured, relevant and characterized by a high level of enthusiasm and professionalism. All the standards are commented upon and seem to be met by relevant procedures. Whereas the bachelor programme is a very broad and introductory programme, the master level is clearly more specialized and focused. However, as was the case for the bachelor programme, the expert team finds it difficult to see the alignment between the objectives of the education, the overall learning outcomes and the learning outcomes of the individual courses and activities.

It may be beneficial to consider introducing modules to the MA studies where certain learning outcomes can be addressed more precisely. It will also address the special interests that the students develop during the BA studies. In order to gain more relevance with the scientific and academic aspect of the studies, it might be beneficiary to introduce modules where students can really deepen their knowledge and eventually produce new research or even products. Here especially the inclusion of digital, spatial data sources (GIS etc.) and procedures may be an important lever towards a modern and internationally oriented educational programme

Compliance level: Fully compliant

ET recommendations:

- 1. The expert team finds the geography programme to be fully compliant but wishes to encourage the staff to enter a process of reviewing learning outcomes in the syllabus to confirm to the ideas and concepts of critical alignment. A very useful tool in this process is the competency matrix. We encourage the staff to work on a **competence matrix** to ensure constructive alignment in the education and ensure that the learning outcomes of the programme is indeed expressed by the syllabus, but also to ensure, that the learning outcomes of the programme is aligned with the objectives of the university and ensures transparency and achievement of the university.*



2.6. Students

Student enrolment process seems to be fair and transparent to all interested applicants. Candidates are aware of all the conditions and requirements to successfully apply and enrol thanks to Departments' engagement in the form of high school visits and student fairs (see also recommendation 2.2.1).

Study groups are well dimensioned with respect to the lecture type. Lecturers provide the students with all the basic information regarding the lecture and their workload, obligations, and completion conditions.

Student rights seem to be met and the students themselves confirm that there are no disputes of any kind, and even if there is, they are aware of the proposed mitigation mechanisms. Inclusion and tolerance are also one of the great advantages that the students possess. Professors and students work together, cooperate, and have maximum respect to each other. Professors are available to students in their office hours, after the lectures and even via online modes of communication.

Students also actively participate in exchange programs, and they have a lot of internal mechanisms at their disposal who help and guide them through the process.

In general, master students are eager to study, focused and intrigued by their fields of interest. They seem to have a clear picture of what they want to do and how they want to do it, and the professors help them a lot in channelling their knowledge. The difference between them and the BA students is palpable, but in a best way possible.

However, the expert team is somewhat critical towards standard 5.8 where the “students are guided by supervisors to pay attention in order to avoid plagiarism”. The expert team realizes that measures are in place where students are guided to avoid plagiarism, yet the team finds the limited effort of guidance somewhat substandard: The students are just beginning to get a grasp of academic writing and some (unintentional) plagiarisms are bound to happen. Obtaining a plagiarism software might be a good way to address and remove those mistakes from early on. And while some part of the students will not continue with academic work, it is still important to implement this awareness to help them think more critically later. Moreover, the same software might also help professors with their research.



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In conclusion, the expert team is fully compliant with this area: Students are happy, their rights are met, professors and students have good communication and rapport. The lack of plagiarism detection software is the only downfall, but the expert team is also aware that obtaining it might be a problem if it is just one department in question.

Compliance level: Fully compliant

ET recommendations:

- 1. Obtaining a plagiarism detection software in order to assist students and avoid unnecessary issues of plagiarism. While the expert team realizes that plagiarism software is both expensive to obtain and to maintain, it is recommended that the educational programme enters into a dialog with the university in order to secure such procedures.*



2.7. Research

The research profiles of the academic staff are relevant and at an acceptable level. However, as noted above, there may be a need to broaden the language proficiency in order to ensure easy access both to publication, but also towards the adaptation of material, especially in English.

Compliance level: Fully compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *The expert panel finds the program to be fully compliant in this respect but would like to encourage the programme to adopt a policy of English proficiency. See also recommendation 2.3.1*



2.8. Infrastructure and resources

While most of the standards are met today, some of them will be met when the Department moves to the new FMNS building that is being built. As a part of a University of Pristina, the Department has no financial independence and therefore the expert team cannot comment on it.

The general and special equipment seems to be in order, with enough components and unique pieces to support the quality of exercises and lectures. The classrooms are big enough to accommodate all the study groups, but the ET did not get any input on the quality of those said classrooms.

The Department is strongly advised to procure new ways of obtaining newer literature and online database access. The current situation is that professors go above and beyond in order to provide relevant literature for their classes, which is a practice that should not be tolerated. Students and professors must have access to a variety of resources to better understand or deepen the knowledge in the fields they are interested in, and it is the Departments responsibility to enable that. The aforementioned language barrier might also be reduced with more foreign language literature, because it implies an active usage of foreign language, hence better understanding.

It is also recommended that the faculty premises are adapted to the students with special needs. The expert team is aware that this is a big infrastructural investment, and it therefore expects this problem to be properly addressed and resolved with the new FMNS building.

In conclusion, the ET is substantially compliant with this area. Most of the standards are met, but a good part of them is not. While we truly believe that the infrastructural issues will be resolved with the new building, the literature access is something that must be dealt with as soon as possible.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant



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ET recommendations:

- 1. It is recommended that the number of relevant and newer resources, both in online environment and library (see also recommendation 2.3.1) is increased in the future.*
- 2. The programme should ensure that infrastructural issues with classrooms is addressed and proper measures are taken to resolve any issues in relation to accessibility etc.*



3. OVERALL EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATION OF THE ET

The overall impression that the ET got is that the department is heading in the right direction, even though there are some elements that can and should be improved. The newly announced building seems like a good place for a fresh start where the recommendations from this report can be implemented.

Academic staff is engaged both with the research activities and the students, which is observable from the first glance at the published works and in first interactions with the students. Feedback mechanisms are set in place, and even though the Quality Assistance mechanisms are not that popular with students, they still get valid feedback.

Students are happy, intrigued and curious about their field of study and they seem to be growing up into true academic citizens.

Standard	Compliance level
1. Mission, objectives and administration	Substantially compliant
2. Quality management	Substantially compliant
3. Academic staff	Fully compliant
4. Education process content	Fully compliant
5. Students	Fully compliant
6. Research	Fully compliant
7. Infrastructure and resources	Substantially compliant
OVERALL COMPLIANCE:	<i>Substantially compliant</i>

In conclusion, the Expert Team considers that the study program in *Geography MSc* offered by Faculty of Mathematical Natural Sciences at the University of Prishtina is ***Substantially compliant*** with the standards included in the *KAA Accreditation manual* and, therefore, recommends ***to accredit*** the study program for a duration of **5 years**, with student quota of **20 students**.



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4. APPENDICES *(if available)*

Expert Team

Chair

(Signature)

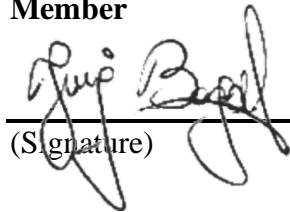
Thomas Theis Nielsen, Ph.D

(Print Name)

06.07.2022.

(Date)

Member


(Signature)

Juraj Bogat

(Print Name)

06.07.2022.

(Date)