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UNIVERSUM COLLEGE

BA FASHION DESIGN

ACCREDITATION

REPORT OF THE EXTERNAL EXPERT

14 April 2022

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONTEXT

This accreditation of a new BA Fashion Design programme was conducted via an audio and visual Microsoft Zoom link between a number of teams comprising Universum management, teaching staff and employers located in Kosovo and the External Expert in the United Kingdom.

Date of event

Wednesday 6 April 2022.

External Expert (EE)

Professor Alan Brickwood, independent higher education adviser.

The External Expert (EE) has some familiarity with Universum College, having previously participated in one other re/accreditation event at the College in 2017.

Coordinators from the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA)

Illirjane Ademaj Ahmeti, Senior Officer for Evaluation, KAA.

Arianit Krsniqi, Senior Officer for Evaluation, KAA.

Sources of information for the Report and criteria used

The EE was provided, in advance, with a Self-Evaluation Report (SER) including module descriptors, a set of curriculum vitae (CVs) for the teaching team, copies of formal agreements between the College and external collaborators and a short video showing the students' working environment

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

No additional information was requested by the EE at the close of the event.



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

During the event a representative from KAA was present to check the accuracy of information provided to the EE.

1.2 EVENT SCHEDULE

Wednesday 23 March 2022

	Event	People
09.00 – 09.45	Meeting with the management of the faculty.	Alejtin Berisha, Shqipe Rashiti-Gërguri, Uran Rraci
09.50 – 10.35	Meeting with quality assurance representatives and administrative staff.	Arlinda Qehaja, Armend Berisha, Albulena Luzha, Nazim Haliti
10.45 – 11.45	Meeting with the heads of the study programme.	Nevila Muka Arjana Blakaj Drenusha Zeka Hana Bakalli
11.45 – 12.30	Lunch break	
12.30 – 13.10	Meeting with teaching staff.	Arben Grajqevci Qendresa Kukaj Arlinda Zylali Besa Rugova Yllkë Kosumi Noli Mati



13.15 – 14.00	Meeting with employers of graduates and external stakeholders	Genta Grainca-UniBB, Gresa Zeqiri-ndermarrese, Armend Mustafa-Arta Tex, KAMA (Asociacioni i kompanive të tekstit), Arta Azemi.
14.00 – 14.10	Internal meeting of KAA staff and expert.	
14.10 – 14.20	Closing meeting with the management of the Faculty and programmes.	

1.3 A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE INSTITUTION AND PROGRAMME UNDER EVALUATION

Universum College describes itself as the most internationalised higher education institution in Kosovo, having established cooperation with some of the most respected educational institutions in the world. It received its most recent institutional reaccreditation in February 2022 and is in the top five largest institutions of higher education in Kosovo.

The SER refers to its Business School having been ranked within the top 1,000 in the world and its MA in Management programme in the top 17 best programmes in southeast Europe, both recently by *Eduniversal*.

Another distinguishing characteristic of Universum College, reported in the SER and exemplified during discussions, is an impressive high level of external collaboration. This currently includes six joint ‘double degree’ programmes conducted with other higher education institutions, a grant of 3.6 million euros (out of a total of 7 million available) from the EU for student exchange programmes enabling some 600 Universum College students to participate in exchange arrangements. The volume of students enjoying exchange scholarships being the largest in the Balkans of which 93% are travelling outside Kosovo for the first time. It also has 350 of its students funded by local industry and commerce.



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The College was established in 2005 and is located on two sites – Prishtina and Ferizaj the latter being described as the second largest city in Kosovo. It currently has approximately 3,000 enrolled students and offers the following 11 accredited bachelor programmes, four masters programmes and two level 5 sub-degree programmes. Specifically:

BA Business and Management	MA Management
BA Political Science	MA Diplomacy
BA Computer Science	MA Data Science and Analytics
BA English	MSc Sustainable Food Production Systems
BA Law	
BA Digital Journalism	
BA Cyber Security	
BA Physiotherapy	Integrated Design (with interior, graphics and fashion design specialisms) at level 5
BA Dental Hygiene	
BA Nursing	Nursing at level 5
BA Graphic Design	

The BA Business and Management programme is conducted jointly with the University of Northampton in the UK and the two level 5 programmes are accredited by Pearson Education.

The proposed new programme would be located at Ferizaj coincident with the existing BA Graphic Design and Integrated Design programmes.

Whilst its core values remained true and unchanged, the College decided to revise its mission statement towards the end of its 2018-22 Strategic Plan. The new mission of Universum College is stated in the SER, as follows:

“The mission of Universum College is to support our students to become good citizens, successful and broad-minded leaders and thrive in the Revolution 4.0, the digital and globalised era.

We do this by providing one-on-one academic and life coaching, putting our



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students and learning at the centre in an innovative, digitally enhanced environment that fosters creativity, inquiry, teamwork, innovation and entrepreneurial mindsets. Our commitment with quality, teacher excellence and applied research builds the bases for a strong and vigorous nation and region”.

It further describes its Mission being built upon five strategic pillars:

- Student and Learning at the Centre
- Quality Improvement
- Innovation and Entrepreneurship
- Digital Transformation
- Internationalisation.

In response to questions as to whether there were any future plans that might significantly impact upon this programme, senior management confirmed that the College had expansion plans underway to include additional accommodation for its art and design provision including this fashion design programme and new technology programmes.

2 PROGRAMME EVALUATION

2.1 MISSION, OBJECTIVES AND ADMINISTRATION

The proposed three-year (6 semester) BA Fashion Design programme shares a common mission, and set of strategic objectives, that are entirely consistent with those of the College and KAA more broadly.

It aims to deliver a teaching and learning experience for its students that is practice-based and with a set of core intellectual, professional and transferable skills vital to the profession, industry and communities for which the programme is designed to serve. Upon graduation, its students will be able to survive, adapt and prosper in a multitude



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of career options locally, regionally and internationally in the broad field of fashion design.

The EE was in little doubt that the proposal to mount this programme in the field of fashion design at degree level in Kosovo would meet those aims. It would be a major and very welcome addition to the College's portfolio and provide strong support to the development of a high-quality fashion and textile industry and the economy of Kosovo.

The College pointed to its experience teaching fashion design on the integrated design programme, albeit it at a lower level. It also stressed the absolute necessity for the programme and its graduates to be vital due, not least, to the growth of opportunities and competition in both education for, and employment in, the fashion industry in Kosovo. The College was therefore very clear that its graduates from this programme "had to be good". The EE was informed that fashion design was in the top 5 popular areas of study in Kosovo.

These objectives were evidenced by a clearly stated emphasis upon student-centred teaching, with full learning support, intended outcomes, subject coverage in the curriculum to include innovation and entrepreneurship, and a balance of delivery at around 60/40% between practice and theory, respectively. These being consistent with other programmes internationally with similar objectives and expectations of a graduate from higher education embodied in the National Qualifications Framework and the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

Compliance level

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

There is a full and thorough range of formal policies, guidelines and regulations referred to in the SER dealing with responsibilities relating to the management and delivery of programmes, behaviour of both teaching staff and students and to recurring procedural



and academic issues. These cover academic integrity, responsibility and public accountability including a full range of documents requiring every person within Universum College to conform to a set of moral and ethical principles and to the principles of scientific and artistic truth – including codes of practice and disciplinary procedures.

These arrangements are established at institutional level with satisfactory structures and mechanisms to ensure they are effectively cascaded down.

The EE was impressed by the thoroughness of these arrangements together with clear measures to ensure appropriate ‘follow through’ and ‘feedback’ occurs.

The EE assumes that a summary of most of these arrangements would be included in a handbook given to students at induction.

Compliance level

The EE is satisfied that these measures are fully embraced at all levels. They are Fully Compliant with Standards 1.4 to 1.6.

2.2 QUALITY MANAGEMENT

Universum College is an established and mature institution with quality assurance standards and principles established over the past 17 years according to the Bologna Process and regulations laid down by KAA. The latter drawing heavily upon participation and advice from teams of advisers and experts from across the world. This to ensure a comparability of standards internationally and the promulgation of up-to-date thinking and ‘best practice’.

At institutional level there is a comprehensive and thorough system of common requirements for the design of new programmes, modification of existing ones and for the processes of monitoring, review and formal evaluation.



This includes a clear articulation of what programmes are setting out to achieve; the selection and recruitment of suitable students; the content and balance of the teaching and learning experience; effective outcomes; and fair assessment for the purposes of monitoring, feedback to students, for progression and award and for when things go wrong. These systems also include the collation of information on the workload of students and staff; student, staff and employer feedback and the destination of graduates.

There is a Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) comprising five dedicated staff in charge of quality control and who described their principal functions to be that of cultivating and maintaining a 'quality culture'. This, in addition to their day-to-day collection, collation and feedback of findings from a wide variety of sources. One example being advice from an Industry Advisory Board that meets twice a year to provide an industry perspective as to whether programmes are in line with the National Qualifications Framework and needs of the market.

Keen to ascertain how some of this worked in practice, the EE chose to explore student attrition rates as one indicator of the College's perception of 'success' and at what point the Quality Assurance Unit might intervene and begin to 'police' a situation. Accepting the limitations of a single and simplified performance indicator, the EE was very reassured by a ready response that any drop-out above 15% would usually cause 'alarm bells' in their system, the activation of academic department Student Retention Officers and special intensive support for vulnerable students.

The EE found the processes in place highly satisfactory – seemingly covering all eventualities in a sensitive and flexible manner.

Compliance level

The EE is satisfied that the required quality assurance processes are in place and will be applied to this new programme. They are Fully Compliant with Standards 2.1 to 2.9.



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2.3 ACADEMIC STAFF

The full-time teaching staff team is strong. It comprises people that are highly qualified, competent, youthful and motivated. The overall position on staffing is stable and secure. All staff confirmed their commitment to student-centred learning with strong tutorial support.

The SER provides listings of 16 full-time and 3 part-time teaching staff dedicated to the programme by qualification, title, tenure and by the amount of time they are allocated to spend on teaching, assessments and on providing academic counselling to students. All were on long-term employment contracts. This represents 84% coverage of the curriculum by full-time staff. The overall College student/staff ratio was advised to be 17: 1

All staff are aware of what is expected of them including participation in external collaborative and exchange opportunities. The SER confirmed promises made in earlier SERs that the level of external collaboration of staff would substantially rise to a total of 191 staff involved in teaching exchanges with other European institutions. This, as a consequence of 115 current bilateral agreements with the prospect of a further increase in funding and more staff attending training and workshop events organised by EU partners.

The SER also provides a comprehensive list of nine major Capacity Building Projects in which it participates. These have a particular emphasis upon assisting academic staff that need to 'catch up' with new initiatives being taken by the College and with professional updating in their particular specialist field. These range from entrepreneurship skills for engineering and IT (REBUS); connectivity between science and society (CONSUS); sustainable food production (STEPS), low carbon economies (KALCEA); through to a project designed to improve equality of access to higher education (IDEA).

All staff are subjected to regular evaluation of their performance. Student satisfaction surveys are conducted at the end of each semester and another, shorter one, mid- term.



Both are completed by students anonymously. There are also annual evaluations conducted by Pearson and professional bodies and by heads of departments.

Management expressed having some difficulty at times, and needing to 'headhunt', in the recruitment of experienced staff due to competition from the public funded higher education institutions.

Compliance level

The EE is satisfied that arrangements for the recruitment, deployment and development of academic staff are appropriate and Fully Compliant with Standards 3.1 to 3.10.

2.4 EDUCATION PROCESS CONTENT

It is easy to identify additional topics for the curriculum of a practice-based vocational programme such as this. What is more difficult is deciding what needs to be reduced or removed to make space and avoid overloading the curriculum and student. One solution historically was to lengthen the duration of programmes. Now programme designers have to be more innovative and deploy solutions such as 'prioritising' subject components by 'levels of understanding'. This can result in subject 'x' requiring, for example, 'mastery' or 'competence' whilst another subject 'y' needing only that students gain an 'awareness' or 'familiarity'.

The EE was impressed by the clarity and ambition of the programme objectives. They are unequivocally designed to produce fashion designers able to survive and prosper in what is a huge international and highly competitive industry. This raises high expectations of graduates having at least an 'awareness' of some of the equally big changes taking place in the industry.

The SER included several of these changes under clear stated intentions that students should be able to '... address contemporary issues', '... handle the impact of (changing) technologies', '... be employable' and 'challenge traditional orthodoxies'.



Those intentions are excellent and evidenced by components included in the curriculum relating to sustainability and the environment, marketing trends, textile innovations and shifts to more frequent and flexible manufacturing cycles than those historically dictated by the weather-driven seasons. They also provoked lively and constructive discussions between the EE, subject leaders and teaching staff ranging across several other topics that included:

- A demise of large ‘high street’ retailers in favour of internet sales with shop assistants and static displays being replaced by live streaming. A shift accelerated in recent years by the global pandemic.
- Fashion designers becoming much closer to the customer. Moving from traditional business models of designer/large manufacturer/ wholesaler/retailer to much smaller models of designer/maker/ consumer that are far more responsive and direct.
- Mass customisation following trends established in other manufacturing industries long ago based on Kaizen, lean manufacturing and high ‘stockturns’.
- Obesity, with over 50% of countries reporting overweight populations and the effect this has had upon the block system and sample sizing.
- Impact of the LGBT gender and identity movement. A very high proportion of designs on display at the London Fashion Week this year were androgynous.
- Consumer-driven pressure for a circular economy with the fashion industry under pressure to reduce waste. It allegedly being the third worst industry for waste in the world.
- Big established fashion ‘label’ producers unable to sell their products in an increasing number of markets due to consumer-driven concerns over ethics, slavery and the human conditions of workers where items are made.
- Plagiarism – sometimes referred to as ‘Diet Prada’. A breakdown of respect for intellectual property rights arising from social media infiltration.

English language features in all parts of the curriculum and is taught as an elective in semesters 2, 3 and 4. The EE was informed that some subjects are taught entirely in English and that there is a Languages Centre at College level accessible to all students.



The Semester 6 dissertation confirmed expectations that this was a culminating comprehensive test of a student's ability to draw together all that they had learnt and be able to present this in a professional manner.

Compliance level

The EE is satisfied that the education process, curriculum content, subject balance, teaching methods and assessment arrangements are thorough and appropriate to this programme's ambitious and demanding objectives. It is Fully Compliant with Standards 4.1 to 4.12.

2.5 STUDENTS

The EE was unable to communicate with any students, nor see any relevant student work, as this is a new programme without any comparable activity of a similar nature and level at the College. The EE was however able to have a useful and reassuring discussion with two employers with experience of students that had completed the fashion design specialism route on the level 5 integrated design programme.

One described themselves as an artist and teacher with their own studio and workshop producing patterns for the fashion industry. The other a manufacturer of specialist medical, security, school and hospitality uniforms and employing 120 staff. Both were very positive and supportive, describing their good experiences of employing students and other relationships they had with the College. These included them giving advice on programme development, providing access to equipment and the provision of student visits to their premises.

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



they are delegated, mirrored and adapted to suit local circumstances and needs within prescribed limits.

Compliance level

The EE was impressed with the reported thoroughness and flexibility of arrangements for students on other programmes and believes this bodes well for the new programme. The employers' views supported these impressions. Arrangements for students are therefore deemed to be Fully Compliant with Standards 5.1 to 5.11.

2.6 RESEARCH

Whilst Universum College describes itself as a teaching institution predominantly, it has nevertheless given research a high priority to ensure its knowledge base, its teaching staff and the material they deliver is professionally up-to-date and vital to students and the communities it serves.

It does this via a wide range of supportive staff development mechanisms designed to inculcate an intrinsic research culture of an applied nature throughout the College – 'top to bottom'.

Research engagement is a condition of teaching staff employment. It is expected to permeate the curriculum of all student programmes. There is formal encouragement for collaboration with external knowledge bases and practice and the College takes advantage of opportunities offered by EU schemes. The latter including those such as ERASMUS, International Credit Mobility and Capability Building Projects, aforementioned in this report, in a big way. The College is also currently developing a new Research and Innovation Hub, in collaboration with other foreign universities to enhance its performance in some of these schemes.

Documentary confirmation of these collaborative arrangements and achievements were supplied to the EE.



With the addition of this new programme to the College's portfolio, it would be good to see the addition of other supportive schemes, of a similar kind, specific to the field of creative art and design.

Compliance level

The EE is impressed by the strategies being pursued and arrangements by the College to enhance its knowledge base and the vitality of its teachers and teaching through applied research. These are Fully Compliant with Standards 6.1 to 6.10.

2.7 INFRASTRUCTURE AND LEARNING RESOURCES

The SER provided full details of the College's commitment to providing a well-resourced and quality environment. These included details of both general and dedicated accommodation, specialist equipment, IT and conventional library learning resources and non-academic student support services.

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

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

Compliance level

Infrastructure and learning resources for this programme appear to be Fully Compliant with Standards 7.1 to 7.6.



3 FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EXTERNAL EXPERT

The External Expert is grateful to the College management and teaching team and to employers for their open and dynamic contributions to the event, and wishes them well for the future.

This proposed new three-year BA Fashion Design Programme is timely and could, within a short time become a serious asset, not just for Universum College but also as a significant driver in the development of Kosovo's industrial economy. There are many parallels where this has happened, in this same field, in other countries and in recent years.

It has many appropriate ingredients for that to start to happen. There is a strong community of committed and experienced staff; the potential to recruit highly motivated students and the possibility of a good working and respected relationship with industry. It will need a continued commitment across these fronts, and in particular, develop its intellectual assets to a high level by research and practice and by exposure and association with the best.

It could become a centre of excellence.

In conclusion, the External Expert considers the proposed new BA Fashion Design programme to be Fully Compliant with the Standards included in the current KAA Accreditation Manual. The External Expert therefore recommends the study programme be accredited for 3 (three) years and with a maximum new annual intake of 30 students.

Professor Alan Brickwood, External Expert
14 April 2022