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AAB COLLEGE GJAKOVA

INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION

FINAL REPORT OF THE EXPERT TEAM

Brno, February 28, 2022



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Context

The institutional evaluation of AAB College (Kolegji AAB) in Gjakova was conducted in an online form in 2022, due to the pandemic restrictions. This means the evaluation panel was provided with the Self-evaluation Report (SER) well prior to the date of the site visit, then participated at the training meeting with KAA representatives, and then conducted all the interviews via Zoom platform on February 4, 2022. After the series of interviews, the panel wrote the draft report, submitted it to the KAA and later took into the consideration comments of the AAB College when finalizing the report.



Date of site visit: February 4, 2022

Expert Team (ET) members:

- *Prof. Milan Pol, Masaryk University*
- *Prof. Peeter Normak, Tallinn University*
- *Mr. Christoph Back, student expert*

Coordinators from Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA):

- *Naim Gashi, Director of KAA*
- *Flamur Abazaj, Senior Officer for Evaluation and Monitoring*

Sources of information for the Report:

- *Self-evaluation report and other documents of the AAB College Gjakova provided prior to the site visit*
- *Interviews*
- *Video on the AAB College Gjakova*
- *Additional documents of AAB College Gjakova provided upon the request of the ET after the site visit*

Criteria used for institutional and program evaluations

- *Accreditation manual of the KAA*

1.2. Site visit schedule

09.00 – 10.25	Meeting with the management of the institution
10.30 – 11.30	Meeting with quality assurance representatives and administrative services
11.30 – 12.30	Lunch break
12.35 – 13.35	Meeting with the heads of faculties/study programs



13.40 – 14.30	Meeting with teaching staff
14.35 – 15.25	Meeting with students
15.30 – 16.20	Meeting with graduates
16.25 – 17.10	Meeting with employers of graduates and external stakeholders
17.10 – 17.25	Internal meeting – Expert Team and KAA
17.25 – 17.35	Closing meeting with the management of the institution

1.3. A brief overview of the institution under evaluation

AAB College is the largest non-public higher education institution in the Republic of Kosovo and in the region. It was established in 2002. Currently it consists of a total of 14 faculties with study programs at bachelor and master levels. Gjakova branch of AAB College was initially accredited in 2011, lastly it has undergone accreditation at the institutional level in 2019. Currently, it offers four programs: English Language (BA, 180 credits); Nursing (BSc., 180 credits), Law (LLB, 240 credits), and Marketing and Business (BA, 180 credits).

2. INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION

2.1. Public mission and institutional objectives

The AAB College has its mission, and this was recently reformulated within the process that included the revision of the Strategic Development Plan for the period 2022-2026 as well as Branch Development Plan. For Gjakova branch, the mission is formulated in a different way: “To develop the full potential of young people and adults from this region by providing access to higher education and to contribute to regional development by strengthening active co-operation with the community and the industry of the Gjakova region” (SER, p. 4) It appears, the mission clearly reflects education and some community reach, leaving research aspect implicit. It is considered, though, this mission statement is also related to the mission statement of the whole College, where all the three pillars are clearly stated.

The SER informs concretely and in a sufficient detail about a consultation process of the mission statement development which involved internal as well as external stakeholders. This was proven during the interviews, too.



During the different online meetings with the people across the AAB College Gjakova Branch and beyond it was confirmed that the mission statement is recognized by the members of the academic community of the institution.

As already mentioned, the mission statement was redefined in the context of development of a new strategic document of the institution. As such, it has a potential to serve as an effective guide for strategic planning, decision making and operations of the institution. Medium- and long-term objectives of the AAB College Gjakova branch are consistent with the institution's mission and support the mission.

Compliance level: Fully compliant

ET recommendations:

- 1. Consider a possibility to emphasise in the mission statement explicitly all three pillars of the higher education: education, research, and the public reach also in the mission statement as specifically formulated for the Gjakova branch.*

2.2. Strategic planning, governance and administration

As already mentioned above, AAB College has drafted a new strategic document for the period 2022-2026. It follows the previous plan which seemed to be successfully met in main aspects (expansion of learning spaces, increase of the number of programs, recruitment of new staff, digitalization of the teaching and administrative services, organization of events with students and the community, inclusion of webometrix, rankings etc.). In the new strategic plan, there are five priority areas emphasized: (1) teaching; (2) science; (3) co-operation and partnerships; (4) teaching personnel and students; and (5) leaning environment and supporting services. These objectives are well chosen. Also, they create a logical whole and cover main areas of the AAB College's operation. In the effort to take into account specifics of the Gjakova Branch, the 3-year development plan was developed (2022-2025) in which five objectives were identified: (1) teaching; learning environment; scientific research; institutional co-operation; and community contribution.



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Similarly to the development of the mission statement, a consultative process with the academic community at the Gjakova branch and in Pristina, and also with external stakeholders, incl. the business sector representatives.

Annual and longer-term budget allocations (specifically formulated for the unit located in Pristina) are explicitly linked with the strategic development planning, reflecting annual phases, too. Finances are planned in such a way that 20% is going to be distributed for the Gjakova branch.

It seems, the strategic planning takes a realistic account of aspects of the changes in internal as well as external environment that affect the AAB College. SWOT analyses served as a framework for this, with a special attention to existing /perceived risks and their analysis.

The institution under the valuation has developed a performance assessment framework which includes main indicators, and thus the monitoring of progress is ensured. Targets for each strategic objective are developed, including activities leading to meeting the objectives. This way, monitoring on a short- and medium-term targets is in place, and evaluation of outcomes can be assumed.

AAB College Gjakova branch has a decision-making system and internal operating regulations in line with existing legislation. The key document containing main regulations in place is the Statute of AAB College, besides it there are specific regulatory documents directly related to the Gjakova branch and they relate to main aspects of the institution's operation.

The Statute also determines the way people are selected to the positions in key academic bodies, such as Steering Committee, the main leading body, and the Senate, the main academic body. Regarding the Gjakova branch, in the administrative respect the branch is led by the Director of the Branch; the main responsibility for the teaching process is to the Dean of the respective faculty.

Individual positions in decision-making bodies are clearly described, as for the specific responsibilities for overall policy and accountability. They are also clearly differentiated and apparently this differentiation is followed in the practice. Rector and five vice-rectors are a key management force covering all main areas of the AAB College operation. On the level of

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faculties, teaching council, deans, vice-deans, coordinators and other academic personnel are playing an important role. In branch, these are branch director, study program coordinators, quality assurance coordinator, academic staff, administration and branch library. Their responsibilities are clearly described and logically defined.

Students seem to be represented in all decision-making bodies within AAB College, and this relates to all students, regardless where they study within the AAB College. This mainly relates to Steering Committee (one student), Senate (three students), Studies Commission (one student), Quality Assurance Commission (one student), Teaching Councils at the level of Faculties (always two students are the members). Students from the branch are equally represented in the structures of student organization. Election procedures seem to be clear, democratic, and non-disciplinary, the institution under the evaluation is not involved directly in the process of electing student representatives.

It seems, the administration of AAB College Gjakova branch is effectively organized. The administration functions rigorously, a considerable proportion of their agenda was digitalized in recent period (E-student portal, E-profesor portal, and more). Responsibilities of administrative staff are clearly defined, and they match the qualifications of the individual. Representatives of the administration are also involved in different decision-making bodies of the AAB College.

Compliance level: Fully compliant

ET recommendations:

1. N/A

2.3. Financial planning and management



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AAB College is operating in its own property which is the property of the founders. It generates sufficient revenue and this way ensures financial sustainability of stud programs but also of other operations it conducts. The financial resources come from several sources (tuition fees and other payments done by students; payments for commercial and other services; fund of Kosovo Budget of Kosovo for teaching and scientific-artistic research of general interest; donations, gifts, grants; exploitation of intellectual property; and more). AAB College has been improving and enlarging its activity within last three years and it seems, generally, it has sufficient financial resources in the short and medium term to adequately reach its mission as well as objectives and priorities formulated in the strategic plan.

Also, AAB College seems to have a realistic annual budget and three-year budget. It also has financial policies which address the institution's financial sustainability. For the period 2022-2026 a total investment of 8,608,000 EUR is planned, depreciation value for five years amounts 5,000,000 EUR. 50% of the total sum (13,608.000) shall be invested in the expansion of infrastructure capacities, 30% in technological equipment, literature, inventory, digitalisation; and 20% in raining, international co-operation and promotion of staff and student mobility, publications, and more. It is worth mentioning that 12% of all revenues in the AAB are planned to support research work. Pristina unit of AAB College shall have about 55% of the overall finances, the rest will go to the branch in Ferizaj (25%) and Gjakova (20%).

Oversight and management of AAB College's budgeting and accounting functions are carried out by a specialised office. Vice-rector for Development and Finance is a key person on the central level in charge of developing financial objectives. The duties of this vice-rector are clearly described, including his/her co-operation with different specialized offices across the institution (with Finance Office having the main role). The chief operating officer for AAB College's finances is the Financial Director and his responsibilities are clear and logical.

The responsibility for monitoring and drafting annual budget reports are a part of responsibilities of the above-mentioned managers and bodies. Independent auditors are also involved in his.

Accounting systems seem to comply with accepted professional accounting.

Compliance level: Fully compliant

ET recommendations:

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1. N/A

2.4. Academic integrity, responsibility and public accountability

The topic of academic integrity is embedded in the Code of Ethics of AAB College. The Code of Ethics (in the current version) was approved on the 17. 12. 2021 by the Rector of AAB College. A designated panel, the Ethics Commission (which is part of the Senate), is in charge to revise the Code of Ethics and to handle cases of violations of the Code. The code contains all relevant aspects (and how to handle them) of academic integrity, high standards of ethical conduct, avoidance of plagiarism and conflict of interest.

Regarding the avoidance of plagiarism, a difficult topic in Kosovo, AAB College showed an extensive awareness for this matter. A plagiarism detection software is available to check documents in Albanian and English language. The EP is satisfied, how AAB College is handling this crucial topic.

With the help of the monitoring system, AAB College is able to check and ensure that the Code of Ethics and its associated processes are applied to all necessary areas within the HEI (management, administration, teaching and research). The QA office of AAB College was able to show and explain how the monitoring system (and the reporting system) is working.

The AAB College is publishing some (but not all) internal regulations and procedures. The same applies to self-evaluation reports and decisions of the management. AAB College justifies this approach with bad experiences with others HEI's in the past. These are said to have exploited and copied the internal documents.

However, AAB College publishes all necessary information (regarding its academic staff, its research and academic activities, the programs it offers, the number of students enrolled, the intended learning outcomes of its programs, the qualifications they award, the teaching, learning and assessment procedures used, the pass rates and the learning opportunities available to its students, graduate employment information, scholarship opportunities, as well as tuition and administrative fees) internally. It is important to say that all stakeholders of AAB College have access to the data relevant for them at any time.



The ET is aware of the situation of HEI's in Kosovo and partially understands the reasons of AAB for not publishing important internal documents. Nevertheless, it is not in line with the Accreditation Standards of KAA.

Apart from the point of not publishing some internal documents, AAB College is able to ensure a high level of academic integrity. The ET does not see any substantial problems for this general area.

Compliance level: substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *The ET recommends to the AAB College to publish all internal documents, as it is stated in the Accreditation Standards of KAA. The EP is sure, that the AAB College finds a way to publish the documents on a lower level of detail, so that exploits and copies from other HEI's are not possible while the KAA Standards are fulfilled.*
2. *The ET wants to motivate AAB College to make it mandatory to publish the Bachelor Theses for its graduate students. AAB College could be become the forerunner in regard in Kosovo with this step.*

2.5. Quality management

Quality assurance (QA) regulations and processes are unified on all three branches (Pristina, Ferizaj, Gjakova). The Senate of AAB College has adopted on 17.12.2021 the *Regulation on Quality Assurance* and the *Rules of Procedure of the Committee for Quality Assurance*. These documents are in line with the legal framework in Kosovo, such as the *Law on Higher Education*, the *Administrative Instruction on the Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions in Kosovo* and the *European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)*. The first document defines the internal quality assurance (QA) procedures, the scope of internal evaluation, the evaluation mechanisms and instruments, as well as the bodies responsible for quality assurance. The scope is defined as "Quality assurance and self-assessment processes include, but are not limited to teaching and learning processes, study programs, scientific research, artistic activities, internationalization, student administration, infrastructure and other support services." The quality of academic and other staff is not explicitly mentioned. These documents are publicly available.



ABB has 17 full-time employees of quality assurance: the head of the Quality Assurance Office, 14 quality assurance coordinators at the faculty level in Pristina campus and 2 quality assurance coordinators at the branches. The Financial Office covers the necessary costs. Quality assurance belongs to the responsibility area of Vice-rector for Teaching and Academic Affairs. The quality assurance coordinators are participating on the meetings where policies and regulations are discussed, as well as with the meetings with the industrial partners. The QA coordinator: 1) implements the quality assurance working plan at the level of branch, 2) collects data through various instruments, such as questionnaires or other qualitative instruments, 3) performs statistical processing of data and makes tabular and graphical presentation of analyzed reports, 4) collects, sorts and analyses the necessary materials from each department during the external evaluation process, 5) designs and coordinates processes that ensure accurate information of relevant stakeholders regarding the process of internal evaluation, accreditation and the status of accredited programs within the institution, 6) assists in the organization of external evaluation processes, including the coordination of self-evaluation reports, the organization of external evaluation visits by international experts, analysis and comparison of external evaluation reports by international experts, etc.

The college has implemented a regular overwhelming reporting system, starting from individual self-evaluation of the staff members until the yearly reports of offices, faculties and branches. As the quality assurance coordinators confirmed during the meetings, analysis of these reports is one of their primary tasks. The proposals made in the previous institutional accreditation have also been largely implemented.

According to the *Regulation on Quality Assurance*, the quality assurance procedures are applied throughout the whole educational process and involves all stakeholders in- and outside the college. Quality assurance is conducted according to the plan of activities which includes different evaluations and assessment. Questionnaires of different type are the main instrument of the evaluations; *surveymonkey* platform is used. In order to integrate the branches in Ferizaj and Gjakova better into holistic quality system, the positions of quality assurance coordinators were established in these branches in 2021.

At the end of each semester, each faculty composes a semester report. This report outlines the progress of the teaching process during the semester, meaning whether there were any lost lessons, the reasons why the lesson hours were lost, the number of substitutions that are made for those lost lessons, data on student attendance in lectures, the number of uploaded publications made by professors on the platform *E-professor*, and finally the student's success rate which outlines the analysis made about student's success for every subject over the last three examination period. These reports describe also the main difficulties and outline the activities for solving them.

Besides of dedicated quality assurance bodies (*Quality Assurance Committee* and *Quality Assurance Office*), the regulatory documents stipulate quality assurance requirements for all members involved in teaching in one or another way (the Senate, the rector, deans, academic



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personnel, administrative personnel). Students' involvement in the quality assurance processes is conducted primarily through questionnaires that are mandatory to be filled in at the end of each semester.

The Quality Assurance Office is an independent structure which is supervised by the Quality Assurance Commission and by the Vice-Rector of Teaching and Academic Affairs. The role of the Quality Assurance Office is thoroughly described in the *Regulation on Quality Assurance*. The main task of the Quality Management Office is to provide professional and administrative support, guidance and support for quality assurance at all levels of the college and in conducting and administering regular, internal and external evaluations.

The Quality Assurance Committee is established by the Senate – based on the Rector's proposal – and consist of five members (three academic staff, one student and the head of the QA Office). The Committee is responsible for the implementation and monitoring of evaluation procedures in accordance with the statute and the regulations of the College. The mandate of the members of the commission is three years, whereas the student member's mandate is one year.

The roles and responsibilities of the QA Office, of the Head of QA Office and of the QA coordinators as well as the relationship of these to other administrative and planning units are clearly specified by the *Regulation on Quality Assurance*. The composition of QA Committee, its duties and responsibilities, as well as the procedures are described in the *Rules of Procedure of the Committee for Quality Assurance*.

Questionnaires are used for the evaluation of the courses, of the academic personnel, of practical work, of the infrastructure and of student support services. There are also questionnaires for graduates, for graduating students, for employers of graduates, for industry and for students who have dropped out. As the questionnaires for students are mandatory for students and will be filled in at the end of each academic semester, the questionnaires for academic and administrative personnel are conducted once a year and questionnaires for graduates, employers and industry every two years. Questionnaires for graduating students and questionnaires for students who withdraw from studies are completed continuously. Although some employers of the graduates are extremely active in giving feedback to the college, the total number of employers who fill in the questionnaires is relatively small.

The ET was explained, that as the misuse of data published by other institutions of higher education is considered as a risk, the results of the surveys are not made publicly available.

There is an integrated data management system *eService*. The QA Office maintains AAB College's electronic platform *eQuality* and ensures that it updates the data for each of its users. The portal *eService* enables each professor to publish data, enables the registration of the lessons, records the number of students present in lectures through the student's attendance card etc. The course evaluation surveys are currently conducted on-line, and statistical data can

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be found in an accessible central database used in preparation of reports on indicators and other tasks in monitoring quality.

The employers of the graduates claimed that the majority of their recommendations to the college have also been implemented. The students gave concrete examples of their recommendations that were implemented.

Both the *Regulation on Quality Assurance* and the *Rules of Procedure of the Committee for Quality Assurance* are updated on 17.12.2021. Regular reviewing and improvement of quality assurance processes is the responsibility of QA Committee. The head of the Quality Assurance Office is accountable by the Vice-Rector of Teaching and Academic Affairs.

Compliance level: Fully compliant

ET recommendations:

- 1. Although the quality of scientific research is one of the strategic goals of the college and research belongs to the scope of quality assurance, the quality assurance is primarily focused on teaching and learning. It is recommended to pay more attention to the quality assurance of research and development as well as to the quality of staff.*
- 2. For every study program, it is recommended to nominate one highly qualified academic staff member as a curator/coordinator of that study program who has the full responsibility on the quality of that study program. The curator will then to form a permanent council of the study program including representatives of employers, partners, students, graduates and some key academic staff. The task of the council will be to propose recommendations for further improvements of the study program based on surveys of all stakeholders, international development trends of the academic area and the needs of the region. The responsibilities of curators should be explicitly defined in the university regulations.*

2.6. Learning and teaching

AAB College has published and adopted sufficient regulations for its academic programs. They are specified for undergraduate and graduate studies. Every program is monitored by the instruments of student evaluation, graduate assessment, employer evaluation (AAB College has an “Industrial Board” as an advisory panel), employment of graduates and graduation data. The QA office ensures with the extensive monitoring and reporting system of AAB College,



that all programs meet high standards. In this context, appropriate quality indicators are defined and used. AAB College was able to explain with the help of examples how this mechanism works, and regular changes are implemented. The ET was able to see a working QA loop at AAB College.

Each program of AAB College is aligned to the National Qualifications Framework and to the Framework of Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. The programs are based on correlations between learning outcomes which are explained in each program documentation. Also, the competences to achieve and assessment methods are explained within these documentations.

All necessary information (lecture timetables, exam timetables, study plan and syllabi) for the students are available on a designated E-Service-Platform. The students stated that they are very satisfied with the transparency and availability of documents and information within AAB College. The EP welcomes the decision of AAB to implement this E-Service-Platform. Also, AAB College was able to handle some challenges, caused by the pandemic situation, easier because of this platform.

During the interviews with the teaching staff and the students, the EP had the chance to learn how the topics of student-centered learning and fitness/effectiveness of examination methods (among other things) is handled by AAB. Satisfactory examples could be presented in both interviews. These topics are also part of the student evaluation.

A competitive hiring procedure and ongoing improvement workshops for younger or new teachers ensure an appropriate quality and qualification of the teaching staff. This topic is also part of the student evaluation. During the interviews, the heads of the faculties explained how younger or new teachers get support by experienced colleagues.

The Gjakova branch of AAB College provides the same quality of teaching as on the main campus in Pristina. Also, the teaching staff is mostly the same. AAB College was able to explain how they implemented all policies and procedures, from the main campus in Pristina, in Gjakova. The ET did not find any significant differences in the delivering of the programs between the branch and the main campus.

AAB College is able to provide a high level of performance regarding to the field of learning and teaching. The ET does not see any substantial problems for this general area.



Compliance level: Fully compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *To improve the student-centred learning approach, the ET wants to motivate the teaching staff of AAB College to focus more on the students' ability to reflect and think critically.*
2. *The students formulated the request for more internationality. The ET wants to recommend to ABB College to extend the hiring process over the borders of Kosovo and hire more international teaching staff.*

2.7. Research

Since the whole academic staff of the college serves all three branches, that is, is not divided between the branches, the research chapter of the SER for the branches coincide. This is why the report of ET on research for the branches coincide as well. On the other hand, since the local industries in Ferizaj and Gjakova differ from each other significantly, this implies the necessity to form different research competency in these branches. Unfortunately, the SER did not discuss this issue.

The college had previously mainly teaching profile. The main document for conducting research is the *Regulation for Science and Research Activities*. The strategic objectives in research are stated in the *Strategic Development Plan for 2022-2026* of the college. Both documents are publicly available.

Creating a system designed to raise scientific research quality is one of the strategic goals of the college. Twelve measures and expected results in research are formulated in the *Strategic Plan 2022-2026*. The college has stated that the overall aim is the formation of a sustainable research culture. For this purpose, three thematic research institutes have been formed: 1) Arts and Humanities, 2) Social Inclusion and Diversity and 3) Health Studies and Development. The college intends to develop and maintain competences necessary for starting doctoral programs in economy, law, health sciences and sports. However, there are no concrete benchmarks fixed. Moreover, some measures are presented in such a general form that they do not allow the necessary focus to be set. For example, the intension to set up research centers in arts and humanities, social sciences and management, and in medicine is the only indication of the college's intended research profile. Determining the research profile of the College is also hampered by the fact that the inevitable tools for intensive research (existence of research groups, regular research seminars, active participation in international research projects, etc.) are not yet implemented.



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The college dedicates 12% of all revenues to research purposes. This includes also resources for establishing and support of research centers as well as for international cooperation. A five-year budget for research – 184.500€ each year – is composed.

The realization of science is supervised and coordinated by the Vice Rector for Scientific Research. His duties cover all significant areas of research administration. However, the work division between the him and the rector – for example, in representing the college in scientific matters – is not explicitly stated. A separate Institute for Research and Training is formed which monitors three interdisciplinary research centers.

Research is basically validated by scientific publications. The College issues twice a year a journal “Thesis” which applies a double anonymous reviewing. The College has organized 11 scientific conferences within the last 5 years in partnership with other universities held in AAB College, 3 symposia held in AAB College (health care, psychology, and nursing field) and 9 partner conferences, held outside of Kosovo. According to the Webometrics, the AAB college holds rank 6682 among the higher education institutions (impact 6537, openness 3934, excellence 7190) of the World holding the second position in Kosovo after university of Pristina (which has the rank 3027, 5.02.2022).

According to the employment contract, each member of the academic staff is obliged to publish at least one scientific work within the year and to be engaged in other cooperation projects aimed at increasing the quality of teaching. However, based on the list of the academic staff, on Annex 11 of SER (List of publications) and *Google Scholar*, this is not always the case. The ET was explained that sometimes is this caused by extremely long publication period in high level journals that can last more than one year. Note that the amount and quality of scientific output are not taken into account in the volume of teaching assignments. Some academic staff expressed their wish to have more training about research methods and about fund-raising.

Expectations for research and publications of academic personnel are set out in the regulation on academic promotion (the *Regulation on Appointment, Re-appointment and Promotion of Academic Staff*). The criteria, time period, calculation of appraisal results, and the undertaking measures following the completion of academic staff performance appraisal are stated in the *Regulation on Academic Staff Performance Appraisal*.

The teaching staff gave a number of concrete examples of how they deal with their research problems in teaching and how they involve students in their own research. For example: 1) introduce databases they use, 2) explain the method and methodologies they use in research, 3) discuss the latest research achievements with students etc. Several professors have involved students in collecting empirical data and in conducting experiments. Some have published a joint paper with a student as a coauthor.

The regular academic staff within the Faculty is obliged to publish papers on behalf of AAB College. It seems – according to the publications available to the ET – that this requirement is met.

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Procedures for the development and commercialization of intellectual property are stated in the *Regulation on Intellectual Property*. Issues relating to intellectual property are also foreseen in the Employment contract of academic staff, Article 14, which stipulates that intellectual property rights in any work that is done or created by the employee during the employment relationship (during the hours and in the workplace) shall be counted as the employer's work. Intellectual property issues are also regulated on the national level.

Ethical principles are regulated in three documents: 1) Code of Ethics, 2) Code of Ethics for Scientific Research and 3) Regulation on Prevention of conflict of Interest.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *Determine the priority research areas of the college and put extra efforts to support the implementation of the necessary instruments of high-level research (forming research groups, running regular research seminars, conducting joint research projects with other research centres etc).*
2. *Improve support mechanisms for academic staff to support the growth of their research capacity (conducting research, writing research articles, planning and conducting research and development projects, etc.).*

2.8. Staff, employment processes and professional development

Similarly to the previous section 2.7, as the whole academic staff of the college serves all three branches, that is, is not divided between the branches, corresponding chapters of the SER for the branches to a great extent coincide. This is why the report of ET on staff, employment processes and professional development for the branches coincide as well. The coordinators of the study programs in the branch are responsible to the director of the branch for administrative issues, while for the substantive issues of the study program they are responsible to the dean of the respective Faculty in the Pristina branch.

The branches do not have “their own” academic staff, the staff is shared. The rights and responsibilities, recruitment processes, promotion criteria and general principles of performance evaluation of teaching staff are in the *AAB College Statute*, and in the *Regulation on Appointment, Re-appointment and Promotion of Academic Staff*. There is no single document on staff related policies. As such, the *Academic Staff Development Plan* and the



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Grant Regulation can be considered. Recruitment of staff is organized in the college centrally. These documents are freely available in the Internet.

The recruitment processes are thoroughly described in the *Regulation on Appointment, Re-appointment and Promotion of Academic Staff*. The areas of expertise, qualification and experience for the positions that will be announced are based on the requirements of the study programs. Within 15 days from the announcement, the Faculty Teaching Council establishes Review Committee consisting of three members. Two members of the Review Committee must belong to the respective field of studies, whereas the third member may belong to other study fields. After a thorough review of the applications, the Review Committee proposes one or more candidates who exceptionally meet the criteria.

The open call announcement includes at least the field of study or the course, the promotion criteria, the number of job positions, the relevant formal documents, and its duration. The criteria for academic positions are described in *Regulation on Appointment, Re-appointment and Promotion of Academic Staff*. The roles and responsibilities of the administrative staff are set in the *Regulation on the Description and Systematization of the Workplace*. The job description refers to academic work, scientific work as well as administrative work and determines the duties of the academic personnel in relation to the students, the Faculty and the college.

For newly employed academic staff, the Centre for Professional Advancement and Innovation (QAPI) offers an orientation program that consists of the following three components: 1) Didactics in higher education, 2) Projects and methodology of scientific research and 3) Management of higher education organizations. Additionally, the Technology Office informs about various electronic platforms and processes used within the College. The formal meetings is organized at the beginning of each semester with a particular attention to the new staff members, informing them about the study program, students, organization of studies and any other contextual information of the College.

The average teacher-student ratio at the institutional level is approximately 1:30 (about 13 500 students in all three campuses and 329 full-time and 192 part-time teachers). The Statute stipulates that any academic staff who has at least the scientific degree Dr.Sc. will have a teaching load of 8 academic hours per week, with the possibility of an additional 4 hours. The group of students within the classroom cannot exceed 80 students in theoretical lectures and 40 students in practical exercises. The actual size of the groups depends on the specifics of the study program.

The amount and qualification of staff satisfies the criteria set in the *Administrative Instruction on Accreditation*. According to the SER, the college employs 521 academic staff, of which 329 are full-time. Out of full-time staff, 156 hold a doctoral degree. The number of full-time academic staff covers more than 70% of all subjects.



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Performance evaluation criteria are set out in the *Regulation on the Performance Evaluation of Academic and Non-Academic Personnel*. The institution has set a staff performance review procedure and the academic staff is informed about the criteria of the evaluation. The performance evaluation process at AAB consists of four stages: planning, management, evaluation, and documentation and takes place once a year.

The evaluation of academic staff is based on three components, namely the self-assessment, the students' assessment and the assessment by the supervisor (dean). Self-assessment is form-based, and conducted once a year. Assessment by students is anonymous and is conducted through electronic questionnaires that students complete at the end of each semester. Superior's assessment is based on the self-evaluation reports of the academic staff. However, no regular development interviews are conducted – the face-to-face discussion takes place only if the dean finds it necessary to discuss some aspects presented in the self-evaluation report. The results of the evaluation are not made public. However, the college plans to start publishing them in a generalized form in the Newsletter. The system of peer-evaluation is designed, but not implemented yet.

According to the SER, “In case the evaluations of the academic personnel are not satisfactory, discussions are initially held between the individual and the management of the academic unit in order to find ways how to overcome such situations in the next semester. More serious remarks regarding the poor performance of any member of the academic staff are discussed at the rectorate level, where the results of the academic evaluation performance are analysed and the possibilities of improving the situation are looked at. In such cases, trainings are organized in order to improve the staff performance”.

AAB has developed, updated and implemented an annual program for the professional development of staff. This program is administered by newly (2021) established QAPI. An *Individual Professional Development Plan* is developed which serves also for identifying the challenges and needs of the staff. Currently, the trainings are divided into seven categories: on teaching methodologies, on assessment methodologies, on research-based learning etc.

Staff training programs are divided into three levels – basic, professional and advanced levels. The Individual Professional Development Plan consists of four parts: 1) Personal goals and objectives, 2) Personal analysis, 3) Development plan, 4) Measures to achieve the goals/objectives. However, the teaching staff indicated that the need for career development is bigger than the college can afford sabbaticals and trainings in leading foreign universities, inviting top level scientists to form and lead research groups, training in writing project proposals and fund-raising were mentioned.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

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- 1. Introduce yearly development interviews of the staff – both academic and non-academic - by the superiors that are based on the self-evaluation reports.*
- 2. Based on the Strategic Plan 2022-2026 determine the major competency gaps of the staff and provide necessary financial and administrative resources for removing these gaps.*

2.9. Student administration and support services

All belongings regarding to the admission procedure are clearly specified. Each year in June or July the AAB College announces the competition for the admission of new students. In the published competition, the criteria for admission of new students are set, which are determined based on the Statute of AAB, but also based on the legal regulations established by MEST and KAA. The ET has not found any indication, that these criteria are not fairly applied.

Before their application, future students have the chance to get information about ABB College at fairs in their high school in which ABB College participate or on the website of AAB College. All relevant information (including the range of programs and courses, program requirements, services, scholarship opportunities, tuition and administrative fees) are available prior to the application.

After the admission, the new students get a student manual from AAB College. In this handbook, all necessary information is combined. The students are able to find all information or documents they need in this handbook and/or on the E-Service-Platform (See Standard 2.4). This also includes the explanation how to feedback or appeal about an issue the students may have. The Vice Rector is in charge to update the content of the student manual. The student appeal procedure is defined in the Statue of AAB College.

The new students are welcomed by AAB College with an orientation day. During this day, the campus with all important locations is shown to the new students. The students have the chance to ask any question they still have at the orientation day.

In the interview with the students, the ET got the impression, that the students are very satisfied with the transparency and availability of necessary information and documents at AAB College.



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AAB offers two different types of scholarships to the students. The criteria for these scholarships are defined in the Statute of the institution. In general, it can be said, that one type of scholarship rewards students with outstanding performances while the other type of scholarship supports students with disadvantaged backgrounds.

AAB College has appropriate policies and procedures are in place to deal with academic misconduct, including plagiarism and other forms of cheating (See Standard 2.6). The policies and procedures are known among the students.

The monitoring system of AAB College collects and analyzes reliable data referring to the profile of the student population, student progression, success and drop-out rates, students' satisfaction with their programs, learning resources and student support available, career paths of graduates. The mechanism is part of the overall QA loop (See Standard 2.4).

AAB College provides sufficient administration services for the students. An open-door policy makes it easy for students to get support or advice any time they need. The international office and the career center are well rated by the students. The services are monitored and evaluated by the QA office.

The support services for students are located on the main campus of AAB College in Pristina. All services for students are available remote

While the facilities for learning and teaching in the Gjakova branch of AAB College are sufficient, AAB College is not providing appropriate facilities for extracurricular activities for students in Gjakova.

AAB College is able to provide a high level of performance regarding to the field of student administration and support services. The EP does not see any substantial problems for this general area.

Compliance level: Fully compliant

ET recommendations:

- 1. The ET recommends AAB College to set up a designated academic counselling office.*



2. *The ET recommends AAB College to provide the supports service for students in the Gjakova Branch on site and not only remote.*
3. *The ET recommends to the management of AAB College to think about opening a dormitory. The students stated that there is a need for one.*
4. *The ET recommends AAB College to open facilities for extracurricular activities in Gjakova.*

2.10. Learning resources and facilities

The top management of the college confirmed that the development of Gjakova branch is one of the priorities of the college. It is planned to use 20% of the total budget of the college to the branch development. However, it seems that the college has currently not reached this level: according to the financial plans for 2022, the total fixed expenditures are 590 400€ and other costs (investments in science and laboratory equipment) are 89 280€, while for Pristina branch these numbers are 10 538 212€ and 2 360 692€, respectively. On the other hand, the income has increased during last two years, as well as the gross residue. The infrastructure corresponds to teaching and learning needs. Lack of a research center was considered as one of the weaknesses in the Development Plan of Gjakova Campus. It seems that the college does not have a clear understanding of what research center should it be and what infrastructure needs it will have. Finances are managed centrally, the branches and faculties have their own budgets, so the branches are financially independent.

The teaching materials cover at least 50% of the subjects and / or disciplines which are foreseen within the study curricula. There is a system of acquiring new books at the request of the academic staff. Different donation schemes are used as well for upgrading the stocks. Although the students did not complain about the availability of textbooks, the college considers the lack of adaptation of literature in the Albanian language in certain fields of study as a weakness.

The college has an integrated digital library that is a full member of the Consortium of Electronic Libraries of Kosovo and has a cooperation agreement with the National and College Library of Kosovo. Therefore, wide electronic resources are available to the students. The library also has cooperation agreements with other libraries in Kosovo and abroad: Slovenian Library (Slovene National Library), IZUM (Slovenia), the US Congress Library, the library from Albania etc. There are currently access to 14 platforms. However, the students complained that the WiFi connection is uneven in the premises (especially, on the 3rd floor).

The facilities satisfy the current needs. However, according to the opinion of the students, there is not enough space for expansion. This can become a problem in the future because there are ambitious plans for the future: widen the scope of academic activities to the areas of textile industry and software engineering, and expand in the tourism and economy. The students also



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expressed a wish to have a dormitory and more space for relaxing purposes. All computers have Internet connection which enables access to online content including video recording of lectures. Laboratories are equipped with software packages and relevant programs according to fields of study. The library has a space of over 150m², and the number of seats corresponds to the number of students. The reading desks and computers have free internet access.

Library and associated facilities and services are available for extended hours beyond normal class time to ensure access when required by users: from 7:30 to 19:00 on workdays (Monday – Friday) and from 8:00 to 18:00 on weekends. Although the facilities are excellent teaching and learning purposes, students expressed their wish to have more sport facilities.

The library has published adequate rules on using the materials, as well as there are effective systems for recording loans and returns.

The premises in Gjakova branch have the size of 4657 m². All premises, classrooms, laboratories, software equipment and libraries are owned by AAB and are not rented. There are 10 classrooms with a capacity of 50 to 80 seats each, and an amphitheatre with 170 seats. There are additionally 2 laboratories, computer cabinets, classrooms for independent work etc.

Students evaluate administrative spaces and services twice within the academic year, respectively after the end of each semester. Questions address the conditions of the library and of the reading room, hygienic conditions and the quality food in the canteen, transport and bus timetables, etc.

The facility possesses toilets for people with special needs as well as the entire infrastructure suitable for students with special needs. In certain cases they are assisted by the administrative staff of the branch or by the coordinators of study programs.

As the ET was explained, complete inventories of equipment are maintained and space utilization is monitored. Equipment related issues are regularly discussed on the weekly meetings of the administration.

Currently at the Gjakova branch, about 50 computers, 9 projectors and other electronic devices are available. AAB has an internet network which is accessible to all users and has a service of photocopying of teaching materials which is used by students. Internet, computer and photocopying services are assessed by students through electronic questionnaires each semester. A major part of the management, administrative and academic activities of the AAB College is digitize.

The Office of Technology is an important office which takes care of technology services and digitalization within AAB. This Office currently has about 16 staff members who perform various functions such as network administrator, software engineers, technology administrator, etc.



Compliance level: Fully compliant

ET recommendations:

- 1. Develop the research and development conception for the Gjakova branch and determine the infrastructure needs for the realization of this conception.*

2.11. Institutional cooperation

The AAB College has drafted and adopted the institutional co-operation and internationalization in its main strategic documents, both the one for the period 2017-2022, and in its newly issued strategic development document for the period 2022-2026. Especially the international co-operation has been recently pointed out as the priority area of AAB College's development; at the level of Gjakova branch, the aim to expand the partnership with industry through increasing number of collaborations was pointed out. The establishment of project development office and increase of international networking were pointed out in this context.

The strategic objective for internationalization is formulated for the whole AAB College as follows: "To build sustainable co-operation with local and international partners in order to advance the quality of teaching and scientific research and increase the presence of AAB in relevant European (and beyond) initiatives, networks and processes in the field of higher education and science" (SER, p. 83). Measures set out for achieving results in this direction are concrete, clear and logical.

AAB College already has the portfolio for institutional co-operation and internationalization, with Vice-rector for External Co-operation as the top management representative in charge of this. His duties and responsibilities are clearly described, they cover main areas of the field across the institution, also, they indicate the relation to the Office for External Co-operation which is responsible for all processes and procedures related to it, and for implementation of strategic objectives of external co-operation.

At the moment, AAB has a solid list of different agreement and memoranda of understanding with relevant institutions locally, nationally as well as internationally.



AAB makes visible efforts to participate in international projects. During 2020/2021 it has applied for nine projects (two were approved, five others are still evaluated). It needs to be appreciated that these projects/project proposals are not only of a development nature, but some of them also clearly aim at research agenda.

It can also be appreciated AAB organizes a number of conferences of international visibility and outreach; also, it supports mobility of its staff and students (this was confirmed during the interviews).

Regular staff evaluations also consider staff involvement in international activities.

AAB College seems to have effective mechanism to support co-operation with international higher education institutions, networks and organizations, and the staff is provided the assistance when engaging in these activities.

Staff seems to be encouraged to get involved in community issues; promotion criteria include the community service engagement.

Also, it seems AAB College has very good relationships with industries and employers, their representatives are members of Industrial Board, apparently a very promising platform for co-operation of AAB and relevant external partners in different aspects, including study programs delivery. This was persuasively confirmed by the representatives of employers, too.

AAB also maintains solid contact with alumni, keeps them informed about institutional developments, and also invites them to talk to students and share their experience, and more. Career Centre seems to be active in this area.

Compliance level: Fully compliant

ET recommendations:

- 1. Consider a possibility to strengthen the capacities of the Gjakova branch for more intensive involvement in international activities.*
- 2. Consider possibilities to develop more the student offer in English language for potential incoming mobility students.*



Summary:

Standard 1	fully compliant
Standard 2	fully compliant
Standard 3	fully compliant
Standard 4	substantially compliant
Standard 5	fully compliant
Standard 6	fully compliant
Standard 7	substantially compliant
Standard 8	substantially compliant
Standard 9	fully compliant
Standard 10.....	fully compliant
Standard 11.....	fully compliant

Conclusion:

We recommend to accredit AAB College Gjakova branch for 5 years.



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Expert Team

Chair

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