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INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION UBT COLLEGE, GJILAN BRANCH

REPORT OF THE EXPERT TEAM

Vienna-Zagreb-Riga, March 2022



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Context

Date of site visit: March 10, 2022

Expert Team (ET) members:

- *Dr. Dietmar Paier, University of Applied Sciences Vienna*
- *Dr. Drazen Vrhovski, Croatian Agency for Science and Higher Education*
- *Ms. Asnate Kazoka, Student Expert*

Coordinators from Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA):

- *Naim Gashi, Director of KAA*
- *Arianit Krasniqi, Senior Officer for Evaluation and Accreditation*

Sources of information for the Report:

- *Self-Evaluation Report (SER) submitted by UBT;*
- *Information obtained during the online site visit on with the management of the institution, teaching and administrative staff, students, graduates, external stakeholders and employers of graduates;*
- *Website of UBT College;*
- *Video presenting the campus of the college and checked by the KAA representatives;*
- *Description of the onboarding training programme of new academic staff ;*
- *Explanation of the underlying calculus of the projection of student numbers and of the empirical data base of the projections;*
- *List of the staff members already employed at the Gjilan branch;*
- *Examples of Quality Reports for the faculties/study programmes that will be represented in Gjilan branch;*
- *Information on scholarships that will be available for students of the Gjilan branch;*
- *Appeals and complaints policy;*
- *Indicators used for measuring the teaching quality (if any);*



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- *Projection of academic and non-academic staff (attributed to single study programs or organizational units, part-time / full-time);*
- *Example of the stakeholder survey questionnaire;*
- *Meeting minutes from the last 3 stakeholder meetings (if possible translated in English);*
- *UBT Gjilan Statute (in English);*
- *Explanation on the correct number of Ethics Commission members;*
- *The forecasted total number of students enrolled in the Branch and UBT as a whole in 2027;*
- *Evaluation report from last year (official version).*

Criteria used for institutional and program evaluations

- *Institutional evaluation standards of KAA*

1.2. Site visit schedule

Time	Meeting
09:00 – 10:25	Meeting with the management of the institution (no slide presentation is allowed, the meeting is intended as a free discussion)
10.30 – 11.30	Meeting with quality assurance representatives and administrative staff
11:30 – 12:10	Lunch break (provided at the evaluation site)
12:15 – 13.15	Meeting with the heads of the study programmes
13:20 – 14:10	Meeting with teaching staff
14:15 – 14:55	Meeting with employers of graduates and external stakeholders
15:00 – 15:10	Internal meeting of KAA staff and experts
15:10 – 15:20	Closing meeting with the management of the faculty and program



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1.3. A brief overview of the institution under evaluation

UBT College Gjilan Branch was established on 11.09.2020 and is part of the wider UBT Group that includes a private higher education institution - UBT College. UBT Group has operated since 2001 and is spread out in several locations and branches in Kosovo. Its infrastructure houses one of the largest libraries in Kosovo and over 80 laboratories with offices, contact points in all regions of Kosovo and abroad. Its main products and services are related to (i) higher education and research, (ii) executive academy for professional development, (iii) vocational training center, and (iv) services (SER. p. 11).

The mission of the UBT College is to offer “a dynamic and innovative 21 century academic environment. UBT College provides a supportive and challenging opportunity for the students, faculty and staff in a participatory and self-governance setting. Building on a tradition of teamwork between students, faculty, staff and administrators, UBT is committed to enhance its participation as an active member of the community by providing learning opportunities driven by teaching and research excellence, intellectual interaction and creativity. UBT is a preeminent center of intellectual and cultural activity in Kosovo, improving the region’s quality of life through the skills, knowledge, experience and engagement of its faculty, staff, students and alumni” (<https://www.ubt-uni.net/en/ubt-en/about-ubt/>). UBT Gjilan branch shares this mission and aims to contribute to it by operating in Anamorava region.

The UBT Gjilan branch is not operational yet. It plans to offer programs in the following fields: Information and Communications Technology, Management, Business and Economics, Nursing and Public Health, Food Science and Technology. At the time of the site visit, the number and the nature of programs to be offered have not been specified yet.

The UBT Gjilan branch underwent its previous external evaluation in 2021 and as a result was not accredited. In this report the ET reflects on the general compliance with the criteria for institutional evaluation and on possible new developments at UBT Gjilan since 2021.



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2. INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION

The institutional evaluation consists of 11 sub headings (areas) through which the administration, organisation and management of the institution, as well as teaching and research are assessed. In the following sections the ET has provided evidence and analysis for the UBT Gjilan compliance with the standards related to these areas.

2.1. Public mission and institutional objectives

The UBT mission may be found both online and in the UBT Statute. The two sources however provide different mission formulations, both of which are rather generic and as such fit for a variety of possible academic and/or business outcomes. Moreover, the UBT Statute document may be questioned for its integrity as there's been at least two versions of the same document using the same reference even though they clearly differ in the publication date. Thus, for instance, a version that has been supplied in the course of the given institutional evaluation has been referenced as the version 1/41-3 from March 2018. At the same time, a version referenced with the same reference number but a different publication date is available online at <https://www.ubt-uni.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Statuti-i-UBT-English.pdf>. Although both versions formulate the mission the same way, still, concerns may be raised as to the ways the institution manages the consistency of its most important founding documents and their contents. Interestingly enough, the very inconsistency was identified as problematic in the previous institutional evaluation process, however the UBT has clearly disregarded the recommendations made.

Even though the interviewed stakeholders suggested consultations were held prior to kicking-off the idea to set up the new branch, these were undoubtedly run arbitrarily instead of as a part of a well thought off system. The UBT Management has in this regard failed to substantiate any of the claimed justifications for the branch with concrete survey results or market analytics, neither they have provided undisputable financial and development plans set up to meet these claims in the years to come. Thus, for instance, even though claims were repeatedly made as to the current considerable need for well qualified food technologists in the region, the representative of the local labour market bureau has failed to provide straightforward proofs on surveys made to assess and quantify the claimed market needs. Moreover, even though the



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evaluation team tried to challenge the branch-opening business case with concrete national statistics data, such attempts were easily dismissed by the UBT by unsubstantiated insinuations on questionable integrity of the data and statistics used. In addition to this, there was ample evidence that the reasoning behind setting up the new branch was governed mostly by the very basic business logic such as “if opening up a branch was successful elsewhere, why shouldn’t it be as successful here” instead of a thorough strategic undertaking.

Relatively complex and omni-applicable mission statement, coupled with the aforementioned lack of adequate strategic market positioning, has led to a situation where academics find it hard to familiarise themselves thoroughly with key aims and objectives of the proposed branch. On a direct question to formulate in simple words the mission/purpose/vision themselves, the interviewed academics all struggled to provide a simple and straightforward answer which would prove their understanding the role they all play in reaching the UBT’s objective to offer “a dynamic and innovative 21 century academic environment” as outlined in the mission.

Although the mission may be seen as providing a framework for effective strategic planning and setting up the corresponding realisation objectives, there are quite a few discrepancies which undermine a straightforward perception of the mission. Thus, for instance, claims on UBT’s international orientation have repeatedly been used in the SER which is somewhat contradicting a purpose-built branch aimed at serving a fairly narrow market niche both with respect to the achievable student population size in the targeted region, as well as regarding the number of study programmes taught. Another discrepancy may also be seen in the claimed focus on educating professionals in disciplines critical to the national economy, said to be other than those related to “law and social studies”. At the same time, the UBT Group recently acquired another HEI – namely the Arberi College – which serves the same geographical territory and offers study programmes in these very disciplines. Finally, career paths of the interviewed academics contradict the very idea of setting up a branch to serve the locals by allowing them to pursue their professional careers locally instead of stimulating workforce mobility at every possible levels

Compliance level: Partially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *Streamline the branch mission such that to provide clear indication on which scientific, research and/or business area the branch is intended to excel in. If possible, adjust the*



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UBT mission such that to indicate the institution's unique identifiers at the given geography or globally.

- 2. Populate the Advisory Board with representatives from geographic areas other than the area gravitating to Gjilan such that to secure unbiased feedback even on locally-relevant issues.*
- 3. Update the medium and long term objectives such that to address changes in the mission made. Precede the objectives setting up with thorough analysis of the trends and needs, making sure the findings are able to be quantified and following a clear business logic.*

2.2. Strategic planning, governance and administration

As an annex to the SER, the UBT Gjilan branch submitted a “UBT Branch in Gjilan Strategy 2027”. In this document, the College explains that “only after long open discussions and only after serious assessment of shared ideas and proposals, the stakeholders have suggested the UBT Gjilan Branch get focused on (...) fields like Economy, Agriculture and Food Science, Nursing and Public Health” (ibd., p. 3). As it says in the annex, the “UBT Gjilan Branch is part of the wider UBT Ecosystem. Its main products and services relate to (i) higher education and research, (ii) executive academy for professional development, (iii) vocational training center and (iv) services.” (ibd., p. 4f.)

The College formulates five “strategic objectives of UBT Branch in Gjilan” as follows (p. 15f.):

- “Achieving Academic Excellence - The institution aspires excellent quality standards and consistent active learning approaches which offer authentic experiences and an inspiring, values-based learning environment to a diversity
- Developing Research, Innovation and Social Responsibility - Offer innovative ways for learners, spin-in and spin-out companies as well as external clients to engage with enterprise supports and applied research, thus creating new knowledge and new employment



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- Creating a Positive Working and Learning Environment - Creating a Positive Working and Learning Environment Aims to offer a high-quality and supportive working and learning environment for all types of students (full-time, part-time, priority groups) and staff.
- Maintaining and increasing internationalization and regional partnerships - Maintaining and increasing internationalization and regional partnerships Formation of the new local and international higher education alliances and continued excellent performance against international and regional efficiency and effectiveness benchmarks.
- Partnering with the community - Partnering with the community Will (sic) continue to forge strong links with industry and wider society, which will be supported through mainstream funding, alternative income streams and volunteering arrangements in order to provide service to industry and the community at institutional, staff and student level.”

These strategic objectives are linked to an action plan where numerous sub-goals, provisions and measures are defined for each objective. Each strategic objective is broken down to multiple bullet points with statements of mainly general nature, which do not contain much information about what exactly Gjilan Branch commits to accomplishing. However, the ET must emphasize that even in some of the actions, where the Gjilan branch is mentioned explicitly, the particular regional connections are not elaborated at all (p. 17-28).

The strategy document also contains a risk management scheme and an action plan, which indicates an annual action plan for the period 2022/23 – 2026/27 disaggregated by a number of indicators for relevant dimensions which will be used for strategy monitoring. This “Indicator Framework 2022-2027” seems to be a well-defined monitoring tool, but it is all the more surprising that several concrete figures are missing. While this is comprehensible for indicators whose development is difficult to forecast, it is surprising they are also missing for indicators which have already been used for other tasks of planning the branch, e.g. number of students, number of staff, number of research projects etc. which would have allowed for calculations of several ratios and proportions. Therefore, the strategy document is also incomplete.

The strategy document contains a three-year annual work plan with relatively detailed actions to be implemented. Unfortunately, the strategic objectives as well as the measures foreseen for goal achievement are very different as compared against the detailed bullet points for the



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strategic objectives in the sections before. Thus, there is a lack of systematization of strategic objectives, measures, and concrete key performance indicators.

The SER also mentions that strategic planning was done as a participatory process involving a significant number of relevant stakeholders. However, the SER does not give concrete examples on the particular needs of external stakeholders. Also, the ET did not obtain clear information about the particular needs of the regions nor about the added value the branch could bring to the region during the site-visit. On the contrary, external stakeholders reported an admittedly low demand of labor in some industries.

Evidence that the relevance of the Gjilan branch was discussed with the representatives of the industry are the minutes of the meetings with the Industrial board on 07.09.2020, 15.10.2021, and 13.01.2022. UBT College has analyzed the broader educational and economic context in Kosovo to inform its operations, but also the meetings with external stakeholders from industry and business did not yield detailed information on the concrete needs of the region nor about specific projects that would have been planned collaboratively. Instead, some of the stakeholders declared their general intent to support the accreditation of study programs while other stakeholders asked for additional time to think about specific suggestions.

The action plan has the same problem as the overall strategy, the information on inputs, outputs, outcomes and respective indicators is missing or is inconsistent. It also remains unclear, which research areas will be prioritized in Gjilan, or how many research centers the institution is planning to establish.

Moreover, the strategy does not have a concrete regional dimension, which is what seemed to be the main reason for establishing the Gjilan branch, as was stated by the UBT management team. For instance, during the site visit, the UBT representative mentioned that one of the needs that has been identified in the region was lack of quality programs in agriculture and that the GJilan branch planned to develop one in the new future. However, this is not reflected in the strategic plan of the branch.

Lastly, the document can hardly be used for informed decision making, as it lacks essential elements of the strategic plan, such as expected results, defined inputs, i.e. resources for achieving those results, specific outputs and outcomes and the indicators corresponding to these outcomes. The document also does not have any short and medium-term targets. Without these elements, the above-mentioned document bears very little utility for management and staff of the Gjilan branch.



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The statements on the strategic objectives are rather generic and – if the name of the institution is replaced - they would fit for any other higher education institution at other places, too. The ET clearly misses reliable exemplifications of the specific regional manifestation of these strategic objectives. Such explanations should provide coherent answers to questions such as, for instance: How does to roadmap of the Gjilan branch on its way to “world-class research” looks like in concrete? What are the specific measures of the branch to achieve “academic excellence” or “partnering with the community” and other objectives? It is not convincing to present general strategic objectives without presenting the processes and projects that will be implemented to achieve them.

This document also incorporates an action plan, but it does not indicate the time-frame. Therefore, it is unclear whether the action is annual, and if so, whether this annual action plan is for the year 2021. The action plan has the same problem as the overall strategy, the information on inputs, outputs, outcomes and respective indicators is missing or is inconsistent.

As a long-standing higher education provider with the center in Pristina, the College has a functioning decision-making system and internal operating regulations which are in conformity with current legal provisions.

The Statute of the UBT College is the essential document, which is supposed to govern the Gjilan branch, however, the Statute does not have any reference to the Gjilan branch. The SER contains a description of the decision-making bodies, such as the governing board, the academic council or faculty councils. The organogram and the explanations show some discrepancies, e.g. the SER names a “Director of the Branch” (p. 44), while the organogram does not show a director but a “Branch Manager”. However, no distinct rector or rectorate is provisioned at the branch level and the faculties which shall be implemented at the branch level are those implemented at the UBT center. Students are involved in all relevant bodies. The ET misses systematic differentiations between the branch and the central level regarding both, the academic governance and the managerial governance. The ET understands that the UBT academic governance of the branch is determined through the legal foundations and the regulations established by the UBT center and academic independence of the Gjilan branch exists partially, since the regulatory, organizational and financial interdependencies with the center and the interdependencies resulting from use of common infrastructure within the UBT group also limits academic independence which corresponds to the statement of the management during the site visit that the “branch should show a kind of independence”. Indeed, the Gjilan branch operates based on the central regulations and provisions, and



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approval of teaching and research activities must be sought from the UBT center. In this sense, there will be no independent International Office and no R&D office at the Gjilan branch, but an international officer and a research coordinator.

Regarding administration of the UBT center and the prospective Gjilan branch it can be assumed that this will function efficiently. The ET did not obtain detailed information about position descriptions of the administrative staff. that is effective in terms of organization, staffing levels and qualifications, and functions rigorously.

Compliance level: Partially compliant

ET recommendations:

- 1. Elaborate the particular regional dimension of the strategic plan of the branch and explain which priorities, projects and measures are intended to be implemented with relevant partners from the regional level.*
- 2. Provide concrete measures according to each objective (and sub-objectives)*
- 3. Develop a plan to ensure full academic autonomy of the Gjilan branch.*
- 4. Develop clear job descriptions for all staff groups and ensure access of all relevant stakeholders to these documents.*
- 5. Plan concrete collaboration projects with local and regional partners as key elements of the strategy and provide informative outlines of these projects and documentation of the projects through memoranda of understanding in accreditation documents.*

2.3. Financial planning and management

The assessment of financial resources dedicated to the Gjilan branch is difficult, since the College provided different financial plans which show serious mistakes and discrepancies.

The incomes of the financial plans are based on projections of student numbers disaggregated by study programs. As is shown in the SER (p. 56), the number of students for all four study programs is supposed to increase from 480 in 2022/23 up to 1754 in 2026/27. The college assumes an annual 10% dropout or postponement of studies until the third year of studies.



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However, the ET noticed that the increase of students from 2024/25 to 2025/26 is very low, i.e. 48, while in other periods the annual increase of total student number is between 338 and 448. The reason for this low increase in this particular period is not explained. However, the projected overall increase of student numbers seems to be ambitious, yet not unrealistic in particular when the lower figures of the financial plan of the annex are taken as a basis.

Serious difficulties in assessing the financial planning arise from wrong and discrepant calculations the college provided in the SER and in the annex. The tables on the projected incomes 2022-2027 in the SER contains wrong calculations of the sums of student fees for the study years 2023/4 to 2026/27. The corrected total incomes for these years are about 50% higher than shown in the table in the SER (p. 56). Consequently, the balances of these years would show much bigger profits. Another source of irritation is resulting from the discrepant financial plans: The financial forecast in the Annex “Budget Planning 2021-2024” deviates in certain respects from the financial plan in the SER, of which the most important is the underlying number of students. In the SER, it is 480 students for 2022/23, in the Annex it is 385; for 2023/24 it is 920 in the SER and 515 in the Annex. Obviously, these documents are based on different projections of student numbers. This Annex is based on a 3-year plan from 2021/22 to 2023/24, while the financial plan in the SER covers the period from 2022/23 to 2026/27.

In addition, there are mistakes in the calculation of staff costs in the Annex mentioned, too. For instance, the expenditures for 8 full time assistant professors in 2021/22 are the same as for 11 full time assistant professors in 2022/23. Also, the expenditures for research activities vary between the two documents: While in the SER, there are total research expenditures of Euro 60.384 in 2022/23 ad 76.441 in 2023/24, the corresponding figures in the Annex for 2023/23 are Euro 23.400 and for 2023/24 Euro 26.100. Basically, discrepancies occur in all cost categories.

It is emphasized in the SER (p. 55), that “the source of funding and financial position has been strengthened due to a constant and predictable pace of growth in student numbers, research projects, industry services, and donations”. The ET feels the need to question this statement, since no evidence about future research projects, industry services and donations could be obtained. Therefore, the figures in the financial plan must be regarded as estimations.



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Overall, in combination with differences in student numbers, incomes and total expenditures, the entire financial planning cannot be considered reliable and evidence-based. Among the information the ET missed most are concrete plans and measures backed with memoranda of understandings with relevant regional, national and international partners which would be essential to making the financial plan realistic.

Regarding the research budget, continuous growth is provisioned in the budget lines on research projects, showing an increase of incomes from research from Euro 15.000 in 2022/23 to Euro 101.250 in 2026/27, which is almost seven times more. Regarding research incomes, it remains unclear where these incomes (increased in the revised budget plan, too) really come from, since during the site visit the heads of the programs and the professors reported that mainly research projects for municipalities were done so far, but no research commissioned by business or industry. Therefore, it must be assumed that it is not realistic to assume that revenues generated from research will be very high. Other sources of income from research were not mentioned in the SER nor during the site visit.

Regarding the management of budgeting and accounting, the UBT college demonstrated realistic processes and responsibilities. From the SER and the information obtained from the management during the site visit, it can be assumed that an accurate monitoring of expenditures is implemented. The accounting system was explained in a general, yet comprehensible way. The division of labor between the UBT center and the Gjilan branch attributes relevant budgeting tasks to the branch manager in collaboration with the UBT center, while accounting is supposed to be done at the center level. Given the description of the responsibilities of the branch and the center, the branch manager is highly dependent on the provisions of the center, particularly on the approved budget plan. While it is reasonable from the UBT center's perspective to determine the branch's budget centrally, this might limit the branch managers and other executive officers at the branch level to act flexibly in order to respond to regional needs.

Compliance level: Partially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *Avoid mistakes in financial plans and avoid discrepancies between different financial plans.*



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- 2. Develop correct and evidence-based budget plans for each program and substantiate and explain eye-catching deviations in incomes and expenditures.*
- 3. Explain the specifics of the development of budget lines.*

2.4. Academic integrity, responsibility and public accountability

The institution has a formally adopted Code of Ethics through which the values of academic freedom, institutional autonomy and ethical integrity are defended from the administrative point of view. As such, it may be deemed that the institution maintains high standards of academic integrity as it requires all internal stakeholders to comply with the stipulations given. Given the feedback gained through the undertaken interviews, there are no reasons to believe the procedural framework set up to enforce the high standards of academic and business conduct is in any way inadequate or applicable to selected stakeholders or processes only.

The Ethics Committee acts as the most critical element of the academic integrity framework responsible for enforcing the standards of ethical behaviour as well as for promoting positive academic behaviour among students, academics and staff members. However, despite its pivotal role, in the interviews held, the interviewees have demonstrated a considerable degree of unfamiliarity with the structure of the committee stipulated in the corresponding UBT regulatory documents. Although this may be seen as minor oversight typical for research-driven and open minded business environments, it is still highly recommended the institution invests more efforts in sharing information on the UBT academic integrity framework thus bringing it closer to its beneficiaries and everyday use.

Taking into account typical sensitivity of any ethical misconduct, questions may indeed be raised as to whether high standards of academic conduct may be achieved by formalised procedures only. This is particularly important in environments with a rather traditional approach to many business and social paradigms of today's world. As such, even though the institution has clearly not been a subject of significant academic integrity breach, further efforts are needed to promote similar business conduct in the interested public.



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One approach in putting such efforts into practice may indeed be to speak openly about unethical behaviour and disclose information on the incidents occurred – at least in a diluted version – to the public. By doing so, the institution will for sure set an example and inspire many to come open on the incidents they might have been witnesses to. Indeed, the expert team recognises that a great majority of reports on UBT operations has been available online (eg. <https://www.ubt-uni.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Annual-report-of-the-Ethics-committee-for-the-academic-year-2020-21fin.pdf>), and appreciates fully the sensitivity of disclosing any such reports having to do with unethical behaviour, self-evaluation, student pass rates or similar. Nevertheless, public availability of such documentation, in addition to standard documentation describing UBT operations, will for sure provide important foundations for further merit-based growth.

Compliance level: Partially compliant

ET recommendations:

- 1. Make sure all the regulations governing the Ethics Committee are consistent as to the number of committee members.*
- 2. Promote ethical behaviour and kick-off awareness campaigns focused on the importance of academic integrity and plagiarism prevention. Include anti-plagiarism activities in study courses taught.*
- 3. Make reports on branch/UBT performance publicly available, including sensitive information on academic integrity breaches, self-evaluations and similar. The reports should reflect UBT's dedication to securing high standards of academic behaviour and hence should provide more information on the matter than mere statistics on incident occurrence.*

2.5. Quality management

UBT has designed a Quality Assurance Regulation. The Quality Assurance Regulation presented to the ET (in the English version) is dated back to 03.09.2020. However, the link presented on the UBT website in the section - Regulations and policies/ Quality Assurance Regulation leads to Quality Manual instead of Quality Assurance Regulation. Although it is not accessible from the central section “Regulations and policies”, a version of the UBT



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Quality Assurance Regulation that was presented during the evaluation in 2021 and dates back to 06.10.2020 is publicly available on UBT website.

In addition to the Quality Assurance Regulation, there is also a Quality Manual dated back to 03.09.2020 that is both available on the UBT website and was also presented to the ET. As pointed out already in 2021, there is some inconsistency in terminology as the Quality Assurance Regulation refers to Quality Manual several times and has a separate section on Quality Manual but it is not clear from the Regulation that Quality Manual is a separate document.

As indicated already in 2021 and still true given that the content of these two documents has not changed which is evident from the dates of the last update, the regulation complies with what has been required by the standard but it raises doubts on to what extent it is practically applicable. The Quality Assurance Regulation (with the related documentation) should be interlinked – it has to state what is the concept of quality, what are the general targets, what are the mechanisms that have to be in place in order to ensure that the targets can be reached (with regularity and the responsible structures) and what are the measures for assessing whether the targets are met.

Another point that is evident from the SER and was highlighted in 2021, is the struggle between separating the quality management system of an institution in general and the internal quality assurance system for quality of study process. In the SER UBT emphasises its compliance with ISO 9001:2015 and its successful certification against the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) framework as important achievements in the context of this evaluation. However, the linkage between the compliance with the above mentioned standards/frameworks and compliance with the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) that should be the main point of reference for higher education processes has not been presented.

The Quality Policy (or a Quality Assurance Regulation that includes Quality Policy) should be an overarching document that defines quality by UBT and sets the main targets. The quality management system itself could be based on either ISO or EFQM or other standards due to the fact that it integrates not only the quality of study process but also the other core and support processes, especially in the case of the large number of other functions performed by UBT. In addition to this, the principles for assuring quality of the study process have to be aligned with ESG. If using ISO 9001:2015, a special attention should be paid to its application to the study



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process as this standard was initially designed for manufacturing and production entities and therefore is not directly applicable to higher education institutions.

The Quality Manual, however, should be a practically applicable document which describes how the quality management system has to be implemented and should state specific procedures, their regularity and responsibilities for implementation in order to achieve the aforementioned targets.

The UBT Quality Assurance Regulation in Article 5 and also on page 18 refers to 7 areas identified in the ESG – 1) policy and procedures for quality assurance, 2) approval, monitoring and periodic review of study programmes, 3) assessment of students, 4) learning resources and student support, 5) quality assurance of teaching staff, 6) information systems and 7) public information. The regulation does not touch upon the teaching and learning process, student admission, progression and certification.

There is an inconsistency in the Quality Assurance Regulation. The Regulation states that the Annual Quality Report includes a summary of all areas listed in the Article 5 of the Regulation (1. Teaching, 2. Research, development and artistic activities, 3. International activities, 4. Libraries, reading facilities and publishing activities, 5. Investment and maintenance, rooms and equipment, 6. ICT, 7. Human resources, staff, 8. Student services, tutoring, student council and extracurricular activities/activities of interest) whereas these areas are not listed in Article 5 nor elsewhere in the Regulation.

UBT has developed an operational structure for management of quality assurance processes and the Quality Assurance Regulation and Quality Manual describes the responsibilities.

The structures involved in different quality assurance processes and listed in the Quality Regulation are the Rector, Dean, Academic Council, UBT Quality Assurance Committee, Faculty Council, Faculty Quality Assurance Sub-Committees, UBT Quality Assurance Office, and quality assurance officers (quality managers) from faculties and departments.

For UBT Gjilan a Quality Circle consisting of 5 members (two members of the academic staff, one representative of students, one representative of student services and one representative of industry) is foreseen. The academic staff representatives and the representative from student services have already been selected, the student and industry representatives still need to be appointed.



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The review panel, however, was confused about the actual composition of the Gjilan Quality Circle, as the UBT representative that announced himself as the chair of the Gjilan Quality Circle during the interviews is not included in the table presented in the SER. Also, while during the discussions it was confirmed that administrative staff for Gjilan is already established but all academic staff appointments are pending, the additional information on staff already employed at UBT Gjilan includes an impressive number of academic staff from several faculties but no administration representatives.

The ET should once again state that the arrangements for quality assurance at the branch level are not convincing, given that UBT Gjilan needs to be assessed as an independent and sustainable entity. Although a separate structure - Gjilan Quality Circle - that would cooperate with all the relevant Faculty Quality Assurance Sub-Committees is foreseen, it is not clear how issues which are not related to a certain study programme (meaning – not under the responsibility of one of the faculties) would be solved on the UBT Gjilan branch level. There is no specific budget allocated to ensuring the quality assurance function on the branch level, except the salaries for staff members included or foreseen in the organograms. Also, when referring to the Quality Committee in the SER, as requested by KAA criteria, UBT refers to the central UBT committee.

UBT makes use of several quality assurance tools, mostly reports and feedback tools. None of these tools are operational for the UBT Gjilan, as the study process in the branch is not yet going on. There are annual quality assurance reports produced by UBT and each faculty. When requested to provide examples of quality assurance reports produced by faculties that will offer studies at the UBT Gjilan, one report on staff evaluation in one of the faculties was provided. Although it is claimed in the SER, unfortunately, the ET does not have sufficient evidence to conclude that the other types of quality assurance reports (based on the evaluation of/feedback from students, staff, stakeholders) exist and to assess the quality of these reports. During the meetings with the representatives of the UBT central management it was evident that, overall, there is a process of analysing different performance indicators and that relevant corrective measures are considered. However, the ET could not confirm it for the UBT Gjilan or for programmes to be implemented at the UBT Gjilan.

It is said in the SER, that UBT Gjilan will be responsible for collecting data that will be submitted to the Quality Assurance Committee and Quality Manager who will ensure that the data have been collected and analysed correctly. The ET could not find any evidence that the UBT Gjilan would collect and analyse any data independently. This is especially important in



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regard to overall processes in the branch that would not be managed at the level of any of the specific faculties.

The ET did not request templates for different surveys as they were provided during the 2021 evaluation and the SER did not document any changes to these templates. Therefore, the ET still upholds the opinion that the previously presented survey template for stakeholders is very general and that UBT would benefit from a more constructive written feedback if the form was designed separately for graduates and separately for employers. The ET also suggests that the survey templates are in the future attached to the Quality Manual as a part of it.

Compliance level: Partially compliant

ET recommendations:

- 1. To review the information published on the UBT website in regard to Quality Assurance Regulation and Quality Manual*
- 2. To revise the Quality Assurance Regulation and Quality Manual in order to interlink them*
- 3. To ensure that all areas covered by ESG are reflected in the UBT quality assurance arrangements - both in the documentation and mechanisms*
- 4. To re-think the organisation of quality assurance processes in UBT Gjilan to make sure that there is an effective mechanism for solving those issues arising on the branch level that do not fall under the responsibility of a certain faculty*
- 5. To clarify the role and responsibilities of branches, in particular the Gjilan branch, in the overall quality assurance system of UBT*

2.6. Learning and teaching

The SER outlines general policies regarding the study programs offered at UBT. No specific policies related to study programs to be implemented at the UBT Gjilan branch were presented. The ET was told that the learning and teaching approach would follow the general principles approved at UBT and depend on the specific study programmes that are planned to be implemented at UBT Gjilan.



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The policies and processes currently established at UBT concentrate on formal arrangements (number of credit points to be allocated to certain components, structure of curriculum, division of responsibilities between the subject leaders and other teachers etc.) rather than on strategic objectives for teaching and learning.

The review panel was told and also the SAR states that the curricula would be improved based on the initiative of the teaching staff and on feedback from the labour market, students and alumni. This issue is especially important given the strategic positioning of the UBT Gjilan branch by the UBT and the claim of UBT that the study programmes offered at the Gjilan branch would be tailored to the specific needs of the region and thus different from the ones offered at UBT in Prishtina. Although some representatives of the teaching staff said that the programme outlines for the UBT Gjilan and the relevant course descriptions, including the teaching and learning methods, have already been developed, the others were not aware of the current stage of developments. It was also not clear how exactly the academic staff would cooperate with the labour market representatives in designing the content and methods for teaching. The ET learned that there is an Industry Advisory Board on the level of UBT and on the level of UBT Gjilan but did not learn of any practical activities related to development of study programmes.

While it was evident from the quality assurance arrangements that the satisfaction surveys for students take place, it was not clear to what extent they are taken into account when reviewing the curricula. Following the request for quality assurance reports for the study programmes to be implemented at the UBT Gjilan, the ET received an example of the report produced based on the student satisfaction with the teaching staff and the subjects taught by them.

The report received by the expert team contained some statistical information and quotations from students but no identification and reflection of issues in teaching and no conclusions about potential improvements of teaching concepts and teaching. As indicated by the ET already in 2021, the reports include lots of data but less evidence about the practical deployment of particular standards and criteria of teaching quality, nor are there conclusions drawn for purposes of improvement of teaching. However, the ET would like to point out that the feedback from the students was very positive, meaning the students are in general satisfied with the quality of teaching process and staff. The specific feedback provided in the form of comments also indicates that a number of elements characteristic to the student-centered learning and teaching process are present at UBT, at least at the faculty for which the report



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was produced. However, as mentioned above, the descriptive nature of these reports and lack of any analysis and reflection from the UBT side does not allow the ET to conclude that these results are analysed against the overall teaching and learning strategy of UBT.

While the ET has to admit that policies and processes do exist, it is the link between data gathering, assessing results, drawing conclusions for improvement of programmes and teaching and linking improvements at the program level via quality assurance processes with strategy development that is missing.

The ET also was not fully convinced about the exact composition of the teaching staff that will be employed at the UBT Gjilan branch. During the interviews, the ET was told that, as there is no study process in the branch, only the branch administration is operational at this point. However, in the additional information UBT presented a significant number of academic staff members who are already employed at the UBT Gjilan. No information on the specific study programmes or subjects that will be taught by these staff members was provided. Therefore, it is difficult for the ET to assess the qualification of the academic staff against the study courses that they will be teaching.

Compliance level: Partially compliant

ET recommendations:

- 1. Revise the relationship between strategic teaching objectives and the overall learning outcomes at the program level aiming at a good balance between skills relevant for the labour market and cross-sectional skills in order to improve the students' position in the labour market.*
- 2. Develop and implement a system of standards and criteria for evidence-based monitoring of teaching quality based on up-to-date teaching concepts.*
- 3. Develop an academic training program on a regular basis for teaching staff and administrative staff with priorities on continuous improvement of teaching skills based on up-to-date teaching concepts.*



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2.7. Research

The College provided a distinct “UBT Branch in Gjilan Research Strategy”. As is stated in the Research Strategy of the UBT Branch in Gjilan, the College intends to do research activities categorized in four areas respectively levels of research (p. 11):

- Applied Research: Using the ICT in Health Care System, Energy Efficiency, Managing Industrial/Enterprise Zones in Kosovo, Media, City Planning, PM
- Opinion Research: Quality Product/Service Perception, FDI, Diaspora, etc.
- Basic Research: Intelligent Systems, Robotics, Innovation, Transportations and Logistics, Complex Systems Design and Management
- Education Research: University Management Models, University – Industry Cooperation's, Curriculum Developments, Learning Outcomes, Capacity Building and Quality Assurance, Knowledge Management, etc.

A few sections later, “key strategic research goals” (p. 6f.) are defined. Most of these are formulated in a way which would fit every academic context and only the last of these key strategic research goals addresses the regional level, but only very general, i.e. “to have active engagement with a number of key strategic partners from across the Region, Europe and the world” (p. 7).

As mentioned before, this list does not contain any reference to agriculture and food science, which is mentioned as a predominant field of activities in the general strategy.

Overall, the College formulated one strategic objective where research is explicitly mentioned (see Research Strategy, p. 5): “Developing Research, Innovation and Social Responsibility - Offer innovative ways for learners, spin-in and spin-out companies as well as external clients to engage with enterprise supports and applied research, thus creating new knowledge and new employment”.

It is striking that, although the Research Strategy does contain research priorities, they are not aligned to a timeline of any kind. Indeed, the Research Strategy contains a list of 131 research priorities “at the departmental level” which are subdivided into four research fields already mentioned before, and which, as can be assumed, shall govern the research activities at the Gjilan branch thematically. The research strategy does not contain short- and medium-term targets, either. Regarding infrastructure which shall be used for research in Gjilan, the Research Strategy also names 9 research institutes, 11 Centers of Excellence, and 103 laboratories which



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all seem to be operated by the central organization. No information was provided which of these institutes, centers and laboratories will be relevant for the Gjilan branch, nor is there information how these sub-units will be connected with particular research priorities and, most important, which regional priorities are defined which will govern the research activities in Gjilan. As a consequence, there are no research priorities which could be attributed to short- and medium-term targets.

Although the College emphasizes that it is aware “that realizing these objectives in an environment characterized by insufficient resource requires the urgent implementation of a sustained program of radical action” (p. 7), the action points highlighted in the Research Strategy contain only a number of general provisions – e.g. “create a positive research environment to maximize the potential of staff” or “maximize performance in future research assessments” - but no concrete measures which would explain what is concretely planned at the Gjilan branch. In the following sections, research actions such as the development of several numbers bachelor theses and research projects disaggregated by sectors and sub-sectors are mentioned. Also here, it is interesting that in this overview agriculture and food science are not addressed at all.

A certain discrepancy arises between research objectives which are formulated as ambitious, though very general, and the provisions for concrete research activities. In the Research Strategy, the College mentions 100 bachelor theses and 34 research projects in 11 research fields which shall be accomplished, yet without providing a concrete timeframe for implementation of this sort of research program (p. 7f.). Here, the ET misses a clear attribution of these research activities to research priorities as well as programs which shall be established at the Gjilan branch.

Regarding publications, there is no information about the number of publications of the staff foreseen to work at the Gjilan branch nor is there information which conduct of good scientific practices is governing research at the strategic and at the practical branch level. The projects which are cited as examples for international cooperation in research in the research strategy are mainly projects concentrating on capacity building, teaching, student and staff mobility and other areas, without significant links to research.

Last, not least, one of the most irritating issues is the fact that during the site visit no convincing information was given how the research strategy would be implemented at the Gjilan branch and which concrete research activities this would comprehend. The SER and the Research



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Strategy of the College contains important elements which are needed to draft a concrete research plan, however, there are serious discrepancies in how the various deliberations fit together in a coherent way. This would also require a coherent academic staff development plan at the branch level which covers a broad range of measures ranging from research management skills to highly specialized skills in distinct research methodologies. However, in the documents available for the expert team no such information could be obtained. No information was provided on the publication activities of the staff envisaged to work at the Gjilan branch.

As a consequence, the Research Strategy contains many interesting ideas, however, it cannot be regarded as a coherent strategy, since many statements are declarations of intent without aligning research priorities and activities to the particular needs of the region in a concrete and coherent way.

Compliance level: Partially compliant

ET recommendations:

- 1. Revise and make the research strategy coherent by defining regional research priorities and aligning them with concrete collaborative RD projects in the region, with a realistic action plan and indicators for monitoring implementation of the research strategy.*
- 2. Develop quality indicators which allow rigorous assessment of research performance at the branch level.*
- 3. Develop a staff development program for the staff foreseen for the branch with a clear focus on research management skills and skills needed for collaborative R&D with stakeholders at the regional level.*

2.8. Staff, employment processes and professional development

The working relations at the Gjilan branch follow the central regulations of the UBT College. These are: The statute, the Regulation on labor relations and responsibilities for working duties, and the Handbook for academic staff. The statute provides the rules for hiring academic staff, as well as their promotion procedure (articles 49 and 50). It also covers basic requirements for academic positions. The procedure of academic staff appointment was not presented as an



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official document. The second document regulates employment relations in the institution for both academic and administrative staff. The Handbook for academic staff explains the scope of work of different organizational units, main steps in organizing the teaching process, main responsibilities of the academic staff throughout the teaching period, exam administration, student evaluation, student plagiarism, academic staff's assessment by students. The information that those documents contain is informative, however it misses three crucial parts. First, academic integrity is not mentioned and main documents and mechanisms of ensuring ethical behavior were not provided. Second, while SER explains that the UBT designed different kinds of assessment tools for the academic staff, only student assessment is mentioned here. Third, no mention of professional development possibilities.

While academic personnel receive a handbook to help orient themselves at the workplace, no similar handbook for the administrative staff was presented.

Upon request of the ET, the College provided a list of administrative staff and academic staff already employed at the Gjilan branch. According to these lists, 21 members of administrative and managerial staff is already employed full-time at the Gjilan branch and 35 academic staff members are employed at the Gjilan branch full-time, too.

Standard 8.2 could not be assessed, as most of the academic staff recruited at the Gjilan branch have already been employed by UBT. In other words, they have been transferred to the Gjilan branch. Additionally, three academic staff were transferred from the Arberi College (which seems to be the parent institution and serves as the bases for the Gjilan branch). It is also unclear how administrative staff were recruited. Recruitment of the manager of the branch also lacks transparency. No job descriptions were presented

No official information on the workload of the academic staff was submitted to the ET, so no verifiable information about the relation between teaching, research and administrative duties of the academic staff members could be obtained. Also, contrary to what is stated in the SER (p. 140) no list of CVs or CVs themselves were submitted.

No verifiable information was submitted to the ET about the student-faculty ratio at Gjilan branch. In the SER it is stated that a ratio of 30:1 for full expansion of the branch will be achieved, however, since there was no information on the full-time academic staff provisioned for the branch, the ET was unable to examine this information.



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As already mentioned, UBT has well-functioning processes for information gathering to assess teaching responsibilities and quality on regular bases. This system comprises several processes such as student evaluations as well as evaluations by the Dean. Assessment of research productivity is also done by the Research Department. Based on the interviews and the documentation provided, it is clear that this data gathering exercise is not always translated into analytical results and decision-making in order to develop a coherent program of staff development. This was substantiated by the “Description of the onboarding training program of new academic staff” which the college submitted as an additional document upon request of the ET. This document was in fact the program of one staff training which was held in March 2021 and lasted for three hours and where 31 topics were presented or discussed. Hence, it becomes clear that no evidence for a systematic process of staff development was presented. Overall, the staff development policy fails to provide concrete methodology for gap analyses, criteria for performance assessment and institution’s approach in addressing those gaps.

Compliance level: Partially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *Revise the Handbook for Academic Staff and include i) section on academic integrity , ii) section describing performance assessment tools and processes for academic staff iii) section describing professional development programme.*
2. *Create a handbook for administrative staff.*
3. *Develop a coherent and evidence-based programme for academic staff development clearly differentiating between teaching and research skills.*
4. *Develop a systematic regulation on academic promotion based on reliable and differentiated concepts of achievements in teaching and research.*
5. *Provide all relevant documents or access to relevant documents for the purpose of accreditation in English language.*



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2.9. Student administration and support services

UBT follows the general student application procedure that is defined on the national level in Kosovo. The SER states that there is the Academic Council Regulation on Undergraduate and Graduate Admission. There is also an entrance examination that is organised by the Commission for the Entrance Examination appointed by the Faculty Council.

As the study programmes in UBT Gjilan branch are not operating yet, there is no information on application of the admission procedure and criteria there. The regulations also do not state any specific responsibilities of the branches in the admission process. Also, the information available on the UBT Gjilan staff members does not include any references in regard to their responsibility for student admission. Therefore, the experts assume that the admission procedure in UBT Gjilan would be implemented the same way as in UBT in general but do not have any evidence of this.

The information available on the UBT website states that the UBT Gjilan would offer studies in four fields - Information and Communications Technology, Management, Business and Economics, Nursing and Public Health, Food Science and Technology. No specific study programmes have yet been advertised. The information on the Gjilan branch also includes a disclaimer that the branch is currently undergoing the accreditation process. The SER lists the general arrangements in UBT that are used for providing information on all study programs at UBT.

The SER states that the induction session is a general policy of UBT and that the Branch Director and Program Coordinators deliver the induction session and the Student Handbook is distributed at this session in the UBT Gjilan branch. While the SER uses present tense, the ET assumes that this would happen once the branch is operational as currently the study programmes are not carried out there.

In the SER, UBT has listed several types of scholarships - merit-based scholarships, tuition reduction scheme for vulnerable groups and work and study scheme. According to the SER, scholarships are allocated on the central level, also for the students in branches. The SER states that if several students who meet the same criteria apply for the same scholarship, then knowledge of the local community context in the areas offered in the branch will be considered and would be assessed by the program coordinator and branch director. As the scholarship instructions apply to the whole UBT and there is no disclaimer about certain branches or



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branches at all, the ET was not convinced about the actual application of this mechanism for Gjilan students.

The SER states that there is a periodic evaluation of each study programme which is performed by a specially designed self-assessment group consisting of different stakeholders. The section also demonstrates the UBT Indicator Framework 2022 - 2025 that includes a number of targets related to students (intake, international students, share of male/female students etc.). However, it is not clear how they are related to this periodic self-evaluation process and who is in charge of collecting and analysing these data. At present there are also no such data for the UBT Gjilan branch and the process of conducting self-evaluation at UBT Gjilan branch is not clear.

The UBT Quality Assurance Regulation states that the faculties monitor the implementation of the study programmes and the self-evaluation is mainly related to external evaluation and based on criteria, adopted by the Kosovo Accreditation Agency. The Annual Quality Reports of study programmes provide some statistics but they are not related to the process and outcome indicators mentioned above.

Based on this, the ET can conclude that there is general evidence of data collection in UBT but their alignment with strategic goals and use for quality assurance purposes in a targeted way is not always clear. Also the exact place of branches in this process, except the responsibility to collect data, is not clear.

There is a Student Quality Handbook in UBT that, overall, covers a wide range of relevant information. The handbook is said to be updated every year but the version provided to the ET dates back to 2020. As noted by the ET in 2021, the handbook does not include any information about student representation (possibilities, contacts) or references to the UBT Student Council and its role. The handbook also does not include any information on academic integrity and any social services available to students (library, culture, sports etc.). There is no general information on UBT as well.

The handbook has clearly been designed for the students of UBT Prishtina, therefore the handbook does not provide sufficient guidance and clarity on what structures and services available on the branch level and what would be the division of responsibilities between the UBT Prishtina, the respective faculty and branch.

The SER (p.107) refers to the Student Appeals Procedure which is not published on the UBT website and was not provided to the experts. There is also a Procedure of Complaints which is announced on the UBT website but not publicly available. In addition, there is a Regulation



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for Student Assessment which is published on the UBT website but does not refer to the appeals process.

The information on appeals that is provided in the SER is very general. The Student Handbook states that the objection to the grade has to be submitted to the head of the respective program within two days (48 hours) after the notification and / or publication of the grade. The appeals process described in the Student Handbook does not raise any concerns as such but there is no evidence of its application and it cannot be checked as the UBT Gjilan is not operational yet. There is also no information on any separate body that would deal with complaints in the UBT Gjilan.

The UBT has developed the Code of Ethics and the issues related to academic integrity are analysed in detail in section 2.4 of this report. However, the ET could not find any references to this in the Student Handbook therefore the ET questions the level to which the newly enrolled students are made aware of the ethical issues.

From the UBT website the ET learned that for the UBT Gjilan there would be a division for Student services that would cover the following functions - Admission Services, Career Services, Examination, Student counseling, Student scholarships. However, the section of SER related to the effectiveness and relevance of student services is very poor and does not cover the essence of this standard therefore the ET could not assess the extent to which the above mentioned would be operational in Gjilan. The SER also states that the Student Support Officer would be responsible for handling student administrative matters and that there would be a tutorial system to provide advice and support to students on study plan issues and learning support. However, from this information and the responsibilities of the different divisions planned for the UBT Gjilan, the ET could not conclude whether any other type of support, except academic and career tutoring would be available for students in Gjilan or is available anywhere in UBT.

In regard to the extracurricular activities, UBT in the SER announces a number of activities that would be available for the UBT Gjilan students - teaching and sports competitions, tours, exhibitions, cultural events - career week, library week, movie night, parties and other leisure activities. The SER also states that the UBT Gjilan will organize various exhibitions on the national and international level. UBT does not refer to the activities of Student Council or any other interest clubs under this standard. Also, the ET is of the opinion that the intention to organise international exhibitions in Gjilan is a bit too declarative and ambitious and it is not



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what would be expected from a branch as an essence of this standard. Rather, a service to community and close cooperation with the Gjilan community, as well as full integration of the Gjilan branch students in the activities already organised by UBT would be expected.

Compliance level: Partially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *To ensure that accurate and complete information related to the student administration and support in the UBT Gjilan branch is published on the UBT website and accessible also from the UBT Gjilan page.*
2. *To revise the Student Handbook in cooperation with the UBT Student Council to ensure that it covers all matters that are important for students and provides clear instructions that can be applicable to any UBT student, including the students of UBT Gjilan branch.*
3. *In case it is not possible to provide all the necessary information in the UBT Student Handbook, develop a special annex to the Student Handbook for UBT Gjilan.*
4. *To ensure that the periodic evaluation of each study programme is aligned with the UBT institutional targets and serves for internal development process.*
5. *To survey students on the accessibility and quality of student services and use the results for monitoring and adjusting the range of services and their quality.*
6. *To clearly identify the support needs for students in UBT Gjilan branch (in addition to academic mentoring and career support) and ensure relevant services*
7. *To pay more attention to systematic development and advertising of extracurricular activities and ensuring them for the UBT Gjilan branch*



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2.10. Learning resources and facilities

The UBT is a privately funded institution and as such its financial stability relies exclusively on self-generated income. From both the SER and the feedback collected, it is obvious that the majority of the income comes from the tuition fees hence special care would be expected to be given to adequate financial planning. However, as argued earlier in Section 2.3, from the data presented and feedback collected better financial planning should have taken place. Interestingly, similar concerns regarding the unsubstantiated financial planning were raised in the previous institutional evaluation.

Due to travel restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic the assessment process did not include a site visit to the Gjilan branch premises. The evaluation of the physical infrastructure has therefore been based solely on feedbacks from online interviews coupled with document and video material consultation. Although this has not had any influence on the objectiveness of the assessments made, nevertheless the process has still been somewhat hindered by the inability to undertake physical inspection of the facilities and operational procedures.

The proposed branch will be a part of the UBT ecosystem. As such, and given that it is more than clear that entire UBT has been run and managed in a corporate-like culture, it is reasonable to expect same infrastructural standards to be applied throughout the institution. Hence, adequate resource availability is to be expected in the Gjilan branch too.

The video material provided, illustrating key learning facilities at the branch, suggests the branch features solid library facilities. The adequacy of the library and the book fund is however difficult to be assessed given that it needs to be correlated with the number of students enrolled. Furthermore, given that the institution is yet to undergo the study programme evaluation process, it is virtually impossible to assess the adequacy of the bibliographic fund without knowing details of the study programmes expected to be taught. Nevertheless, given the corporate-driven culture explained above, it is reasonable to expect adequate bibliographic resources will be provided once the branch starts its regular operations in addition to the online sources that are already available.

Even though the branch premises could not have been inspected physically, the expert team did not find any grounds to dispute claims provided in the SER regarding the library associated resources such as the library management software and similar. According to the SER, the



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library operations will be managed using the Koha open-source library system which, according to publicly available sources, contains all core library modules for cataloguing, managing circulations, reporting and others, and hence should be able to underpin all aspects of library operations. It needs to be said however that it would be somewhat expected that the same software solution has already been well proven in practice in other UBT branches, hence concrete proofs of effective Koha operations as well as proofs on UBT's own capacities to manage an open-source software such as Koha could have been given. Nevertheless, even though no such feedback has been provided, the expert team operates under the assumption that effective library operations in the branch will be facilitated by using best UBT practices and capacities from elsewhere.

Given the information provided in the video material supplied, it may be deemed that the branch features clean, attractive and well-maintained physical infrastructure which – judging by similar experiences from elsewhere – are more than likely to meet all relevant health and safety standards mandated by the corresponding Kosovo legislation. It must be said though that, given the claimed focus on technology related disciplines such as food technology, no evidence has been provided the branch will feature adequate laboratory facilities necessary to reach the academic and research excellence the UBT as a whole is aspiring to. Indeed, the SER does address this issue by suggesting the branch will secure all relevant laboratory infrastructure through cooperation with other branches in addition to its own capacities, nevertheless this undermines the very reasoning for setting up the branch in Gjilan. Equally so, despite that the branch is yet to undergo corresponding study programme accreditation, it would be somewhat expected a concrete roadmap on planned infrastructure investments is able to be presented even at this stage of the branch setting up process. The expert team fully appreciates that some financial planning has been done in this regard and, according to the SER (p57), more than €900.000 is expected to be invested in capital assets and research until 2027. Nevertheless, no concrete details have been presented on how much of the planned sum is expected to be invested in the facilities only, and in which laboratory equipment in particular. This, coupled with the doubts on financial planning discussed earlier in Section 2.3 leave a lot of uncertainty as to branch's expected capacities to facilitate the learning outcomes and programme objectives set.

The UBT Quality Regulation document suggests concrete QA procedures aimed at making sure facilities are regularly inspected to keep high standards of facility management are in



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place. This, however, has not been clearly visible in the referenced documentation. Thus, for instance, even though the SER suggests the UBT Quality Manual defines that “...procedures related to the audit of lecture rooms (are) carried out during winter and summer breaks to allow repairs, adjustment and optimal conditions for the learning process...”, no such reference could have been found in the document.

Although it is beyond any doubt that UBT as an organisations pays special attention to securing state-of-the-art facilities in its campuses and branches, from the video material made available, UBT web site and the SER, it is not entirely evident the institution has secured quality physical infrastructure and equipment dedicated to students and staff with special needs such as text-to-speech aids, floor guidance for visually impaired people, access ramps, dedicated lavatories and others.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

- 1. Define a roadmap on planned infrastructure developments needed to facilitate targeted study programmes and research accomplishments of the branch.*
- 2. Update the Quality Manual such that it defines exact procedures aimed at securing high standards of facility management.*

2.11. Institutional cooperation

UBT’s focus on international cooperation may clearly be seen from both the corresponding internal regulations and everyday practice. As a result, the institution as a whole prides itself to have been cooperating with an extended list of institutions from Kosovo and abroad as shown in the APPENDIX 11.3. Institutional Cooperation document provided. Even though it is beyond any doubt such an achievement should be complimented for, it remains unclear to which extent the institution actually benefits from these collaborations. Given the sheer number of partners, it is reasonable to assume immense efforts are required to be invested in various forms of partner management undertaking, hence it would be business savvy to validate these



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efforts against the outputs coming from exercising a given partnership. Equally so, concerns are likely to be made suggesting the majority of listed partnerships have not been a part of a well thought off strategy but rather a consequence of mere arbitrary undertaking of interested individuals. Indeed, internationalisation as a term exists in many UBT strategic documents (eg. The UBT Research Strategy available online at <https://www.ubt-uni.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/UBT-Research-Strategy.pdf>), however none of these documents provides information on UBT's strongholds which would suggest portfolio of services and UBT capacities any cooperation would be benefiting from. Moreover, even though the evaluated branch is indeed in a position to fully benefit from the partnerships made by the mother institution, it remains unclear which of the partnerships listed are likely to most benefit the branch, neither in what concrete capacity nor why.

Given the number of partnerships made, it was virtually impossible for the expert team to assess content of each individual contractual documents. Nevertheless, given the UBT's reputation and a business-driven way of conduct, it is reasonable to expect expectations from all the partners involved are contracted accordingly.

As has been the case with evaluating branch compliance with some of the standards discussed earlier, the evaluated branch is yet to start its regular operations and as such has still not been a part of any international projects, event organising or similar academic undertaking. Nevertheless, taking into account the capacities and experiences of the academic team that will be leading the branch operations, as well as the experiences accumulated by other members of the UBT group of institutions, there are no reasons to assume similar positive practice would not be exercised in Gjinal too once the branch reaches its full operational capability.

Various UBT regulations include clauses on staff developments procedures leaving an impression that building own human resource capacities is highly valued across the entire UBT. An example of such regulation is the UBT Staff Development Policy provided in the "Appendix 5 - UBT Staff Development Policy" document. However, it remains unclear how concretely is individual engagement in international cooperation, professional bodies, liaising with community or public awareness campaigns are credited in the staff professional advancement process.

Although the branch undisputedly enjoys support from some of the key industry members from the Gjilan region, this support is mostly given in an arbitrary and unformalized way. Moreover,



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despite the obvious support, the interviewed employer representatives suggested their participation in analysing the branch setup business case was rather rudimentary and providing basic “who’s in favour vs. who’s against” feedbacks only. For an institution that prides itself with its dedication to argument-based thinking and doing, it was rather surprising to get a feedback from the interviews held that no significant employer and market surveys on the current vacancies and labour market trends had preceded the branch institutional evaluation process. The same stands for seeking the corresponding feedback from the UBT Alumni network. The expert team fully appreciates the fact that the branch is yet to enrol its first students and as such the corresponding Alumni network is yet to be established. Nevertheless, given that in the entire institutional evaluation process the UBT representatives have continuously been using alleged negative experiences of the locals regarding studying and working away from Gjilan as an important reasoning for setting up the local branch, it is rather unclear how come that no formal feedbacks had been requested from UBT aluminises to substantiate such claims.

Compliance level: Partially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *Define target institutions critical for meeting the key academic and research objectives of the branch and, if needed, adjust the existing contractual documents such that to reflect on these expectations.*
2. *Define clearly in which concrete ways a staff member would be credited for initiating and/or taking part in internationally recognised academic/research undertaking.*
3. *Set up the branch advisory board such that to reflect both local needs, as well as wider national or international context. For an institution claimed to have been dedicated to providing state-of-the-art 21st century outputs, actions focused solely on a relatively small geography are more than likely to act as an impeding rather than important contributing factor in reaching these goals.*



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3. OVERALL EVALUATION AND JUDGEMENTS OF THE ET

As shown above the compliance levels per general areas are:

General area (from the KAA manual)	Compliance level
1. Public mission and institutional objectives	Partially compliant
2. Strategic planning, governance and administration	Partially compliant
3. Financial planning and management	Partially compliant
4. Academic integrity, responsibility and public accountability	Partially compliant
5. Quality management	Partially compliant
6. Learning and teaching	Partially compliant
7. Research	Partially compliant
8. Staff, employment processes and professional development	Partially compliant
9. Student administration and support services	Partially compliant
10. Learning resources and facilities	Substantially compliant
11. Institutional cooperation	Partially compliant

*The expert team considers that UBT College Gjilan Branch is “Partially compliant” with the standards included in the KAA Accreditation manual and, therefore, recommends **not to accredit** the institution for now. The present report suggested a series of relevant recommendations that would bring the college closer to the KAA standards and these should be implemented by the college before another future request of accreditation is made.*




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Expert Team

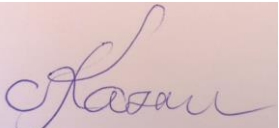
Chair

	Dr. Dietmar Paier	08.04.2022
(Signature)	(Print Name)	(Date)

Member

	Dr. Dražen Vrhovski	09.04.2022
(Signature)	(Print Name)	(Date)

Member

	Asnate Kazoka, MA	08.04.2022
(Signature)	(Print Name)	(Date)
