



Republika e Kosovës
Republika Kosova - Republic of Kosovo
Agjencia e Kosovës për Akreditim
Agencija Kosova za Akreditaciju
Kosovo Accreditation Agency



UBT College, Gjilan branch

INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION

REPORT OF THE EXPERT TEAM

March 2023
Vienna-Bucharest-Lüneburg

1

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	2
1. INTRODUCTION	3
1.1. Context	3
1.2. Site visit schedule	4
1.3. A brief overview of the institution under evaluation	4
2. INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION	6
2.1. Public mission and institutional objectives	6
2.2. Strategic planning, governance and administration	10
2.3. Financial planning and management	13
2.4. Academic integrity, responsibility and public accountability	15
2.5. Quality management	18
2.6. Learning and teaching	22
2.7. Research	24
2.8. Staff, employment processes and professional development	28
2.9. Student administration and support services	31
2.10. Learning resources and facilities	35
2.11. Institutional cooperation	37
3. OVERALL EVALUATION AND JUDGEMENTS OF THE ET	40
4. AMENDMENT: Feedback and clarification of the ET on the comments of UBT College on the draft report	42

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Context

Date of site visit: February 21, 2023

Expert Team (ET) members:

- *Dr. Dietmar Paier*
- *Prof. dr. habil. Anca Greere*
- *Christopher Bohrens, Student expert*

Coordinators from Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA):

- *Naim Gashi, Director of KAA*
- *Leona Kovaçi, KAA Officer*

Sources of information for the Report:

- *Self-Evaluation Report (SER) submitted by UBT*
- *Information obtained during the site visit in meetings with the management of the institution, teaching and administrative staff, students, graduates, external stakeholders and employers of graduates*
- *General strategy and work plan of the College*
- *Research strategy*
- *Website of UBT College*
- *Visits of on-site facilities*
- *Statute of the College*
- *Code of ethics*
- *Various regulations governing administrative processes, teaching, and assessments*
- *Additional documents requested by the expert team*

Criteria used for institutional and program evaluations

- *Standards for institutional evaluation as outlined in the Accreditation Manual 2022 of the KAA*

1.2. Site visit schedule

Time	Meeting
09:30 – 11:00	Meeting with the management of the institution (<i>no slide presentation is allowed, the meeting is intended as a free discussion</i>)
11:05 – 12:05	Meeting with: 1. Quality assurance representatives 2. Administrative services
12:10 – 13:10	Meeting with Deans of Faculties (Head of programmes in case of smaller colleges)
13:10 – 14:10	Lunch break (to be provided at the evaluation site)
14:10 – 14:40	Visiting tour of the facilities and infrastructure
14:40 – 15:30	Meeting with teaching staff
15:40 – 16:30	Meeting with employers of graduates and external stakeholders
16:30 – 16:40	Internal meeting – Expert Team and KAA
16:20 – 16:30	Closing meeting with the management of the institution

1.3. A brief overview of the institution under evaluation

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 100 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.

UBT College was built on the experience of the Institute of Enterprise Engineering and Management (IEME) since 2001. The College was licensed to operate as a private bearer of higher education by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.

The philosophy of the institution has been to offer competitive education programs that would base teaching on labor market demands and international practices. UBT student orientation is balanced between three broad areas: (1) ICT, mathematics, and natural science, (2) Engineering, manufacturing, and construction, and (3) social and humanity Science.

The UBT Gjilan branch is not operational yet, because of the failed institutional accreditation from KAA two times. Some other branches also do not have institutional accreditation from the KAA.

The UBT Branch in Gjilan aims at becoming a preeminent center of intellectual and cultural activity in Kosovo's Eastern Region, improving the region's quality of life through the skills, knowledge, experience and engagement of its faculty, staff, students and alumni. The UBT College operates at the following locations: Prishtina, Lipjan, Prizren, Ferizaj, Peja and Vienna/Austria and Budapest/Hungary.

The UBT Branch in Gjilan aims operating particularly in the following fields: Information and Communications Technology (ICT); Management, Business and Economics (MBE); Nursing and Public Health (NPH); Agriculture and Food Science and Biotechnology (FST);

The UBT Gjilan branch underwent its previous external evaluation in 2022 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 2022.

As of the plans that have been discussed the UBT Giljan plans to enroll 530 students in the first year (2023/24), then up to 1.007 students in the second year and in the year of 2026/27 up to 1.436 students.

2. INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION

The institutional evaluation consists of 11 sub headings (areas) through which the administration, organization 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 SER (p. 3) indicates that the mission of the UBT Branch in Gjilan is to offer a dynamic and innovative 21 century academic environment in Kosovo's Eastern Region, while also aiming to provide a supportive and challenging opportunity for the students, faculty and staff in participatory and self-governance setting. This same text is repeated on p. 17 of the SER and on the website, with the website also indicating the following under Mission: "The UBT College Branch in Gjilan will apply excellence in teaching, learning, and research within a comprehensive, student-oriented environment to foster graduates or to encourage graduates to advance their leadership role in business, professions, industry, public service, and society in the country and particularly in the Eastern part of Kosovo, Anamorava." The Strategic Plan (Annex 4) indicates: "Following one of UBT's main policy for regionalization, the UBT Gjilan Branch's Mission is to offer a dynamic and innovative 21 century academic environment in Kosovo's Eastern Region. It also aims at providing a supportive and challenging opportunity for the students, faculty and staff in participatory and self-governance setting. Building on an approach of teamwork between Students, faculty, staff and administrators, UBT Gjilan Branch is committed to enhance its participation as an active member of community by providing learning opportunities driven by teaching and research excellence, intellectual interaction and creativity. UBT Gjilan Branch aims at becoming a preeminent centre of intellectual and cultural activity in Kosovo's Eastern Region, improving the region's quality of life through the skills, knowledge, experience and engagement of its faculty, staff, students and alumni. UBT Gjilan Branch will be a leading contributor to the growth, and strategic development of Kosovo's Eastern Region. It will serve the region, by preparing leaders for the 21st century with a global outlook and the skills needed for educational, social, economic, political, environmental and cultural advancement."

The ET thus observes that the branch does not benefit from a clear mission statement and one which can explicitly highlight the three pillars: teaching, research and community service. There is oscillation between the elements which need to constitute priorities for the branch.

The ET appreciates that there is emphasis on regional development and support; however, it fails to understand how the three pillars are relevantly communicated to the stakeholders and notes that there is a risk to strategic and operational activities where a mission statement is not explicit for stakeholders to refer to in a unified manner. Additionally, the paraphrasing employed oscillates in placing focus which is sometimes on the regional, sometimes on the excellence. As such the ET concludes that there is no formally adopted mission statement which is uniquely communicated to the stakeholders of the branch to ensure clarity on focus for action. This poses a high risk to strategic and operational management. Whereas the words representing the three pillars are used in the various formulations, the mission as presented across the documentation is not defined and cannot serve as a unique point of reference for all stakeholders of the branch.

The ET probed into the elements of the mission during the review visit to ascertain the level to which this is understood and made use of by a variety of stakeholders. Whereas the ET appreciates that a mission is an institution's own to develop and adopt and that particular terms may be given a contextually appropriate interpretation, it notes that branch stakeholders were unable to clarify for the ET what was meant by "teaching excellence" and how this could be operationalised and measured for success. Also, stakeholders (internal and external) articulated very different priorities for the branch, depending on individual perceptions and there was no unified answer on what the main area of focus was once the branch became operational. UBT provided the draft Quality Assurance Regulation, where under article 1 the following is noted: "With UBT 2025 Strategy the priority focus shifted from development to quality to achieving the highest standards of Excellence. The goal anticipates development of mechanisms, procedures and criteria for monitoring and assuring quality of educational, scientific and research, as well as artistic and professional activities." The ET reads this as acknowledgement that work is undergoing to develop and embed the quality mechanisms which may support an environment desirably labeled as excellent; however, the discussions across multiple meetings showed that there was still extensive work to be done before a unified understanding was to be obtained. The same Regulation continues to indicate that: "UBT has adopted the teaching excellence as an academic process by which students are encouraged and well-motivated to learn and study based on a sustainable, continuous, extensive, and positive inspiration on how they anticipate, act, and feel during the whole period of study and beyond."; however the ET found this to be less embedded as it received high variations of individualized opinions of what teaching excellence may have meant for different staff in different roles, rather than a collective understanding generated via the branch mission. The ET thus concludes that consultations with stakeholders may have been insufficient as they do not demonstrate the branch having reached a collective position on what exactly drives the mission and how this may translate operationally on the ground. It also concludes that recognition of the mission and its deeper understanding are lacking; hence mission elements are unable to relevantly and consistently guide strategic and operational activities at the branch.

The SER indicates 5 main goals which target medium or long term initiatives and these are mapped against elements from what the branch refers to as mission, which in essence are the paraphrasing of the narrative on the website. The Strategic Plan repeats these areas: “(i) achieving academic excellence; (ii) developing research, innovation and social responsibility; (iii) creating a positive working and learning environment; (iv) maintaining and increasing internationalization and regional partnerships and (v) partnering with the community.” In fact the ET observes that the SER text is lifted from Annex 4, also in the four paragraphs following this statement.

The ET is of the opinion that if the mission statement were clarified, then there is some potential for alignment. But with a clear mission statement lacking, this is difficult to ascertain.

The feedback received from UBT on the draft report explicitly queries “We do not understand how the mission of UBT is completely compliant in the main campus, as well as in other branches and not in the UBT branch in Gjilan! [exclamation mark retained].” As this report is for the Gjilan branch, it is outside the ET’s responsibilities to evaluate compliance at the other branches. However, the ET cannot not notice that the mission descriptions on the website for all of the branches are un-aligned and the main campus does not set a clear tone for a mission statement. As such the main campus notes on the website the following under mission: “UBT offers a dynamic and innovative 21 century academic environment. UBT provides a supportive and challenging opportunity for the students, faculty and staff in 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 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.” This is identical with the Lipjan branch. The Prizren branch, however, notes: The main mission of our branch lies in transmitting knowledge and competences to future experts in the following areas: Development of information technology, digital economy and innovation as the first development opportunity for the labor market in this period of time; Architecture Design, Regulatory and spatial plan with special care for the historic part of the city of Prizren, incl. Architecture Heritage; Artistic design and modernization as a supporting part of traditional crafts; Food technology and processing of plant and animal feedstock; Implementation of good practices in industrial production; New development strategies for trading agricultural and agricultural products; Administrative and Legal Competences, etc.” The Ferizaj webpage indicates: “UBT College Branch – Ferizaj

implements the central mission of the UBT College which is to offer a dynamic and innovative academic environment. The mission of the College is also to provide a supportive and challenging opportunity for the students, faculty and staff in participatory and self-governance setting. Building on a tradition of teamwork between students, faculty, staff and administrators, UBT College Branch – Ferizaj implements the mission of UBT College, which is the commitment to enhance its participation as an active member of community by providing learning opportunities driven by teaching and research excellence, intellectual interaction and creativity. UBT College Branch – Ferizaj as an important part of intellectual and cultural activity in Kosovo, aims to improve the region’s quality of life through the skills, knowledge, experience and engagement of its faculty, staff, students and alumni. The branch implements one of the key strategic goals of the UBT College, which is serving the higher education needs and being closer to the local and regional community.” For the Peje branch it is stated that: “The mission of the Peja Branch is in compliance with the overall mission statement of UBT, which is to achieve academic excellence, maintain and increase internationalization, create positive working and learning environment, as well as to partner with the community. Accordingly, the mission of this branch is to provide superior education in the region of Peja. To accomplish this mission, the branch has established objectives related to teaching, research, and service activities.”

It is important to note that whereas, in the main, similar formulations are employed, there is no finite, defined mission statement which can serve as a guiding force across the main campus and all of the branches. The variations clearly show that there is no unified position and any claims that branches align with the mission statement of the main campus and UBT as a global organization fail to be demonstrated by the webpages cited above. Therefore, the ET maintains the position that the mission statement needs to be unified, clarified and demonstrate a stronger prioritization of the main pillars: teaching, research and community service.

Compliance level: *Non-compliant*

ET recommendations:

1. to develop an explicit and definitive mission statement and communicate this in a unified manner across stakeholder groups
2. to propose engagement actions with stakeholders which can result in a collective understanding of the mission pillars
3. to explicitly and demonstrably use the mission pillars in guiding strategic and operational actions

2.2. Strategic planning, governance and administration

As an annex to the SER, the UBT College submitted a “UBT Branch in Gjilan Strategic Plan 2023-2028”. In this document, the College explains that

“the strategic plan is drafted in close consultation with the academic community at the institution, as well as external stakeholders and private sector (Industrial Board). Certain ideas, opinions and proposals shared among the said stakeholders are reflected on the Strategic Plan and this common admission of the plan constitutes one of its strongest points. It is to be said that only after long open discussions and only after serious assessment of shared ideas and proposals, the stakeholders have suggested the UBT Gjilan Branch to get focused on certain fields which would help the future development of Kosovo’s Eastern Region. In this regards (sic), getting focused on fields like Economy, Agriculture and Food Science, Nursing and Public Health are among most (sic) common proposals and suggestions given to the Branch Management.” (p. 3).

In the SER (p. 23), the College cites five strategic objectives of the Gjilan Branch:

“(i) achieving academic excellence, (2) - the Branch aspires excellent quality standards and consistent active learning approaches which offer authentic experiences and an inspiring, values-based learning environment to a diversity,

(ii) 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,

(iii) creating a positive working and learning environment- the Branch 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,

(iv) 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 and

(v) partnering with the community - will 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.”

The Strategic Plan 2023-2028 contains the action plan for achieving these strategic goals, the financial projection for the period 2023-2028, the strategy metrics respectively key

10

performance indicators and the annual work plan. A brief review of this Strategic Plan makes clear that this is the same Strategic Plan which is used for another branch of UBT College; the only exemptions are the tables of financial planning. Interestingly, even the Annual Work Plan (chapter 9 of the Strategic Plan 2023-2028) and the performance metrics are identical with the one of the other branches of UBT College which is surprising since the Gjilan Branch is not operational yet, while other branches started several years ago which implies that, due to the different durations of both branches, at least some implementation activities must be different, since setting up a new branch is characterized by some particular challenges and tasks even though it is highly plausible that structures, standards and processes from the UBT center as well as from other branches may be adopted quickly in the new setting in Gjilan.

The strategic objectives are linked to an action plan where a mix of 100 sub-goals, provisions and measures are allocated to the 5 strategic objectives. These statements are very general by nature and do not contain much information on the specific regional alignment of the future activities of the Gjilan Branch. The ET must emphasize that even in some of the actions, where the Gjilan Branch is addressed explicitly, the particular regional relevance of goals and activities are not elaborated at all (p. 17-28).

In the Action Plan, precise dates of implementation or goal achievement are assigned only to a very small proportion of actions. Accurate assessment of the plausibility and the feasibility of the action plan is hampered by the information provided in the “Annual Work Plan”, which is another part of the Strategic Plan 2023-2028 (p. 40ff.), since this plan contains only 30 strategies related to working areas which again coincide with the actions enumerated in the Action Plan only partially and which are in fact more everyday academic business operations but not activities of strategic relevance. The three-year annual work plan contains 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 strategic objectives in the sections before. Thus, there is a lack of systematization of strategic objectives, measures, and concrete key performance indicators.

Overall, the strategic plan is not outlined in a systematic way and does not contain information of regional relevance but rather seems a combination of various strategic and operational plans. It must be asserted that the “UBT Branch in Gjilan Strategic Plan 2023-2028” does not elaborate on the specific regional character of the strategy except for several general statements which may be applicable to any region in the country or elsewhere.

The strategy document also contains an “Indicator Framework 2023-2028” which seems to be a well-defined monitoring tool, but it is all the more surprising that concrete figures are missing. There is no information whether they have been omitted or forgotten or considered irrelevant for the purpose of institutional accreditation. However, this is surprising since no use is made of indicators which have been used for other tasks of planning at the branch level, eg. number of students, number of staff, number of research projects etc. and which would have

allowed for calculations of several ratios and proportions but are not included in this framework.

Regarding the needs of stakeholders and companies, the UBT College provided minutes of meetings with members of the Industrial Advisory Board (IAB) which were held in 2020, 2021, and 2022. While the minutes summarize statements of the IAB members on needs for personnel in their sectors and also expressions of interest to provide inputs for curriculum development, no particular definitions for regional needs or considerations about the linkages between businesses and college or the priorities of future development of the branch in the Gjilan region were made available.

UBT College reported to have analyzed the broader educational and economic context in Kosovo to inform its operations, but it seems that no detailed conclusions for the particular setup of the Gjilan branch have been made. However, some of the stakeholders declared their readiness to support the accreditation of study programs while other stakeholders asked for more time to think about specific suggestions. As the amendment at the end of this IAB minutes shows, the SER working group felt the need to point out that consultations with the IAB have been ongoing throughout 2022, but “no significant change in opinions, expectations and support have taken place” (p. 10), what made the working group obviously assuming that no minutes of the latest meetings need to be reported. However, this also means that no further progress has been made in developing further the idea of the Gjilan Branch.

In general, the SER can hardly be used for informed judgements, as it lacks essential elements of a strategic plan, such as expected results, defined inputs, ie. 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. The ET clearly misses reliable exemplifications of the specific regional manifestation of these strategic objectives as well as a well-adjusted implementation plan. The ET considers it not convincing to present mere general strategic objectives without explaining the processes and measures that need to be implemented to achieve these objectives.

Regarding the governance structures and processes which would be adopted in the Gjilan Branch, the UBT College as a long-standing higher education provider with the center in Pristina, has a functioning decision-making system and internal operating regulations which are in conformity with current legal provisions.

The SER (p. 31) contains a description of the decision-making bodies, depicting the following bodies at the branch level: Branch administrator (reports to UBT Secretary), responsible person in the IT office (reports to the IT Office of Main Body and to the Branch Administrator), responsible person for Student Services Office (reports to the Student Services Office of Main Body and to the Branch Administrator), responsible person for Finance Office (reports to the Finance Office of Main Body and to the Branch Administrator), the heads of faculties and Quality Assurance Office. This is somewhat contradictory to other sections of the SER, where

it reads that an "Academic Council of the Branch" (p. 18) is a structure, where all domestic stakeholders are supposed to be represented; and contradictory to Gjilan Branch strategy (p. 5), where the UBT Faculty Councils and the director of the branch are presented as main governing bodies.

In fact, the Gjilan Branch operates based on the central regulations and provisions, and 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. Upon request, the ET obtained a general job description for heads of programmes. According to the Statute of the UBT College, students are represented in the relevant bodies.

Compliance level: *Partially compliant*

ET recommendations:

1. *Refine the strategy and develop a plausible set of objectives, which are derived from evidence-based analyses or regional needs and which are accurately documented and attached to the SER.*
2. *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 region.*
3. *Provide concrete measures and key performance indicators for each objective (and sub-objectives) instead of enumerating a mixture of general objectives, measures and activities.*
4. *Develop a plan to ensure a maximum extent of academic autonomy of the Gjilan branch.*
5. *Develop clear job descriptions for all staff groups and ensure access of all relevant stakeholders to these documents.*
6. *Plan concrete collaboration projects with local and regional partners as key elements of the strategy and provide informative descriptions of these projects.*

2.3. Financial planning and management

The assessment of financial resources of the Gjilan Branch of UBT College is based on figures provided in the SER and in the Strategic Plan 2023-2028. The figures in these documents are identical. As a private bearer of higher education, the financial planning of UBT College is based on forecasts of student numbers and the income generated from student fees.

The incomes of the financial plans are based on projections of student numbers disaggregated by study programs. In the period 2023/24 to 2027/28, the College calculates an increase from 530 students to 1436 students (Strategic Plan, p. 33). The college assumes an annual 10% dropout or postponement of studies until the third year of studies. According to the breakdown by programmes, the academic operations are supposed to start with four bachelor programs: (1) Management, Entrepreneurship, and Innovation (200 students), (2) Information and Communications Technology (ICT, 150 students), (3) Agriculture, Food Science, and Biotechnology (100 students), (4) Nursing and Public Health (80 students). The projected overall increase of student numbers seems to be ambitious, assuming almost a tripling of students within three years. The ET raises some doubts about the reliability of these numbers, since no empirical labor market analyses have been provided which would substantiate such an optimistic forecast. Furthermore, the credibility of these numbers is contested since in the meeting with the program heads during the site visit, the ET obtained the information that not all programs are scheduled to start in the academic year 2023/24 and the total number of students enrolled in the first year thus may not exceed 450.

Given a student fee of EUR 1.200, the total income from student fees amounts from EUR 636.000 to EUR 1.723.560 in 2027/28. Additional income will be generated from research projects, consulting services and donations, showing an increase from EUR 73.922 in 2023/24 to EUR 211.207 in 2027/28.

Staff expenditures are projected to increase by 145%; research expenditures by 227%. Including other expenditures, the College plans to generate a balanced profit and loss in the first year and it plans to generate moderate excesses in the subsequent years.

It is emphasized in the SER (p. 41), 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. Also, no evidence on generating incomes by external funds from companies or public bodies were provided to substantiate these estimations.

Regarding the management of budgeting and accounting, the UBT College demonstrates 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 and functional monitoring of expenditures is implemented. The accounting system is explained in a general, yet comprehensible way in the SER. The division of labor between the UBT center and the Gjilan branch attributes relevant budgeting tasks to the finance coordinator at the branch level 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 coordinator

14

is 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. *Refine the financial plan and provide evidence-based projections of incomes from student fees, research projects, consulting services and donations.*
2. *Develop a budgeting structure which ensures maximum autonomy for the branch in order to respond to regional demands as wick and as flexible as possible.*
3. *Explain the specifics of the development of budget lines.*

2.4. Academic integrity, responsibility and public accountability

UBT has a Code of Ethics which was presented as evidence to the ET. Article 13 indicates that UBT has an Ethics Commission and that there are Faculty sub-commissions organized, inclusive of one student member. Whereas the Code of Ethics does stipulate regulations in respect the protection of Knowledge and Academic Freedom and highlights principles of behavior and responsibility, it fails to identify what it considers violation and how these are to be dealt with. The proceedings in respect violations are detailed, procedurally, however a clear indication of what would be ruled as violation and what actions is UBT likely to take, hence what options the Ethics Commission has in ruling on violations, so as to maintain consistency of approaches, does not form part of the Code of Ethics. The Staff Handbook lists at art 5 "What is prohibited at UBT?" and goes one to say that "Violations that are prohibited by this guide, as well as other acts, even though they may be a violation for the first time, may bring forth the termination of collaboration between you and UBT". The Student Handbook does not highlight any list of violations or their institutional consequences. The SER indicates that "the branch makes sure to list different types of breaches for different stakeholders and describes punishment mechanisms (approach)"; however no evidence was provided of such listing and the ET did not see either the Standard Operating Procedures or the Risk Assessment Document which the SER claims supports the implementation of the Code of Ethics. The ET finds that whereas the Code of Ethics is in place and is supported by an Ethics Commission, there needs to be more detail to ensure full understanding of what constitutes an academic integrity violation or breach and the possible consequences. It also considers that before termination of the relationship with the particular stakeholder, be that staff or student, UBT may wish to devise some intermediary disciplinary actions to allow for remedial corrections of any unhelpful

15

behavior. If this information exists across multiple structures and reference documents, the ET is of the opinion that integration of this information is essential to ensure consistent implementation.

The Code of Ethics makes direct reference to conflicts of interest explaining what may generate conflict; it gives a non-exhaustive list of examples of compliance with integrity principles in relation to interpersonal behaviors, administrative procedures, and scientific research. Apart from some elements related to the choice of assessments and discussions in class, there is very little on teaching integrity, with the Staff Handbook bringing some additional elements in focus. The ET believes that all elements of integrity need to be brought into one definitive document so that reference is easy, accessible and consistent.

The processes which are applied in relation to Academic Integrity revolve around the Ethics Commission, at institutional level, and the Faculty sub-Commission, at the level of structural units. However, as noted above, if the procedure of raising and resolving a breach is clearly outlined, what actually constitutes a breach is not as explicit. Additionally, it is unclear to the ET how a branch operates in respect of the Ethics Commission, i.e. does a branch report to the institutional Ethics Commission, does it have its own, instead of faculty-level sub-commissions will there be sub-commissions by programmes when these are in operation at the branch. This lack of clarity makes it difficult to ascertain the level of branch independence in relation to academic integrity at the branch. The SER notes "...all the parties have the right to appeal before the Ethics Committee operating at the Branch level, whose deliberations are made public via publication on the Branch Announcement Board." suggesting a branch-specific structure, however there is no mention of such structure in the Code of Ethics.

Elements of plagiarism are an important component of academic integrity. The ET considers it important for key documents to signpost directly to plagiarism (and use the term plagiarism) for more robust awareness-raising. Currently, whereas there is mention to practices of not citing properly and/or not crediting the works of others in the Code of Ethics, these are not clearly signposted in the Staff Handbook or Student Handbook and the avoidance of the use of the word plagiarism will deter attention from the issue at hand. UBT has shown an invoice for Turnitin anti-plagiarisms software and staff were probed on its usability. The ET found that there is variability on the use of plagiarism software, that there was not a consistent approach to when, how often and with what consequences it would be used, and it was indicated that for assignments in Albanian there was no reliable software in usage at the time of the review. Hence, it was confirmed that staff prefer not to use plagiarism software and generally try to design assignments to be able to avoid its usage, with little solid guarantee that students would not be plagiarizing. For students coming completely new to a branch, the ET found that there was a high risk here as awareness of academic integrity and plagiarism-related issues would rely on staff interventions, possibly in verbal format in class. With the documentation being at best insufficiently detailed and lacking the necessary signposting, it was difficult to see how

16

the messages of academic integrity could be communicated consistently to all students at the branch.

The Code of Ethics is public and the SER claims that individual branches will publish the outcomes of Ethical Committee investigations on Announcement Board. The ET was not presented with a list of outcomes from cases investigated, nor did it receive any statistical data of cases or was it presented with an example of an announcement board in any given branch; however the ET did find on the website an Annual Report, which was listed under the Gjilan Branch, Internal Regulations, but is in fact a UVT-wide report for the year 2018-2019: <https://www.ubt-uni.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Annual-report-of-the-Ethics-committee-for-the-academic-year-2018-19fin.pdf> . Clearly, as the Gjilan branch is not yet operational, there will not be any cases which can demonstrate the effectiveness of handling academic breaches at the branch. Additionally, whereas the report found on the website demonstrates UBT transparency, it does not speak favorably of currency of public information – there have been 3 completed academic years since the annual report listed and international research demonstrates that concerns of academic integrity have risen over the pandemic period, as such the ET expected that more recent reports would be available.

The branch website (<https://www.ubt-uni.net/en/ubt-en/ubt-branches/ubt-gjilan/>) lists 77 regulations and policies, but only 23 links are active, which represents 1/3 of the regulations in force. Important content which can be expected in such documents as: Regulation of Administering the Examinations; Regulation related to student fee's and payments; Regulation of studies and academic structure; Regulation of transfer from one academic institution to another etc are actually not accessible.

Currently, the branch website has the following tabs: Mission and Vision; Administration; Planning; Org chart and Gallery none of which provide detail about the programmes the branch wants to advertise. However, the same applies for all of the other campuses. The supra-ordinate tab of Study takes us to details of individual programmes offered at bachelor's and master's level, inclusive of admission, list of courses, list of staff, partnerships etc, the programs for the Gjilan branch do not feature, not even with a status of "pending accreditation". In fact, looking at the details of the infrastructure which supports the various programs it is difficult to ascertain in which UBT branch delivery is likely to take place.

Compliance level: *Partially compliant*

ET recommendations:

1. *to develop the Code of Ethics by explicitly indicating what is considered to constitute violations and what consequences are applied at UBT. Subsequently, this should be correlated with the Staff Handbook and Student Handbook.*

2. *to develop the Code of Ethics by making explicit reference to aspects of teaching integrity. Subsequently, this should be correlated with the Staff Handbook and Student Handbook.*
3. *to ensure that the information which may exist across multiple documents is brought into an integrated format so that there is one referential source of information on academic integrity, its violations and the consequences these may generate.*
4. *to update the website and include all relevant regulations and all current reports.*
5. *to update the website and include details of the prospective programmes for the branch.*

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 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 and 2022, 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.

In the discussions on site, there was talk of a newer version, version 4.0. In the subsequent requirements and submitted additional documents, a version 4.0 was also set up, but with a date of September 2022. Unfortunately, this shows that the version 4.0 of 03.09.2020 in the submitted documents does not correspond with the subsequently submitted version, but differs significantly. Therefore the numbering with the version 4.0 is wrong, but it should have been called here the version 5.0, because the subsequently submitted document is newer.

On the UBT website, under UBT->Offices->Quality Management here is still the "UBT Quality Manual" version 3.0 dated 03.09.2019. And in addition, the "UBT Quality Regulation" are dated 03.09.2020. Therefore, the information on the website is significantly outdated.

As indicated already in 2021 and 2022 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 and 2022, 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 emphasizes its compliance with ISO 9001:2015 (since 2007) 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.

In the end, the expert team could not clarify the question whether the ISO 9001:2005 certification refers to the university or to the UBT Group as a group of companies, which also consists of other facilities such as laboratories. Educational organizations are better represented by ISO 21001 (Educational Organization Management Systems - It is intended provide a common management tool for organizations providing educational products and services capable of meeting learner and other beneficiary needs and expectations and it focuses on the specific interaction between an educational organization, the learner, and other relevant interested parties).

UBT Gjilan will use the KPI system to measure and track the institution's progress on their academic objective. The UBT KPIs system will support the institution to monitor and evaluate the performance and direct policy formulation and target setting. UBT Gjilan branch has each study program's Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). The data provided are reviewed at least once a year, with the overall performance reported to the management of the institution. Performance indicators are vital to assessing and monitoring the progress of the program. The purpose of these indicators is not only to show whether the pre-established standards have been met but also to improve the competitiveness of the program within the institution as well as outside. In the end, the expert team were not yet able to see for themselves how the system, already established at other branches, would work and find a use here at this branch.

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 or ISO 21001, special attention should be paid to its application

to the study 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 52 (SER) refers to seven 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 five 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.

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

20

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 analyzing 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.

Likewise, with regard to quality assurance, it could not be established that there is a process or criteria to close degree programs or even to close a site.

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 analyzed correctly. The ET could not find any evidence that the UBT Gjilan would collect and analyze any data independently. This is especially important in regard to overall processes in the branch that would not be managed at the level of any of the specific faculties.

Accordingly, it was not possible to see how the data and evaluations are further distributed within the university and how they are published for the public. The corresponding information was also missing on the website.

A final point to mention is the lack of transparency and the corresponding deadweight loss for a closed cycle in quality assurance. The corresponding results of the course evaluation are not discussed with the students. Thus, the students cannot enter into a dialogue with the lecturers. With regard to a common understanding of quality, this gap also still needs to be closed.

The ET did not request templates for different surveys as they were provided during the 2021 and 2022 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.

The improvement plan incorporated the recommendations of the last failed institutional accreditation. For some of the recommendations, target achievement horizons of June 2023 were mentioned. At the time of the assessment in February 2023, these recommendations could therefore not yet have been fulfilled. Overall, from the point of view of the experts, the period of fulfillment of the recommendations from last time is too short in this chapter.

Compliance level: *Partially compliant*

ET recommendations:

1. *Review the information published on the UBT website in regard to Quality Assurance Regulation and Quality Manual.*
2. *Revise the Quality Assurance Regulation and Quality Manual in order to interlink them.*
3. *Publication of evaluation results from the general surveys. Summary of these results for the public. In particular, make clear what changes have been brought about by evaluation results.*
4. *Ensure that all areas covered by ESG are reflected in the UBT quality assurance arrangements - both in the documentation and mechanisms.*
5. *Re-think the organization 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.*
6. *Clarify the role and responsibilities of branches, in particular the Gjilan branch, in the overall quality assurance system of UBT.*
7. *Discussion of the course evaluation results with the students. The results of the course evaluation could be discussed with the students. The lecturer can discuss the results with the students and present them during the course. This should promote the dialogue between the students and the lecturer.*

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.

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 SER 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 and 2022, 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 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 analyzed 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.

The improvement plan incorporated the recommendations of the last failed institutional accreditation. For some of the recommendations, target achievement horizons of July 2023 were mentioned. At the time of the assessment in February 2023, these recommendations could therefore not yet have been fulfilled. Overall, from the point of view of the experts, the period of fulfillment of the recommendations from last time is too short in this chapter.

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.*

2.7. Research

In the “UBT Branch in Gjilan Research Strategy”, the UBT College states that it intends to do research activities categorized along four key strategic research goals (p. 7):

- To be internationally renowned for our world class activities in a number of strategically important centers of excellence, whilst simultaneously demonstrating excellence across a broader range of disciplinary areas;

24

- To be recognized internally and externally for the provision of outstanding research leadership, infrastructure, facilities, and support, and be admired for our creativity in developing and supporting new talent and initiatives;
- To substantially increase our share of external research grant income, in order to provide a sustainable funding base for our research;
- To attract increasing numbers of high quality postgraduate research students, and provide them with a stimulating and supportive research environment and training;
- To have active engagement with a number of key strategic partners from across the Region, Europe and the world and be increasingly sought out by potential collaborators, partners, funders, policy makers, and the media, so that we increasingly shape the external research agenda.

As becomes clearly visible, these key strategic objectives 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 at all, 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”. Besides, this list does not contain any concrete reference to one of the programs which shall be offered at the Gjilan Branch. Thus, it is to be assumed that the research strategy is a declaration of very general intentions which still needs several steps of concretization.

The UBT College Gjilan Branch is aware that these objectives are very ambitious, since it says that “realizing these objectives in an environment characterized by insufficient resources requires the urgent implementation of a sustained program of radical action” (Research Strategy, p. 7). In fact, implementation of these objectives would require a rigorous action plan which is not visible yet. Instead, the Research Strategy lists some provisions which are vague and undetermined, such as “Shape what should do, not simply what can or are best equipped to do” (sic!) or “Balance existing capability with potential and opportunities”. Among these provisions, there are some highly relevant starting points, eg. emphasis on the need to “align institutional competencies with external environment and national aspirations” (ibd.). In any case, a more rigorous and systematic elaboration on how the institution intends to leverage these ambitious goals facing insufficient resources in connection with the characteristic economic and cultural development needs of the region would be essential. However, there is no other information available about the linkages and prospective plans at the regional level than mentioned in connection with the minutes of the Industrial Board which contained only vague declarations of interest but no concrete plans for collaborative research and development or research funding.

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 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.

Interestingly enough, the research priorities outlined in the Research Strategy seem to be not aligned with the prospective academic staff's research priorities, too. During the site visit, the ET learned from the heads of the programs and from teachers about several research priorities, which might be nuclei of future research strategies. Among these research topics were entrepreneurship and marketing (in the management, business and entrepreneurship program); Internet of Things, monitoring of energy efficiency, and Big Data (in the ICT program); increase of production capacities and system management (in the Agriculture, Food Science and Technology program); and mental health, health needs, assessment of elderly people and non-communicable diseases, diabetes and cancer (in the Nursing and Public Health) program.

While these topics undoubtedly need time for greater specification, the Research Strategy for The Gjilan Branch obviously did not take up these research activities which already exist and could be further developed to the level of regionally integrated research priorities.

A further 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.

One of the most irritating issues emerges from 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 would be implemented The SER and the Research

Strategy of the Gjilan Branch contains important elements which are needed to draft a concrete research plan, however, this is not visible in the documents nor have their been made more concrete outlooks during the site visit. A concise, feasible and regionally embedded research strategy would also require additional measures, such as a distinct research management at the branch level and a coherent academic staff development plan 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 the ET could not find such information. No information was provided on the publication activities of the staff envisaged to work at the Gjilan branch, too.

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.

Regarding the research budget, continuous growth is provisioned in the budget lines on research projects, showing an increase of incomes from research from EUR 30.240 in 2023/24 to EUR 86.400 in 2027/28, which is an increase of 185%. 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, revenues generated from research might be lower. Other sources of income from research were not mentioned in the SER nor during the site visit.

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 R&D projects with companies and stakeholders in the region.*
2. *Develop a realistic action plan for research as well as indicators for monitoring implementation of the research strategy.*
3. *Develop quality indicators which allow rigorous assessment of research performance at the branch level.*
4. *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 Handbook for Academic Staff (latest version May 2020) includes details of multiple activities at UBT and this is confirmed to be accessible to both teaching and administrative staff. Given that a fair proportion of the Handbook tackles matters related to teaching, learning and assessments, interaction with students before, during and after the lectures as well as the appraisal procedure, the use of infrastructure and coordination of professors with other offices, it was unclear to the ET if this was also targeted directly at administrative staff or if administrative staff benefit from a different Handbook.

UBT indicates that its Statute is the definitive reference point for aspects related to recruitment and promotion and where the rights and responsibilities in relation to college activities are clearly outlined. On consultation of the UBT Statute, the ET found that whereas there is some information on candidacy for governance roles such as Deans or other managerial structures, information on recruitment and promotion of staff is limited to Art 49 and 50 and not quantified, i.e., there is no clarity on, for example, how many publications are required, how is an “international journal” defined.

The SER (p.87) indicates that all recruitment process is transparent, with all the calls for vacancy published on the webpage, together with all the procedures. It is the HR department which sets the requirements according to Regulations on standards for academic titles and the UBT Statute. At the time of the review visit no posts were being advertised.

In respect employment for the Gjilan branch, the ET were told that internal staff had been identified to move to Gjilan and take on full-time or part-time positions, with no additional external staff having been recruited by open calls. Whereas the teaching staff seemed to be fairly clear on what their roles and responsibilities would be once they took up the Gjilan post, the appointed heads of the programmes were vague in describing their responsibilities and it was unclear whether they had been presented with a full job description when the offer for the post of head of the programme was made. When the ET queried what were they key activities that they anticipated they would be likely to engage with most on a daily basis the answers proved particularly varied. Following the visit, the ET was presented with a standard template for the Job description of a head of programme role, however this was unsigned and presented no peculiarities for the Gjilan branch. It may be expected that for a completely new programme, the implementation of the responsibilities may see some variation, with focus on set-up priorities, to those specific for heads of programmes which have been run for many years.

UBT indicates the Staff Handbook (listed as Appendix 9) and Staff Employment Handbook (listed as Appendix 13) as being important for consultation. However, the list of appendices presents as Appendix 9 the Quality Manual and as Appendix 13 the Handbook for Academic Staff. The website under Regulations and Policies (<https://www.ubt-uni.net/en/ubt-en/ubt->

[branches/ubt-gjilan/](#)) indicates at position 44 and 46 Handbook for Teachers, and position 45 UBT Tutor Handbook, however as none are linked to documents, the Et could not ascertain if these overlap with the Staff Handbook and Staff Employment Handbook referenced in the SER. Regardless, the ET heard from staff that the orientation programme at UBT is effective and that the staff development opportunities are sufficient and relevant for their career progression. Some examples of more recent trainings were provided in the meetings, although it wasn't fully clear what the participation levels had been. UBT provided a development plan and a list of trainings organised between 2020-2022 where 16 members of staff are listed to have participated. The list does not seem to have applied a filter for members of staff proposed to take up posts in Gjilan, and even if it had, the total lists of Gjilan proposed staff combine into around 150 staff members, when there were only 16 participants and the same participants across all of the 8 training sessions listed, which amounts to approximately 10% of staff. This is particularly low, especially if new programmes are set up and/or weaknesses are identified in performance. If staff do not take up the opportunities, the efforts of UBT will remain less efficient and improvements cannot be guaranteed. It was confirmed that there is no discrimination of opportunities offered.

The student to staff ratio is anticipated to be maintained a maximum of 30:1, with seminars confirmed at no more than 50 students, which is still a high number to ensure any level of individualised attention to students. As there are yet no students or staff at the branch, the figures presented are provisional projections.

Workload is mainly quantified by contact hours, although staff did confirm that within the hours, they are allowed by law to have working activities, they manage to build in all responsibilities, teaching, assessments, research, administrative and community services. It was also confirmed that travel time between branches would be quantified in the workload. Staff also indicated that they could negotiate workload if in any given period they need more time to fulfil research or administrative activities. As there is yet no activity at the branch, the workload model presented is based on other UBT branches and is a provisional projection for Gjilan.

Staff employed hold the relevant qualifications to complete their responsibilities. A good number of staff hold international qualifications or have done development trainings abroad, which contributes to their competent profile. Within the proposals for full-time staff at the branch it is noticeable that full-time professorships need to be encouraged and secured.

The Handbook of Academic Staff indicates the following in relation to the evaluation process (on page 14, full quote provided): "At the end of each semester or module you will be assessed by the students, through a standard questionnaire which is distributed by the Office for Quality Assurance in cooperation with the Dean's Office of the respective faculty. The result is sent to each teacher individually. Improvement measures are taken in collaboration with the actors

involved in the process: Students, Teachers, Dean's Office, and the Office of Quality Assurance.” Whereas this will cover the level of satisfaction of students with the course and the support received from the teacher, it cannot serve independently as a full appraisal process. International expectations would show staff members self-assessing, peer-assessing, being assessed by management and then deriving developmental actions. Staff confirmed that their roles include a complex workload of teaching, assessments, supervision, research, administrative and management, as well as community service. However, the ET has not been presented with an aligned appraisal system which can relevantly cover all of these components and judge staff performance on the totality of their contribution to UBT. The SER (p. 89) refers to a UBT College Staff Employment, Performance, and Progression Policy which the ET has not had access to. The Regulation on Labor Relations and Responsibilities for Working Duties, found on the website, highlights employment details, in general, such as rights and obligations, conditions of rest, protection of women, disciplinary responsibility etc. but does not indicate elements related to evaluation of performance. While item 50 Recruitment Procedure does not have a link attached. The SER also indicates that the Dean will perform an initial, detailed appraisal of each staff member by using a point-based numerical assessment of the distribution of efforts in line with the performance criteria set in the Regulation for Staff Appraisal (another document not included in the evidence base). The Annual Assessment template was presented to the ET in Albanian, hence it could not be ascertained how the areas of competences map onto all of the activities a staff member is responsible to perform. It is difficult for the ET to understand how the Dean can be made responsible for individually completing the template for each staff member for at least two reasons: 1. depending on the number of staff under their management, the time for such a task could well exceed that available to the dean and 2. it is unlikely that the Dean can have full details of their staff performance across all competence areas. The ET was not presented with a report combining the results of the annual assessment, nor was it evident where such a summative position would be discussed for identification of trends and establishment of developments.

The Handbook of Academic Staff talks about the possibility of termination of contract if breaches are observed; however there is no presentation of an intermediate resolution which could aim towards correction via development opportunities.

Compliance level: *Partially compliant*

ET recommendations:

1. *Unify staff information in one handbook.*
2. *Ensure administrative staff receive the same level of information in respect rights and responsibilities, recruitment processes, supervision, performance evaluation, promotion, support processes, and professional development.*

3. *Indicate for new heads what priorities and/or specificities there might in relation to set-up responsibilities they would be taking on*
4. *Secure full-time professorships for the branch*
5. *Ensure more staff participate in the training sessions organized, especially where these are proposed to counter weaknesses identified*
6. *Continue to monitor workload, including travel time between branches for staff who are part-time.*
7. *Keep class sizes low for seminars or laboratory work to allow for individualised attention to students.*
8. *Propose an appraisal system which is more comprehensive.*
9. *Ensure that appraisal responsibilities lie with the posts which can most pertinently conduct appraisal.*
10. *Create an annual summative report of evaluations which can be used as referential for trends and developments.*
11. *Propose a system whereby correction and development can be offered, before termination, in case of unsatisfactory performance or alleged breaches.*

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 organized 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 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 2023 - 2028 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 analyzing these data. At present there is 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 and 2022, 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.

Regulations are in place at the university or in the UBT group at universities regarding plagiarism. For example, the university has submitted a contract with turnitin for the examination of plagiarism and regulation on how to deal with academic misconduct.

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 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 analyzed 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 organize international exhibitions in Gjilan is a bit too declarative and ambitious and it is not 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 organized 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*

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, 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.

The evaluation of the physical infrastructure has therefore been based on feedback from interviews coupled with a site visit. The Branch in Gjilan has capacities of 1,519 m². Also, the library is composed of hundreds of books and electronic platforms such as J-store, EBSO, UBT Koha, Sage Journals. During the on-site visit, a manageable number of specimens were found here, but there were no students enrolled in the programs, after all.

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

The site visit tour, 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.

The inspection also showed that not all rooms are equipped with a permanently installed projector. Mobile projectors are therefore used in some rooms. Overall, the equipment is therefore not quite optimal.

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 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 at the site visit and the interviews, 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. However, it was noted that there is no elevator, so wheelchair access is not possible. Addressed to this condition, it was mentioned here that the accessibility for the building does not have to be guaranteed.

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. 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 in place. This, however, has not been clearly visible in the referenced documentation. Thus, for instance, even though the SER (p. 55) 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 organizations pays special attention to securing state-of-the-art facilities in its campuses and branches, from the site visit, 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, elevators, dedicated lavatories and others.

Compliance level: *Partially compliant*

ET recommendations:

- 1. Define a roadmap on planned infrastructure developments needed to facilitate targeted study programmes and research accomplishments of the branch.*
- 2. Rooms should also be appropriately accessible for students who rely on a wheelchair.*
- 3. Update the Quality Manual such that it defines exact procedures aimed at securing high standards of facility management.*

2.11. Institutional cooperation

UBT has an Institutional Cooperation and Internationalization Strategy which is shaped and informed by the rapid globalization and worldwide interconnectedness. UBT demonstrates a strong list of partnerships internationally and it was confirmed to the ET that once activities commence at the branch, students and staff at the branch would have access to the same international opportunities as students and staff at UBT more broadly.

At local level, partnership collaborations are already agreed and the ET met with a group of stakeholders, who expressed a clear commitment to support the Gjilan branch with the activities it needed, including internships, employment, curricular consultation and project work. The ET found that the region was fully prepared to receive UBT, also as collaborations had been ongoing for many years via other UBT branches or the main campus. The Gjilan branch already has a fully operational Industrial Advisory Board, which has been providing a clear steer on academic and community related measures.

Agreements with both national and international partners exist and have clearly defined responsibilities for partners.

UBT has instituted an International Office which coordinates collaborations across its multiple partnerships. It was confirmed to the ET that once the branch commences activities, a representative of the International Office would be based in Gjilan to coordinate activities more closely and to liaise with the main office. The interviews during the visit asked if the representative of the International Office had been already identified and the responses indicated that the branch was in discussions with staff members, but, at the time, the specific staff member to carry out this role had not been nominated.

UBT presented a list of projects it participated in the last three years and expressed the intention to expand thee to Gjilan, once operational, and/or to create dedicated project strands which would be appealable for the Gjilan region.

Staff confirmed that they found the events organised by UBT to be of international significance and indicated that they, too, were encouraged to identify and participate in outgoing international mobilities for research, conferences or study. Financial resources were also confirmed to be sufficient for such requests and many staff members confirmed they had already benefited. The risk with a branch is if the institution concentrates its international activities at the main campus, leaving staff and students at the branches feeling somewhat isolated. Of course, the ET acknowledges that the risk for Gjilan is somewhat reduced by its close proximity to the capital.

As described above, the appraisal system is less clear to the ET as it seems scattered across multiple documents without there being a source for a composite approach – although this impression may have occurred due to lack of sufficient evidence provided to the ET, still no summative assessment report or completed assessment forms were evidenced, as such the ET cannot ascertain the level to which, if, indeed, at all, various project work or international cooperations may feed into promotion criteria or staff performance reviews.

Some staff reported having been part of community discussions with a view to the opening of the Gjilan branch. Staff members were limited to those who had been invited to give a stronger contribution to curricular discussions. As the branch is yet not operational it is difficult to know to what degree all staff would be involved in forums in which significant community issues are discussed and plans for community development are considered. This is also because the total number of staff is fairly high for the branch.

As it is not yet operational the branch does not have alumni; however, UBT anticipates a functioning alumni network once operation commences. Interestingly, during the visit, UBT did not present any model of alumni networks from the main campus or other branches to allow the ET to anticipate what the structure and activities might likely be and whether there is transferability across branches. However, the website <https://www.ubt-uni.net/en/study/alumni/> portrays a robust alumni engagement which highlights amongst others a magazine, published almost every other year, and news and events which track alumni successes.

Compliance level: *Substantially compliant*

ET recommendations:

1. *Make explicit promotion and appraisal criteria linked to international cooperations and community activities*
2. *Design a plan for involvement of all staff into community-based discussions*

- 3. Design a plan for an alumni network at the branch and its desired activities by evaluating transferability from other models on the main campus or functional branches*

3. OVERALL EVALUATION AND JUDGEMENTS OF THE ET

As shown above the compliance levels per general areas are:

General area	Compliance level
1. Public mission and institutional objectives	Non-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	Partially compliant
11. Institutional cooperation	Substantially compliant
Overall compliance	Partially compliant – fail in chapters 6 and 10

*According to the KAA Accreditation manual, in order to be granted a positive decision for institutional accreditation, every education provider has to demonstrate at least a **substantial compliance** level in the overall judgment. Standards on evaluation of Higher Education Institutions, Chapter no. 6 related to Learning and teaching, and chapter no. 10 related to Learning resources and facilities are mandatory. No accreditation on institutional level can be granted unless these two (2) chapters has been fulfilled to either substantially or fully compliant level.*

According to the expert teams evaluation, UBT College Gjilan Branch is “**partially compliant**” with the standards included in the KAA Accreditation manual and fails the required compliance levels in chapters 6 and 10.

Therefore, the ET recommends **not to accredit** the institution.


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.

Expert Team

Chair


	Dr. Dietmar Paier	March 10, 2023
(Signature)	(Print Name)	(Date)

Member



	Prof. dr. habil. Anca Greere	March 10, 2023
(Signature)	(Print Name)	(Date)

Member



	Christopher Bohlens	March 10, 2023
(Signature)	(Print Name)	(Date)

4. AMENDMENT:

Feedback and clarification of the ET on the comments of UBT College on the draft report

The ET would like to highlight the fact that for this accreditation it was presented with a SER which, in the main, failed to contain updated information to allow the ET to fully understand areas of improvement from the last KAA visit. Also, some elements of evidence submitted were either from the previous accreditation visit or presented data from 2019-2020 or were simply incorrectly referenced. This has made the work of the ET substantially more difficult. Nonetheless, the ET confirms that it has consulted all the documents presented and the findings are the result of this consultation.

The UBT feedback on the draft report indicates elements of update from after the visit. This demonstrates that UBT insufficiently understands the process and what is being reported on, i.e., the SER, the evidence submitted with the SER, the evidence collected during the visit and the evidence received by request from the ET before the draft report was finalised and presented to the Gjilan branch. To uphold the procedural requirements of KAA, no updates can be considered which were made post receipt of the draft report. Any such updates will not be in alignment with evidence collected as part of the formal KAA process.

It must be explicitly noted that it is the full responsibility of the provider to identify and present the ET with relevant evidence which can make a clear demonstration of how the provider complies with the standards. Whereas the ET will request elements it finds lacking to ensure it gain a fuller understanding of the issues presented, it is not the responsibility of the ET to request every single document the provider may hold in support of their case. This is so also because the ET cannot anticipate all of the documents which are produced by the provider.

It is also important to state that a direct comparison with findings in the previous report misses the purpose of KAA accreditation. Definitely, where recommendations will not have been resolved and/or where progress is insufficient, it is clear that the recommendations will be repeated by the ET as recommendations are directly linked with the KAA standards, which are the same for this accreditation exercise as they were for the previous two rounds. If the branch is found to fall short of the standards, the recommendations will need to repeat until they are resolved. The fact that additional recommendations are formulated will have to do with the fact that some areas of developments may have been inaccurately applied and hence do not align with responses for previous recommendations and/or that in the year past, where there was no action, the situation at the branch will have also decreased in quality.

The ET fully appreciates that the Gjilan branch is not yet in operation, hence some elements of demonstration need to rely on the main branch or other branches, and it aimed to put these in perspective as best as possible, in the most objective manner. However, direct comparisons with operations at other branches are not functional under KAA procedure, as each branch needs to demonstrate its independent and autonomous functioning, even when within a system of multiple branches.

Finally, the KAA standards are aligned with the ESG, and the ET has made use of their European and international experience to recommend areas of development which can positively contribute to the student experience. The findings, as they currently stand, are a reflection of the situation at the Gjilan branch based on all of the evidence which was supplied and collected as part of the KAA process. The ET finds it unfortunate that the response to the draft report demonstrates a lack of constructiveness in relation to educational development and that the UBT branch cannot factually take on board recommendations which are made in good faith to safeguard the future of the student experience and the educational quality in the Republic of Kosovo. Any suggestion that the ET might have been biased or influenced in its judgement is completely unfounded and, in fact, offensive to the ET's professionalism in carrying out its duties.

Expert Team:

March 10, 2023

Dr. Dietmar Paier

Prof. dr. habil. Anca Greere

Christopher Bohlen