



Republika e Kosovës
Republika Kosova - Republic of Kosovo



Agjencia e Kosovës për Akreditim
Agencija Kosova za Akreditaciju
Kosovo Accreditation Agency

AAB COLLEGE

BA PROFESSIONAL GRAPHIC DESIGN

ACCREDITATION

REPORT OF THE EXPERT TEAM

30 May 2023



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. CONTEXT

This accreditation of a new BA Professional Graphic Design programme took place during a one-day visit to the institution and involved discussions with the management team of the Faculty of Arts, persons responsible for quality assurance at both faculty and institution levels, Heads of the study programme, teaching staff and a group of employers and stakeholders with a probable interest in the programme and its eventual graduates.

Date of event

Monday 15 May 2023.

External Experts (EE)

Professor Alan Brickwood, independent higher education adviser.
Marko Komso, student expert.

Professor Brickwood had some familiarity with AAB College, having previously participated in several re/accreditation events at the College in recent years and, most recently, in two events during 2022.

Coordinators from the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA)

Leona Kovaci, Senior Officer for Evaluation, KAA.

Sources of information for the Report and criteria used

The EE were provided, in advance, with a Self-Evaluation Report (SER), curriculum vitae (CVs) for the teaching team and syllabuses (subject curriculum models) for most of the subjects included in the curriculum.

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



Additional information was requested by the EE at the close of the event. This comprised:

- A Syllabus for the Final Project in Semester 6.
- A Syllabus for English Language in Semester 1.

This being an initial accreditation for a new programme, there were no students in place and no graduates. Similarly, there were no employers able to comment on their experience of employing graduates from the programme but the EE did meet with a small group of potential employers.

The coordinator from KAA was present during the whole event.

1.2 EVENT SCHEDULE

Wednesday 23 March 2022

	EVENT	PARTICIPANTS
09.00 – 09.45	Meeting with the management of the Faculty.	Bujar Demjaha Fitim Aliu Elisa Nikolla
09.45 – 10.30	Meeting with quality assurance representatives and administrative staff.	Furtuna Mehmeti Medina Ceko Margarita Haruni
10.45 – 11.45	Meeting with the heads of the study programme.	Armend Fazliu Liridona Abdullahu Halil Xhafa Agron Sejdiu Burim Myftiu
11.45 - 12.45	Lunch break (on site)	
12.45 – 13.30	Meeting with teaching staff.	Bujar Selimi Clirim Vokshi



		Agon Nimani Luan Tashi Lorik Sylejmani Fisnik Ismajli Leonita Fazliu Adriana Kutllovci Fidan Qerimi
13.35 – 14.20	Meeting with employers of graduates from AAB with a potential interest in graduates from the proposed new programme.	Zonda Creative L.L.C Selim Maloku Ewwwolution L.L.C Valon Bucaliu Albert Salihu Eris Production SHPK Esen Kaymakci OfficePrinty Avdi Koca Tierra Agency Fioralba Krapu
14.30 – 14.40	Internal meeting of KAA staff and experts	
14.40 – 14.45	Closing meeting with the management of the Faculty and programme.	Bujar Demjaha Fitim Aliu Elisa Nikolla
14.45 – 15.15	Visiting facilities	

1.3 A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE INSTITUTION AND PROGRAMME UNDER EVALUATION

AAB College describes itself as the largest non-public institution of higher education (HEI) in Kosovo and in the region. It was established in 2002 and has grown exponentially over the past 20 years comprising 14 faculties with study programmes at both BA and MA levels. AAB started with a unique programme in Journalism and Mass Communication after which it went on to secure further accreditation in the field of forensic sciences in cooperation with the Public University of Sarajevo. Nowadays, AAB College offers teaching at its main campus in Prishtina and two other locations in Gjakova and Ferizaj.



As a consequence of this growth, AAB has invested heavily in the digitisation of academic and administrative data and processes creating a comprehensive management information system and student resource. This has facilitated a process of decentralisation and devolvement of responsibilities from the Rectorate down to Deans of Faculties across a wide range of academic and administrative functions. This includes quality assurance, personnel selection and management, students' projects and feedback and the management of resources to include finance.

AAB claims to have achieved a high degree of institutional maturity in terms of organisation and the manner in which it conducts its operations. It also prides itself on how it has created an academically free, stable and secure community of supportive academic and administrative staff. The SER cites a high proportion of its staff to be employed full-time.

The Faculty of Arts was created in 2005 and currently offers the following six accredited bachelor programmes and two study programmes at Masters level.

- BA Graphic Design and Visual Arts Programme
- BA Fashion Design
- BA Painting and the Visual Arts
- BA Musicology
- BA Choreography
- BA Game Design and Animation
- MA Graphic Design.
- BA Architecture.
- MA Architecture

All of these aim to contribute towards the development of students' individual visual intelligence and understanding of the arts through information and a critical attitude that relates to the context of their creative and intellectual study specialisms. This obtained via an appropriate balance of teaching that embraces new delivery technologies and learning as prescribed in the SER. In addition, the Faculty is committed to both the content and delivery of curricular that are vital to latest trends



in the arts field, to the specific subject studies and highly relevant to the respective world of work. To ensure these objectives, the Faculty has an unequivocal commitment to internationalism and to vocationalism through capacity building of the Faculty's academic staff and their contribution in the community via the organisation of various activities and events in a variety of creative fields.

In terms of need, the EE were advised that there was a substantial and growing demand for graduates of the kind this programme aims to produce. This includes some 20,000 companies involved in the communications business comprising over 100 active graphic design studios; seven national television stations; about 50 local and cable TV stations; marketing, media, communications, advertising, branding, packaging and PR studios, firms and consultancies.

In response to questions on the faculty's strategic planning, senior management confirmed that there were no immediate future developments anticipated that might significantly impact upon this programme.

2. PROGRAMME EVALUATION

2.1 MISSION, OBJECTIVES AND ADMINISTRATION

This proposed three-year (6 semester) BA Programme in Professional Graphic Design shares a common mission and set of strategic objectives that are entirely consistent with those of the Faculty, College and KAA more broadly.

It aims to equip students with professional knowledge in the field of graphic design, develop their creativity and technical skills via a teaching and learning experience that is practice-based, high quality and especially vital to the industries and communities for which the programme is designed. These, in addition to the usual development of intellectual and transferable skills common to any undergraduate learning experience.

Upon receipt of some additional material, and especially the descriptors of the final 'capstone' project, the EE were confident that the programme design, and especially its content, would deliver the intended objectives. It would be an important and very



welcome addition to the College's portfolio and provide strong support to the development of a high-quality communications industry and to the economy of Kosovo.

The Programme was described as being built upon didactic and research concepts that combine theoretical knowledge and practical skills via a curriculum that includes lectures, practical exercises, seminars, individual and group projects together with hands-on experience from participation in projects with external industry collaborators and internships.

These characteristics being entirely consistent with other programmes internationally with similar objectives and expectations of a graduate from higher education embodied in the National Qualifications Framework and the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

The balance of the programme of studies was described to be within an overall range of between 60 to 70% practice and 40 to 30% theory with a regular staff team of 10 delivering more than 70% of the programme.

Of particular concern to the EE, however, was the formal request for an annual intake of 140 students and consequential theoretical maximum of 420 students on the programme. This, especially when compared to both the high level of practical studies and Faculty regulations that limited teaching group sizes to be no more than 60 students and a lower limit of 12 for certain 'hands-on' practical working groups. The EE felt an intake of these kind of numbers could have serious implications for a number of academic and administrative issues and would need to be reassured on the logistics of teaching staff resources, due to the multiplication of teaching hours, and on student access to shared resources. The EE felt this was a matter best examined at a later stage in the programme's development when there had been some operational experience.

Compliance level

The study programme is entirely consistent with the overall mission of the College. It has a well-defined overarching didactic and research content and its rationale is



well founded on relevant best practice and advice for what is an ever-changing industry. It is Fully Compliant with Standards 1.1 to 1.3.

There is a comprehensive range of formal policies, guidelines and regulations referred to in the SER dealing with responsibilities relating to management and the delivery of programmes, behaviour and to recurring procedural and academic issues. These cover academic integrity, responsibility and public accountability that includes a requirement of everyone within AAB to conform to a set of moral and ethical principles and to the principles of scientific and artistic truth. These include codes of practice and disciplinary procedures.

These arrangements are established at institutional level with an increasing number delegated to the Faculty for administration and implementation. The particular structure put in place by the Faculty, post decentralisation, mirrors those established centrally. It comprises a mixture of committees and posts to cover both policy and managerial matters under a senior Scientific Teaching Council which has a membership to include all academic staff and representation from students and administrative staff.

The EE considers the systems in place to be comprehensive and thorough with clear measures to ensure appropriate 'follow through' and feedback occurs. The EE assumes that a summary of these arrangements is made available in a handbook given to students at induction.

Compliance level

The EE is satisfied that these measures are full embraced at Faculty level. They are Fully Compliant with Standards 1.4 to 1.6.

2.2 QUALITY MANAGEMENT

AAB is a long established and mature institution with quality assurance (QA) standards and practices established over the past 20 years according to the Bologna Process and regulations laid down by KAA – which, in turn, draws heavily upon participation and



advice from teams of advisers and experts drawn from across the world. This to ensure a comparability of standards internationally and the promulgation of up-to-date thinking and 'best practice'.

At institutional level there is a comprehensive and thorough system of common requirements for the design of new programmes, modification of existing ones and for the processes of monitoring, review and formal evaluation. The Regulations on Quality Assurance, the Quality Assurance Guidelines, and AAB's Strategic Development Plan are the main documents regulating the quality management system in AAB.

Operationally, much of this is now delegated to Faculties, with each Faculty having its own dedicated Quality Assurance Coordinator.

These arrangements demand a clear articulation of what programmes are setting out to achieve (aims and objectives); the attraction, selection and recruitment of suitable students that can benefit from programmes (recruitment); effective outcomes (objectives); and fair assessment for the purposes of monitoring and feedback to students, progression, final award and also for when things go wrong. These systems also include the collation of information on the workload of students and staff; student, staff and employer feedback and the destination of graduates.

Digitalised questionnaires are used for the collection of feedback from students, academic staff, employers and graduates on the quality of the whole study cycle. The students complete the questionnaires before each exam whilst the employers and graduates do so once every two years.

The SER also describes how quality management arrangements utilise a variety of different methods for the collection of feedback from focus groups, working meetings and ad hoc meetings.



Programmes are reviewed on a two-year cycle and it is at this point that the QA process can be used to inform, from evidence it has gathered, the desirability or need for change.

As a means to further cultivating a quality culture, the Quality Assurance Office advised that it recently introduced the distribution of short news sheets containing information on findings, and conclusions that can be drawn, from the collection of survey data.

However, the material provided to the EE for this accreditation was not as good as it should have been, given the procedures and people in place, and certainly not of a standard expected from AAB, the Faculty and what would be normal for a new programme proposal. Much of those shortcomings were detail and could be attributed understandably to translation from Albanian to the English language but other faults such as inconsistent and muddled labelling, the accidental inclusion of irrelevant material from unrelated sources ('descriptive geometry' and 'set design') suggest a lack of care and casualness in checking material before submission to KAA and, as such, should be easily avoidable. The EE gained an impression from discussions that there was a weak point in procedure not at college level, and probably not with compilers in the Faculty, but at the interface between these two that some kind of simple joint check-listing before dispatch might remedy.

Compliance level

With the benefit of additional material requested during the event, the EE is satisfied that the required quality assurance processes are in place and have been applied to this proposed new programme. They are Substantially Compliant with Standards 2.1 to 2.9.

Recommendation:

- 1. The Faculty should investigate how the initial papers supplied for the EE had shortcomings so as to ensure there be no repeat of this situation.***



2.3 ACADEMIC STAFF

The full-time teaching staff team is strong and able. It comprises people that are well qualified, competent, experienced as teachers, motivated and appropriately well-versed and connected to the field of professional graphic design.

The SER lists 10 regular full time teaching staff dedicated to the programme by qualification, title, tenure and by the amount of time they are allocated to spend on teaching, assessment and on providing academic counselling to students. Similar information is provided for 3 part-time and visiting staff.

The overall staffing position is stable and secure with a majority on full-time contacts.

Full-time teaching staff have contracts for between 1 – 3 years with the possibility of extensions within a framework of legal requirements for the minimum number of teachers required and their workload. The latter being 8-20 contact hours per week, depending upon their seniority and includes the supervision of internships. Upper limits are also stipulated for tutorial contact conducted via the College's electronic e-professor system. The Faculty has ensured that most of these 10 full-time staff only teach at AAB and that they deliver more than 70% of the teaching.

All staff are aware of what is expected of them and are subject to annual review via anonymous questionnaire surveys of opinions from students, peers, line managers and from self-evaluation. The results of these reviews are made available publicly.

Opportunities and support for the development of staff is described to be more related to training by the College on internal quality assurance, teaching methods and on e-learning curriculum developments.

The EE found scant reference to whether the Faculty has any system for checking the originality of the students' work and if so, whether all academic staff are using this on any consistent basis.



Weaknesses and threats in a SWOT analysis, refer to continuing very common problems, beyond AAB, arising from age- related retirement and migration abroad.

Compliance level

The EE is satisfied that the arrangements in the Faculty are appropriate and Fully
Compliant with Standards 3.1 to 3.10

2.4 EDUCATION PROCESS CONTENT

One characteristic of the subject area is its commonality. The study of Graphic Design can be found in a very large number of higher education institutions offering vocational education and in an equally large number of institutions offering sub degree studies. The EE was therefore keen to establish the rationale for ‘yet another graphic design programme’ and what its distinct characteristics might be vis-a-vis the accredited BA Graphic Design and the Visual Arts programme already offered by the Faculty.

Assurances were given that, whilst there were some common components in the designs of the two programmes, over 80% of this new BA Professional Graphic Design programme was different and new. Its distinguishing features were those of an unequivocal emphasis upon producing graduates for professional graphic design practice.

That definition of need and distinction having been established from student monitoring, lecturers and from representatives of a fast-growing industry. The latter placing a very high emphasis and demand for graduates that were prepared effectively to work within a very wide range of communications businesses and especially with a characteristically high percentage of those business being small to medium sized enterprises. This therefore raised ‘levels of understanding’ needed in many subject areas to be beyond mere ‘familiarity’ and ‘acquaintance’. Graduates had to be at least competent. The EE were pleased to see an increase in the use of language within syllabuses that made distinctions of those different levels of understanding.



Discussions were held with Heads of Study and the teaching team on what ‘drivers’ within the national economy and industry could have an influence upon the programme and especially its continued vitality. These included:

- Local growth in communications technology and especially TV and production.
- The decline in conventional shop- based retailing in favour of new forms of web-based shopping – all being critically dependent upon quality digital graphic messaging.
- Distance working with an increasing volume of professional graphic design work being sourced over the net, cross border and internationally.
- Project teams assembled virtually and, on a project-by-project basis.

Other topics discussed, and found satisfactory by the EE included those of graduates being competent in ‘costing and pricing’; an awareness of ethical issues ranging from waste, recycling through to rogue marketing and deception; the fundamentals of typography and readability; graduates’ preparedness for working internationally and student attendance.

On the latter, the teaching team appreciated a common issue with subjects less dependent upon specialised facilities and students’ consequential ability to work off-site and alone without the benefits of peer group support - as indeed most might find themselves if they became self-employed. On this, staff referred to attendance being important and ultimately enforceable by applying College assessment regulations.

The topic of teaching, or more controversially, ‘teaching versus learning’ was introduced and it was made clear by both the heads of studies and teaching team that the balance of delivery for this programme was upon conventional teaching along with regular tutorial support – not upon any notion of student-centred learning that left students having to fend for themselves.

On the question of English proficiency, it was confirmed that all study programmes at AAB continue to be delivered in the Albanian language but that almost all students would be able to speak English. This had been the Faculty’s past experience and was largely as a consequence of secondary school education and that there will be an



English language module in semester 1 in the first year. Students' exposure to English would be high, not least by the predominance of English language publications and other teaching materials upon which the syllabuses depended.

Compliance level

The EE was satisfied that the education content and subject balance are thorough and appropriate to this proposed new programme. They are Fully Compliant with Standards 4.1 to 4.12.

2.5 STUDENTS

With the proposed programme being new, there were no students nor graduates with whom the EE could meet and discuss their interest, motivation and experiences.

The EE was however able to meet with a small group of employers – most of which were very positive of their experience in offering internships to students and of the quality of graduates they had employed from the Faculty. All expressed their support for this new programme.

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

Past experience of evaluations had always shown these arrangements to be highly effective, well managed, well delivered and well received by students. The EE found no evidence that high regard held by students would be any different for students enrolled on this new programme.



Compliance level

The EE consider the thorough and flexible arrangements for students, common across AAB and the Faculty, would be equally highly regarded, effective and popular for this programme. Based upon that evidence, the EE considers arrangements for students to be Fully Compliant with Standards 5.1 to 5.11

2.6 RESEARCH

Whilst AAB has, in the past, maintained its commitment to being a 'teaching institution' it has also been taking major steps to enhance its 'research and scholarly activity' base. This has been strongly evident since the establishment of its 5-year plan in 2018 supported by State-driven resources to stimulate and support staff research, practice and other relevant scholarly activities.

The language used in the SER remains ambiguous with regard to definitions. 'Scientific terminology' continues to prevail at the expense of artistic 'practice' but how the various initiatives and support are applied is certainly not biased. This was again tested and found satisfactory in discussions with teaching staff. The evidence presented in the SER continues to demonstrate flexibility and inclusion of other forms of appropriate professional development related to this programme. From the SER and CVs provided, the EE were able to see commendable examples of staff development across a wide range of activities from conventional refereed articles through to more practice-based engagement with the industry. The latter often being more typical and appropriate within an art and design context and equally beneficial to the quality and vitality of the teaching and learning process.

The EE is pleased to see a good sustained level of staff research and development appropriate to professional graphic design teaching and practice and both the flexible interpretation of institutional research initiatives and support from the College.

Compliance level

The EE is content with the continuing improvements in the level of research and staff development activity in the Faculty and especially with the flexible interpretations being taken of AAB's policies and practices in this field of



knowledge and practice. The arrangements at institutional level and at faculty level are Fully Compliant with Standards 6.1 to 6.10.

2.7 INFRASTRUCTURE AND LEARNING RESOURCES

The College claims to have the most modern infrastructure and best study conditions in Kosovo for students and for the conduct of staff research. A new facility built by AAB claims to be meeting all European standards for the organisation of teaching as well as offering opportunities for conducting research. During the event the EE were able to visit an impressive suite of professional and 'live' media production spaces funded by a commercial broadcaster in which students can gain invaluable hands-on working experience.

The descriptions in the SER appear highly satisfactory in terms of volume and quality of general and dedicated space, equipment, administrative support (including the electronic e-platform) and learning resources. The SER also provides information on the suitability of that accommodation for access by persons with disabilities and special needs.

The EE welcomed the reporting, as a strength, of AAB's continuing financial stability from which it can be concluded that the budget plan is in a healthy and positive state with the highest amount of monies to be spent over the period 2023-26 on infrastructure. Similar spending on management and other provision for exhibitions, research and external collaboration was discussed during the event.

The Faculty collects most of its funds from tuition fees, administrative fees and other payments made by students; payments for commercial and other services; funds of the Ministry of Budget of Kosovo for teaching and scientific-artistic research of general interest; donations, gifts and grants; the use of AAB intellectual property; contracts with national, international, public or private organizations in the field of teaching, scientific research, art; and any other source permitted by the laws in force in Kosovo.

Compliance level



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

3 OVERALL EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EXPERT TEAM

The External Experts are grateful to the Faculty's management, the teaching team and employers for their open and dynamic contributions to the event, and wishes them well for the future.

This proposed new three-year BA Professional Graphic Design programme is an appropriate addition and could, within a short time, become a serious asset within AAB's portfolio of higher education provision serving Kosovo's industrial economy. It will probably be very popular with students and the industry it aims to serve.

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

STANDARD	COMPLIANCE LEVEL
Mission, objectives and administration	Fully compliant
Quality management	Substantially compliant
Academic staff	Fully compliant
Education process content	Fully compliant
Students	Fully compliant



Research	Fully compliant
Infrastructure and resources	Fully compliant
Overall Compliance	Substantially compliant

In conclusion, the External Experts consider the proposed new BA Professional Graphic Design programme overall to be Substantially Compliant with the Standards included in the current KAA Accreditation Manual. They therefore recommend the study programme be accredited for 3 (three) years with a maximum annual number of 70 enrolled students.

Professor Alan Brickwood, External Expert
30 May June 2023

Marko Komso, External student Expert
30 May 2023