UBT College

Master of Science in BIOCHEMISTRY

Study Programme Accreditation

REPORT OF THE EXPERT TEAM

The 6th of June, 2023, Prishtina

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Table of Contents

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2

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Context

Date of site visit: June 6, 2023

Expert Team (ET) members:

- Professor ***Mladen Krajacic***, PhD
- Ms ***Delia Lupescu***, Student Expert

Coordinator from Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA):

- ***Arianit Krasniqi***, KAA Officer

Sources of information for the Report:

- Self-evaluation report by the UBT College
- Syllabus Documents for all the courses of the study programme
- CV Documents for all the teaching staff included in the study programme

Evidences requested additionally by the ET:

- The UBT regulations (QA code, ethical code, admission-, appeal- and transfer-procedure, students' rights)
- Example of QA related surveys that the students fill in
- Educational plan and syllabuses of the BSc programme in Biochemistry
- Timetable for the 1st semester of MSc programme in Biochemistry

Criteria used for institutional and program evaluations

- Standards and performance indicators for external evaluation according to the *KAA Accreditation Manual*
- Compliance with the overall mission statement of the *Faculty*, and the *University*
- Consistency with the *National Qualifications Framework*
- Consistency with the Framework for Qualifications of the *European Higher Education Area*

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3

1.2. Site visit schedule – The 6th of June, 2023

Time	Meeting and Participants	
09:00 – 09:45	Meeting with the management of the faculty where the programme is integrated	
09.55 – 10.40	Meeting with quality assurance representatives and administrative staff	
10:50 – 11:50	Meeting with the heads of the study programme Molecular Biology BSc	
11:50 – 12:50	Lunch break (provided at the evaluation site)	
12:50 – 13.35	Meeting with teaching staff	
13:40 – 14:40	Visiting Facilities	
14:45 – 15:20	Meeting with employers of graduates and external stakeholders	
15:25 – 15:35	Internal meeting of KAA staff and experts	
15:35 – 15:45	Closing meeting with the management of the faculty and program	

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4

1.3. A brief overview of the institution under evaluation

UBT College emerged from the *Institute of Enterprise Engineering and Management*, founded in 2001. As a higher-education institution, it was established three years later trying to offer competitive study programmes in social sciences with emphasis on management, business, economics and law. In parallel, the institution has been oriented towards technology, starting with computer sciences and engineering and further expanding to mechatronics and robotics, architecture and civil engineering. The institution was first accredited by the *Kosovo Accreditation Agency* as *UBT College* in 2009, but the acronym actually stands for the ***U****niversity of* ***B****usiness and* ***T****echnology*.

According to demand-driven philosophy of development, the institution has made efforts to introduce biotechnology and biomedicine stuff, thus year by year new study programmes have been accredited such as food science and technology, agriculture and environmental engineering, nursing, pharmacy, stomatology, anaesthesiology and radiology.

Nowadays, UBT claims to be a leading contributor to the growth and strategic development of Kosovo and the region supporting the resilience and sustainable development of its emerging economy.

UBT is situated in its campus in Prishtina. It has just completed the first building-phase of a new modern campus in the outskirts of the city. A number of specialist ambulances offer a strong clinical support to medicine oriented study programmes. Furthermore, UBT is associated and supported by a number of specialised professional centres like the *Centre for Technology Transfer, IPR and Innovation*; *Centre for Knowledge Management and Library*, *Centre for Professional development and LifeLong Learning*; and many more. Aside from the main campus in Prishtina, UBT operates in the scope of dispersed regional centres in Ferizaj, Prizren, and Peje.

It is not completely clear from the self-evaluation report what is actually the organisational structure of *UBT College*. There is information on a number of constitutive departments but it has not been explained how the vertical organisation (a pyramid-like top-down management) is structured. There is just a discrete mention of a department which would be responsible for research and educational programmes in biochemistry. However, in the chapter concerning *Mission, objectives and administration*, a Faculty with no name is represented as a unit that delivers a study programme in biochemistry.

The last institutional external evaluation was accomplished in 2019, re-accrediting UBT for the next five years. Following a number of study programmes at undergraduate and graduate level have been accredited and re-accredited, the *Bachelor study programme in Medical Biochemistry* was recently accredited (2022), and the University of Business and Technology submitted a proposal of the **Master of Science study programme in Biochemistry**, which is the subject of this accreditation process.

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5

2. PROGRAM EVALUATION

2.1. Mission, Objectives and Administration

UBT claims to implement an integrated strategy to establish itself as an internationally recognised and competitive, research-intensive university, committed to the transfer of knowledge and the provision of a word-class education and service. However, the institution must be careful not to spoil that mission and vision by primarily following demand-driven orientation that is also declared in the Self Evaluation Report. As it will be presented in the following chapters, the high-quality approach is sometimes endangered by high-pressure intentions of offering competitive programmes and attracting as many students as possible.

The master study programme in Biochemistry is expected to contribute to higher education in the topic through contemporary curricula, harmonised with the best practice at European level, distinct educational philosophy, research and services to the community. The programme aims to ensure a highly supportive teaching environment, based on research and aligned with recent developments in contemporary biochemistry science. To ensure that, the institution claims to participate in advanced research and implement scientific projects in cooperation with international partners. In this way, a continuous scientific and academic development of the teaching staff has to be promoted, as well as continuous development and improvement of the research laboratories.

In spite of study programmes in biochemistry are already available (the ET found two examples) in Kosovo higher-education area, professionals in the field are considered to be among bottlenecks in the country. Thus, the proposal of a new study programme at UBT is considered by the institution itself and confirmed by potential employers of the graduates, as justified. Moreover, the proposal is aligned with the *Ministry of Health* priorities, as well as the *National Development Strategy*.

The *Master Study Programme in Biochemistry* aims to equip graduates with knowledge and skills successfully used in all the aspects of public health and general or specific health care and human well-being. According to objectives presented in the SER Document, the proposed programme would better fit the name of `medical biochemistry`, rather than biochemistry. The creation of the study programme is presented to be influenced and guided by advising from the international universities that UBT has an agreement with. However, the universities mentioned in the SER Document do not possess study programmes in biochemistry (with an exception of doctoral study programme at La Sapienza). On the other hand, there are several examples of both bachelor and master programmes in medical biochemistry in the *European Higher Education Area* (Manchester, Graz) that would be expected to serve as much better inspiration. Following some strategical arguments given by the UBT representatives, the ET still believes that a succession *BSc Biochemistry → MSc Medical Biochemistry* would be reasonable. Alternatively, both levels of the programme could be *Medical Biochemistry*, as have been found in some European examples.

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6

No matter of the proposed title, the new *Master Study Programme in Biochemistry* defines general learning outcomes that are consistent with both national and European qualification frameworks. With strong focus on appliance in biomedicine and medicinal chemistry, the proposed programme answers the demand for professionals who are going to face the challenges of contemporary social circumstances. It follows institutional policies and regulations. Procedural and academic issues seem very well developed at the level of the College, complying with general ethical principles in research, teaching and other academic and administrative activities. They are translated to the particular study programme and made publicly available to both staff and students.

To take advantage of significant opportunities, and express thoroughly all the strengths, it would be necessary to define the organisational structure of the Institution (discussed in the *Introduction* chapter). As it was mentioned in the *Expert Team Report* on *BSc Study Programme in Medical Biochemistry* (2022), "*the consistency of information is an important indicator of the internal quality assurance system and, in order to assess processes related to the study programme, it is important to understand the structural unit within which the programme will operate*".

Compliance level: Partially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *We suggest the heads of the programme to reconsider the up-side-down succession of titles related to BSc and MSc study programme level (Medical Biochemistry, Biochemistry).*
2. *We suggest a priority to be put on research-intensive approach, international competitiveness and world-class education and not a high-pressure demand to attract as many students as possible.*
3. *The College is fast growing; thus, its size reached the critical value when stronger organisational units have to be defined. It could be concluded (moreover, it is explained during the site-visit) that the study programme is delivered by the Faculty. But it is ridiculous that the name of the Faculty has never been defined (at one point in SER, Faculty of Nursing is mentioned, by mistake or…?). It seems like this would be a virtual unit without a real physical character. The character of departments remains unclear too, as well as relation between departments and faculties. All these aspects of the organizational structure of the institution must be clarified.*

2.2. Quality Management

The UBT College has a full-fledged QA system in place, that ensures evaluation of all aspects of the study program (including the infrastructure and administrative services). Some efforts

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7

started to be done to also evaluate the learning outcomes and consider the results for the improvement of the study programmes, but more can be done in this direction.

The main bodies responsible for Quality Assurance, at institutional level, are: The Governing Body, the President, the Academic Council, the QA Committee, the Quality Manager, the Heads of the Faculties and Departments, Faculty councils. The QA processes involves academic staff members and students – which are represented in the Faculty QA Sub-committee. Therefore, one concludes that QA is important for all levels of decision-making within the college.

As described by the SER, the QA processes intend to check if the study programs meet the academic standards and to identify any potential gaps between their quality and the expected performance indicators, in order to suggest and implement recommendations for improvement. ` *The quality assurance processes are designed to enhance service and program delivery and include review of quality procedures, governance, teaching and research at the Faculty, student admission, progression and graduation, staff selection, recruitment and development, student support services, physical infrastructure and equipment and public information* ` [SER, p.23].

The UBT college QA practices include collection of data through different instruments. The data thus obtained is used to prepare periodic reports that indicate the strengths and weaknesses of the study programmes. The reports include recommendations on how to improve the programme, and a concise version of the reports are published online.

Teaching staff is evaluated through a 360 degrees system that includes: self-evaluation, evaluation by students and evaluation by superiors (supervisors). A peer-to-peer evaluation is piloted in another program and, if possible, in the future, the intention is to up-scale it for the entire institution. In the meantime, the members of the QA structures put-up efforts to overcome the difficulties observed during the piloting phase.

QA procedures are periodically reviewed.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *Continue efforts to implement the peer-to-peer evaluation;*
2. *Continue efforts to increase the participation of the academic community in QA processes (where it is not yet so high);*

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8

2.3. Academic Staff

UBT College has ensured an appropriate number of academic staff that comply with the formal legal requirements concerning the occupation of teaching positions. Out of 13 lecturers mentioned in the Self Evaluation Report, there is one to whom no teaching course is affiliated. The academic staff members have mostly received their PhD degree in chemistry/biochemistry or related areas of biology, pharmacy and medicine. In the table presented in chapter *2.3. Academic staff*, there are all marked as tenure – college members who have full-time positions at the College. Academic staff do not cover more than two teaching positions in the respective academic year. Their working time is properly structured with 30-40% allocated to teaching, exams and consultations, 20% of clinical work, 10-20% of administrative work and 30% allocated to research activities. This information, as well as the statement given in the SER document that staff development is an integral part of the Faculty strategic planning process, should convince us that the teaching staff is strongly supported in their professional development.

According to another statement, the Institution recognises that excellence can only be achieved and maintained by appropriately skilled, experienced and motivated staff. To ensure these staff features, the Faculty strongly supports their professional development by creating developmental plans in the scope of financial planning process, by establishing staff-performance indicators and by identifying key targeted areas and aspects that will be supported by specific strategic activities.

In spite of everything mentioned above, we could have recognised that the academic staff recruited for the proposed study programme is differently skilled, and their professional competences vary significantly concerning study courses allocated to them.

Albina Feiza would certainly be considered a flagship of the study programme. The youngest, but the best. She has not been yet promoted to the assistant professor position, but fulfils all the requirements to be so. She received her PhD from the University of Venice. As a researcher, she was impressively productive during the previous two years with publications in high-impacted journals. Although being co-author as a member of a huge research team, she has succeeded to be positioned first and the second in some of those publications. As she has been affiliated to an Italian research institution, she is expected to continue to publish similar papers, but being affiliated to UBT College in the future. Allocation of courses in "*Biological membranes and their proteins*" and "*Molecular basis of cancer*" to her is absolutely justified.

There are also several other teaching staff members that could be recognised as appropriate lecturers of the particular courses according to the scientific area in which they have received their doctoral degrees, as well as according to a topic in which their scientific papers have been published.

Mirlinde Bilalli, assistant professor, with her bachelor and master education in psychology, the doctoral degree in public health, and publications that might not be considered scientific or have nothing to do with biochemistry, could hardly be recognised as an appropriate lecturer of the course "*Ethical and legal challenges in biochemistry laboratory*".

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9

Dugagjin Sokoli received his PhD in prosthetics and stomatology. As could be recognised from his Albanian CV, he has held various administrative and management positions (ministry, university) including universities and even a bank (!?) in Illinois, USA (a Dean of the Everest University!?). In contrast with his international experience, his CV is written in Albanian language. His list of publications brings references that are not properly cited, could hardly be recognised as scientific, and have nothing to do with research in biochemistry. For sure, he is not qualified to be a lecturer of the course "*Research and research methodology*".

Biochemistry is a hard basic science that, together with molecular biology, aims to answer fundamental questions on living entities and the phenomenon of life. This is an area of research topics of which a number have been awarded with the Nobel Prize in Medicine or Physiology, and Nobel Prize in Chemistry. To be a competent biochemist, one should be aware of a development in the field, being ready to accept changes that emerge frequently and are often dramatic. Competences of a good lecturer in biochemistry have to be based on research intensive activities in the very subject of a course or at least a closely related one. A proficiency in English is a basic prerequisite enabling a scientist to be familiar with up-to-date information and participate actively by publishing her/his own research results that build up her/his lecturer's dignity.

Unfortunately, after a brilliant opening with the head of the programme and the most prominent scientist, the site-visit continued with the session with other academic staff members which was quite disappointing. All the lecturers were unable to communicate without a translator, and could not properly present the content of their courses. Out of thirteen lecturers on the staff members list, just ten of them are accompanied with a CV document. There are two CV documents that are written in Albanian. Furthermore, there are two CV documents bringing improperly cited references. Last but not least, some of the staff members have good publications, but not related to the course they teach. In spite of being not productive in the recent years, and previously publishing low-impact papers, Valon Durguti has been promoted to the position of Assistant Professor in 2021, and then to Associate Professor in 2022. All these aspects are concerning for the ET.

Teaching assistants are expected to be presented in a list of teaching staff. It is necessary for the Expert Team to have information on a number and qualifications of the staff that will be in charge to deliver practical work with students. As long as we have no information on distribution of the practical work, we cannot judge with certainty on the workload of those who are employed in this teaching aspect.

Altogether, UBT College and leading people of the *Study Programme in Biochemistry* have to make an effort to improve the quality of the staff members (approximately half of them) to align their performances and competences with declared commitment to internationally recognised quality and research output.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

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10

ET recommendations:

1. *Teaching assistants who are in charge of delivering laboratory exercises are expected to be presented on the staff list. Their number, qualifications and workload are key information enabling UBT to be considered properly staff-equipped for the study programme.*
2. *It is mandatory for all the academic staff to be accompanied with a related CV document. All the CV documents should be written in English and have to bring properly cited publication-references.*
3. *To comply with a particular course, academic staff is expected to have a PhD degree in the very topic or a topic related to the course content, as well as a list of publications in the related field. Moreover, good command of English is essential.*
4. *Promotions of staff members to academic positions are expected to demonstrate that promotional criteria are respected. The UBT college should revise promotional regulations and practices.*

2.4. Educational Process Content

The *Master Study Programme in Biochemistry* is an extension of the recently (2022) accredited *Bachelor study programme in Medical Biochemistry*. That is why we have paid attention to the comparison between the two levels of the study programme.

The bachelor study programme is intended to equip students with basic knowledge in chemistry, basic and specific knowledge in biology, fundamentals in biochemistry with related practical knowledge, as well as patient-related skills and the professionalism and integrity required for a medical biochemist. Compared to that, the master study programme brings new courses to familiarise students with some specific topics like protein biochemistry, enzymology, physical chemistry, radiobiology and molecular oncology. Courses like "*Biological membranes and their proteins*", "*Advanced physical chemistry*", "*Molecular basis of cancer*", "*Food toxicology*" or "*Plant and microbial biochemistry*" sound good contribution to enhancement and improvement of students' knowledge, acquired in the BSc study programme.

The courses that could be recognised under similar titles (with uncertain necessity to be doubled) are:

Research Methods and Academic Writing (BSc)

Research and Research Methodology (MSc)

(both delivered by the same lecturer whose CV is written in Albanian, with improperly cited references – ironically, there is a lecture in the scope of the course: "*Research formatting and referencing*") MSc would be a more appropriate level to deliver that course.

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11

It seems that there is no further overlapping of the courses delivered at the two programme levels. Moreover, the succession of the courses looks reasonable and their selection in the vast majority fulfil the expectations of the Expert Team. What is missing at both programme levels is a fundamental course in "*Molecular biology*". The border-line between biochemistry and molecular biology is unclear – thus, the two scientific areas are very close and actually fuse one another. For example, to properly understand PCR-test, used for detection and identification of the coronavirus (certainly in the scope of biochemist's professional skills) it is necessary to be familiar with processes of DNA replication that does not seem to be explained enough in other related courses.

Following comparison of the two programme levels we could not recognise that the master level is less "medical" (with the exception of "*Molecular biotechnology*") and more "general" – thus, we are still convinced that "*Medical Biochemistry*" would be a more appropriate title of the proposed MSc programme. The ET recommends the college to consider this idea.

The crucial differential feature of the master programme, compared to the bachelor one, is the significantly higher presence of practical work. On the first site, it sounds perfect, however, as indicated in section 1.1 of this report, the ET could not evaluate the real capacity of the college to implement these practical stages in reality due to the lack in information about the assistants that will support/facilitate them. Nevertheless, biochemistry is not only an attractive fundamental science, but also offers a range of techniques and methods with important application in different aspects of biomedicine and public health. For this reason, a high share of practical work is extremely wishful and welcomed in the concept of the study programme.

However, we are concerned about the ability of the teaching staff to accomplish that wonderful concept. In the SER document, elective courses list is given for the second study year only. A list for the first study year is missing. Just 14 syllabuses are presented out of 16 courses found in the educational content table. In general, syllabuses correctly present aims and objectives, as well as learning outcomes of the programme courses. Most of them bring clear and proper week-by-week succession of theoretical lecture content. The learning content is appropriate, although sometimes not precisely aligned with a course title. The quantity of overlapping content is bearable, sometimes even wishful when delivered in a different way and in a different context. Although the syllabuses declare up to 60% of share for laboratory exercises in the teaching/learning activity and ECTS workload, there is no description of the practical work with students. Unfortunately, that would be a significant failure in the case of a study programme in biochemistry. The programme representatives have been made aware of this failure. For the re-accreditation of the programme, they are expected to introduce the laboratory exercise content and specify, week-by-week, the methods and techniques that will be practically completed with students. During the site-visit we tried to assess and learn about this issue. However, it was extremely difficult and exhausting for staff members to explain what is intended to be the content of the practical work. The necessity of using translation made this even worse – of course, it was difficult to translate the professional language. In the end, it was hard to judge if the staff members had a clear idea about the content that had to be delivered in the scope of the laboratory exercises.

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As long as a number, qualifications and teaching workload of the staff who is in charge of delivering laboratory exercises is missing, it is not possible to judge with certainty on the quality and a proper delivery of the practical work with students. The issue is of particular importance taking into consideration that specific and delicate laboratory exercises can only be performed with small groups – thus many groups have to be established.

There is a sufficient number of English literature titles, but it would be necessary to refresh the lists with some more recent items.

Discussions during the site-visit indicated that the study program intends to attract students from the graduates of the BSc programme offered by the UBT and it is designed in a way that allows them to concomitantly work, if necessary. The provided timetable proved that for at least half of the enrolled students (those that will be grouped in workgroups 1,2 and 3) this would be possible, while workgroups 4, 5,6, 7, and 8 will have to gather those students that are not working (as their classes are scheduled during the morning). It was impossible for the ET evaluate whether the UBT college has enough teachers and assistants to organize 3 parallel classes as they are scheduled in the timetable. Attracting more assistants in the future might make this endeavour easier, especially if in time, the programme will more students.

Compliance level: Partially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *Ensure that every course in the study programme, mandatory or elective, is accompanied with a related syllabus document.*
2. *Ensure that every syllabus document of the study programme is properly informative presenting not only theoretical courses content, but also describing week-by-week content of the practical work by specifying exact methods and techniques intended to be completed in the scope of laboratory exercises.*
3. *Recent literature titles, not older than ten years, would be preferable.*
4. *We recommend a double performance of the course "Research methods and academic writing* (BSc)/*Research and research methodology* (MSc) *to be re-considered. It would be appropriate in the MSc programme level.*
5. *We recommend an introduction of the course in "Molecular biology" with the particular focus on replication, transcription, translation and basics in genetic engineering to be reconsidered (and possibly introduced instead of "Research methods and academic writing" in the BSc study programme). It would preferably follow after general biology, cytology and genetics, but precede the course in "Genetic engineering" which might better fit the content of MSc programme.*
6. *Reconsider the name of the programme in order to better reflect its content.*

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13

2.5. Students

The program will follow the UBTs' rules and regulations, including the admission procedure. Potential candidates will have to be graduates of a Biochemistry BSc program and thus all will possess high school graduation documents or equivalent. The SER mentions `*Admission to the study is performed based on a public call. Based on the results of previous education, experience, and knowledge of English language the Commission creates a ranking list determining which candidates have become entitled to enrol and who have psychophysical abilities for the title of Master of Science in Biochemistry*` [SER, p. 47]. However, the SER fails to offer sufficient details about the criteria used for admission, the exams/elements of the admission process – e.g. how are the psychophysical abilities of the candidate assessed- and the manner in which the admission grade is calculated for the ranking list. The SER does not mention how is the consistency of the applicability of the procedures ensured. The ET recommends that the college clarify these aspects for the next evaluation for re-accreditation.

The program was designed in a student-centred manner that intends, through the proposed teaching methods, to encourage an active participation of the students in the learning process. These methods include `*case-studies, project work, problem-based learning, and simulated learning. Opportunities for interactive learning are reinforced through project-based learning, case study analysis, visiting speakers*` [SER, p. 47]. The institution also argues that the modern infrastructure and the equipment bought and/or allocated to this new programme will ensure the favourable context for ensuring an interactive teaching and learning process. The institution intends to organise small study groups – of 5-6 students – for the practical activity.
The heads of the programme, have envisioned several tools/instruments to offer feedback to students regarding their performance in relation to the learning objectives. For example, a good practice example is the initiative to monitor and identify early the students in risk of non-completion [SER, p. 48]. There are instruments like a mentor system, tutorials and workshops that will help students to perform better towards reaching their learning goals.
Students are periodically evaluated, so that they receive continuous feedback regarding their progress. Their results are recorded in the SMIS.
There is no mention of any flexible treatment ensured for students in special situations.

In order to ensure that the students work is original, the college has adopted several initiatives. They are mostly focused on prevention, preparing students for conducting original research and qualitative ethic academic writing. For example, students learn about plagiarism from the Student Handbook and from the provisions of the Code of Ethics. Students also sign a declaration attesting that they submitted an original work. All these efforts are commendable, but teachers should also take upon some responsibility in monitoring the progress of their students in writing their papers and red-flagging any misconduct.
Students find out about their rights during their Induction session and from the student Handbook. They are also included in the college regulations which are accessible to all students. The SER mentions that the rights of students include the right to appeal which is

14

regulated by UBT rules and regulations and Statute. However, the Code of Ethics does not mention it among the rights of students. Uniformity and coherence in the contents of the documents needs to be ensured. They also include the right to **transfer** from other Biochemistry study programs, during the window of period dedicated to transfers as per the decision of the Ministry of Education. The SER describes at page 51 the transferring process and the share of responsibilities between different units/departments of the college.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *Consider ensuring a flexible treatment for students in difficult situations;*
2. *Ensure coherence between the documents of the college regarding the rights of the students.*
3. *Revise the admission procedures so that it is very clear what is taken into account and how is the admission grade calculated (how are the students ranked if they come with similar grades from the BSc program).*

2.6. Research

It is good to start this chapter with the statement that "*UBT aims to establish itself as an internationally competitive, research-intensive university, committed to the transfer of knowledge and a provision of a world-class education and service*". A lot of wording like that could be found in the Self Evaluation Report glorifying and praising the Institution to the position of a leading contributor to the growth and strategic development of Kosovo and the region.

The overall achievement of the College is significant indeed, including impressive infrastructure and facilities, research centres and clinics, as well as a number of already accredited study programmes and academic staff members of which there is a number of high-quality ones. But the position and status of biochemistry in the general environment of UBT College remains unclear and uncertain. We found information that a research plan of the Faculty of Biochemistry is a constitutive part of the UBT institutional research strategy, but a question remains what is the content of that particular research plan, what are the objectives of the general institutional strategy, and what results and achievements have revealed so far from that strategy. All over again, there are plenty of phrases and statements on "*an individual health care across the life span, community healthcare, management of patients during illness and recovery, a reduction of risks for disease and promotion of healthy lifestyles*". The development of research capacity is going to be positively reflected in all those issues of public health, but at the very moment some concrete research objectives and achievements are expected to be discussed.

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15

There is a list of universities across Europe and the United States that UBT College has an agreement with. But the question remains what is the content, and what are concrete aims and objectives of all those agreements? What results have been revealed from them? Unfortunately, we have not found in the SER Document one single collaborative research project, or an arrangement of research training for an academic staff member, or an arrangement of visiting lectures by an eminent professor from abroad. All the agreements have to generate some progress in research skills and capacities, that will immediately be translated to higher educational quality and teaching capacities. This simple formula is expected to be implemented in the future, not only to glorify the UBT College in its whole, but to particularly contribute to biochemistry and the related BSc and MSc study programmes.

The allocation of professional duties, with minimal 30% of engagement in research activities, satisfactorily defines scientific and not only teaching character of academic staff members. Moreover, staff performances are evaluated in relation to research achievements, and promotional criteria are defined and strictly followed, as we discussed during the site-visit. However, the scientific outcome of the academic staff members differs significantly. Perhaps the quality assurance system should have been implemented in preparation, checking and polishing the study programme proposal. Improperly cited references are an issue that does not contribute to a positive opinion on research skills, and would not be appreciated by any expert team. There are some CV documents that do not reflect significant research output and we also found at least one CV bringing no publication at all during the last few years. In spite of the standard 6.7., which is not satisfied, it has to be emphasised that a scientific result is not something that would be delivered on request. It is not unusual for an eclipse-period to happen from time to time. But it is not what would contribute to the opinion on the programme and the institution, that an academic staff member was promoted twice (2021,2022 !?) having no recent publications, and having previously just a low-profile track record. Additionally, we found at least two CV documents presenting papers that are published in no-impact journals of which some could hardly be recognised as scientific. Furthermore, some track records are not related enough to the courses that staff members have been entrusted with.

As has been revealed from academic experience all over the world, institutional support (claimed in SER Document) is necessary but not enough. The quality has to be a demand and not a possibility. The quality has to be expected and not just encouraged. The institutional management (College, Faculty, Department) should define particular objectives (escaping general wording) as well as particular aims, with defined milestones towards accomplishing a task given. The heads of both BSc and MSc programmes and an institutional unit (whatever it is) should insist on defined research collaboration and not ceremonial international agreements. Study programmes in biochemistry should be supported but could not be sheltered under a general umbrella of UBT College. For the first re-accreditation, it would be necessary to better define the organisational and management structure, to define its recognisable plan of research activities and development, and build up its own recognisable profile. It would be recommended to support the strategy with expenditure-items in the scope of the research budget. The heads of the constitutive unit and study programmes are expected to be aware of

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16

the academic staff track record to be on the same topics as their teaching activities. It would be extremely important to demonstrate that promotional criteria are not possible to be corrupted. Last but not least, a research development is hardly possible without short-term (but not shorter than one month) of research training in internationally recognised institutions profiled in the field, and long-term doctoral or postdoctoral specialist training supported by internationally available fellowships.

It would be nice to close this chapter with a positive example of Albina Fejza. She completed her PhD by joining an internationally recognised research team. She has built up her track record with a number of papers in high-impacted journals, in the same topic or related to her teaching activity. Co-authoring a paper that presumably originated from her doctoral thesis, she appeared first on the authors' list. There has been nothing more to be achieved. We strongly believe she is able to contribute with new publications, but now being affiliated to UBT College. As we could presume, the example of Albina Fejza has happened, and we would like to believe that the institution will not let the new positive examples to happen, but to be forced through an appropriate research- and development-strategy.

Compliance level: Partially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *A specific research plan and strategy is expected to be defined. It has to be in alignment with the UBT College plan, but the general UBT strategy could not substitute the particular strategy concerning biochemistry study programmes.*
2. *Stronger demands on international publishing and publishing in scientific journals, and not professional ones, has to improve track records of some academic staff members.*
3. *One single example of corrupting promotional criteria is not allowed. This is the basic prerequisite that ensures quality in research and higher education.*
4. *It is hard to imagine a development in a research and higher-education institution without short-term and long-term research trainings of academic staff (real research – not "touristic" visits with the only purpose to build-up CV documents)*
5. *Agreements with international institutions can help in objectives and achievements mentioned above. Moreover, they should be used as a platform for proposing collaborative projects.*

2.7. Infrastructure and Resources

According to the Self Evaluation Report, UBT College has a modern infrastructure encompassing campuses and other facilities, which provide the necessary space for studying and research. In general, the UBT premises are impressive, indeed. But similarly, as discussed in some previous reports on UBT study programmes, the external observers are confused trying

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17

to recognise premises and resources available specifically for the evaluated programme. A more clear delimitation is needed.

There is a table in the SER (p. 92), bringing specific evidence on premises and resources of which the Biochemistry Programme is a primary user. Unfortunately, the table does not present laboratory/practicum spaces. This is concerning given the high share of practical hours this program encompasses – which is, as already mentioned, very good if the proper resources are allocated for ensuring the quality of these practical stages (space, equipment and consumables being essential). During the site-visit just one general biochemistry laboratory was shown, as well as one microbiology laboratory. There are also several specialised laboratories with specific equipment usable for very particular methods/techniques that could be attended by very small groups only.

In the Accreditation Report on the Bachelor Study Programme in Medical Biochemistry, premises were described to be located in the UBT Hospital at the Innovation Campus in Lipjan. In on-line accreditation procedure, a video was presented to the Expert Team, "*testifying to the modern nature of the building and providing a tour of some laboratories, seminar rooms, a lecture hall and a library*". By having the opportunity to visit and explore the premises mentioned above, we have to repeat the statement from the BSc study programme report: "h*ow precisely these facilities are shared amongst different study programmes is not clear*".

Thus, the question remains on the ability of delivering specific sophisticated practical work (laboratory exercises) that is intended to have a high share (up to 60%) in the courses' content, and have to be delivered for small groups of students. The general and specific laboratories, shown in the site-visit, and not presented in the table, are presumably/obviously premises used for other study programmes. Another open question is how many users there are, and what is actually a time-share of Biochemistry in using those spaces and facilities for both BSc and MSc study programmes.

Furthermore, there was no mention of whether there is a team or individual staff member with responsibility for facilities. Do they belong to the Biochemistry unit? It was not possible to meet some younger academic staff who will be in charge, in practical work with students, to demonstrate how the facility would operate.

The impressive library, encompassing "traditional" items (textbooks, manuals, journals), as well as an advanced online platform, presumably satisfies the needs of study programmes in biochemistry.

The financial plan is reliant primarily on student tuition fees, and the SER Document claims a balance of expenditures and incomes is expected. Less than half of the UBT budget is allocated to the staff salaries, and a significant share of income is claimed to be for research and development, capital investments, international cooperation activities and capacity development. Again, it would help to have a bit more specific financial plan concerning the particular study programme under evaluation.

A standard 7.6. which deals with issues around facilities for students with special needs is not addressed.

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18

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *Specific infrastructure and facilities, supporting delivery of laboratory exercises in the scope of the particular study program in biochemistry. are expected to be better defined and presented.*
2. *Stronger evidence would need to convince an Expert Team that a practical work with declared extent and the particular content would be feasible concerning the premises and facilities available to the Biochemistry unit (not UBT College in general).*

3. FINAL RECOMMENDATION OF THE ET

Compliance level:

Standard	**Compliance Level**
Mission, objectives and administration	Partially compliant
Quality management	Substantially compliant
Academic staff	Substantially compliant
Educational process content	Partially compliant
Students	Substantially compliant
Research	Partially compliant
Infrastructure and resources	Substantially compliant
Overall compliance	**Substantially compliant**

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19

The UBT College is an ambitious higher-education institution characterised in a number of impressive features and achievements. We believe the institution could contribute with the new study programme under evaluation, in equipping graduates with knowledge and skills successfully used in all the aspects of public health and general or specific health-care and human well-being. For the first re-accreditation, the Heads of the programme are expected to fulfil our recommendations preparing the SER Document with a bit more precision and without some inconsistencies recently found. In particular, we expect the educational process content to be specified concerning laboratory exercises and teaching staff who would be in charge of delivering it. The constitutive unit, related to the study programmes and research is expected to be more defined, as well as infrastructure and facilities specifically related to the huge teaching hours of practical work with a number of small groups, intended to be performed in the programme. In the re-accreditation procedure, the session with students will be very informative for the Expert Team to reconsider a decision on the students' number enrolled in the study programme.

In conclusion, the Expert Team considers that the **Study Programme in Biochemistry – Master Level**, offered by the UBT College is **substantially compliant** with the standards included in the *KAA Accreditation Manual*, and therefore, recommends **to accredit** the study program for a duration of **3 years** with a total number of **25 students** to be enrolled in the program.

Expert Team

Member

	Mladen KRAJACIC	**15.06.2023**
(Signature)	(Print Name)	(Date)

Member

	Delia LUPESCU	**15.06.2023**
(Signature)	(Print Name)	(Date)

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20