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UNIVERSITY OF PRISTINA

BA Early Childhood Education

Programme Re-Accreditation

Final Report of the Expert Team

May 4, 2024

Pristina - Brno - Zagreb



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Context

Date of site visit: *March 28, 2024*

Expert Team (ET) members:

- *Prof. Milan Pol, Masaryk University, Czech Republic*
- *Domagoj Švigir, University of Zagreb, Croatia (Student Expert)*

Coordinators from Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA):

- *Shkelzen Gerxhaliu, Director of Department*
- *Leona Kovaci, Senior Officer*

Sources of information for the Report:

- *Self-evaluation report (SER) and other documentation provided by the University of Pristina*
- *Site visit observations*
- *Interviews during the site visit*

Requested documents:

- *Clarifying documents related to some syllabi*

Additionally, received documents:

- *Clarifying documents related to some syllabi*

Criteria used for program evaluation:



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- Accreditation Manual of KAA

1.2. Site visit schedule

Site Visit Program

Time	Meeting	Participants
09:00 – 09:55	Meeting with the management of the faculty where the programme is integrated	
10:00 – 10.45	Meeting with quality assurance representatives and administrative staff	
10:50 – 11:50	Meeting with the heads of the study programme Early Childhood Education (0-6 years), BA, (room 1) Prof. Milan Pol, Expert Mr. Domagoj Svigir, Student Expert	Rozafa Ferizi Shala Albulena Metaj Macula Ganimete Kulinxha Adelina Hajrullahu



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10:50 – 11:50	Meeting with the heads of the study programme Primary Education, BA (room 2) Prof. Elene Jibladze, Expert Prof. Juliette Torobian, Expert	Hatixhe Ismaili Vjollca Ahmedi Teuta Danuza Jehona Rrustemi
11:50 – 12:50	Lunch break	
12:50 – 13.40	Visiting Facilities	
13:40 – 14:30	Meeting with teaching staff	
14:35 – 15:20	Meeting with students	
15:25 – 16:10	Meeting with graduates	
16:15 – 17:00	Meeting with employers of graduates and external stakeholders	
17:00 – 17:15	Internal meeting of KAA staff and experts	
17:15 – 17:25	Closing meeting with the management of the faculty and program	



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1.3. A brief overview of the institution and program under evaluation.

University of Pristina is the largest public higher education institution in Kosovo. The Faculty of Education is one of the academic units of the university and it was established in 2002. According to the SER, the faculty currently has 60 full-time teachers (professors and assistants) and nearly 2500 students registered as active students. Nowadays, the Faculty of Education offers three programs at the bachelor level, three programs at the master level, and one PhD program. The program submitted for re-accreditation, Early Childhood Education, is the one of a bachelor level. Until 2020, the Faculty of Education offered two programs focused on early childhood education, namely Early Childhood Education (0-3 years of age), and Preschool Education (3-6 years of age). In 2020 these two programs were integrated into a single one which includes education of children from birth to six years of age. Its first accreditation was done in 2020. The number of students registered in the first year of study is 60 (in regular studies).



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2. PROGRAM EVALUATION

2.1. Mission, objectives and administration

The mission of the Faculty of Education, University of Pristina is formulated as follows: “Provide quality programs for the preparation and continuous professional development of educators, teachers and other specialists in the field of education, the development of research-scientific activities and community networking, in order to achieve the advancement of a system oriented towards the needs of the society for quality education and the development of knowledge, skills and social values.” (webpage of the UP) Clearly, the mission aims at three main pillars of the higher education institution, teaching/learning, research/development, and the public reach.

The vision of the Faculty of Education, University of Pristina correlates with the mission statement and stresses that “The Faculty of Education is Kosovo’s leading institution for the preparation of teachers and educational professionals, competent in the implementation of innovative teaching, learning, and research practices seeking to develop each individual to the maximum of their potential, striving for the country’s sustainable development and in line with global development trends.” (webpage of the UP)

The program under the evaluation, Early Childhood Education, is in compliance with the overall mission statement of the institution; it also reflects three main areas of concern - teaching/learning, research/development, and the public reach (so-called third mission).

As concerns the learning outcomes of the program, they are in agreement with the National Qualifications Framework and the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. This seems clear that when formulating the intended learning outcomes of the program under the evaluation, relevant academic and professional advice was taken into consideration by the program leaders.

The bachelor program Early Childhood Education has a clearly and acceptably defined didactic concept. It is logically built; it covers main areas of the field and has an internal gradation. The

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program interconnects theoretical knowledge and practical experience of the students and provides students with possibilities to get involved in what can be called research-driven activities (appropriately demanding to the bachelor level of the study). Also, the program is compatible with similar programs, namely those realised at University of Ljubljana (Slovenia) and University of Rijeka (Croatia).

The University of Pristina, Faculty of Education has developed a set of formal policies, guidelines, and regulations that deal with procedural and academic issues directly related to the program. The main document in this respect is the Statute of the University of Pristina and it seems clear that the Faculty of Education adheres to this document. These policies, guidelines and regulations are made available to staff as well as students of the program. Despite this, during the interviews some students said they did not have enough information about mobilities, for instance.

This can be said that the staff and students comply with internal regulations that relate to ethical conduct in research, teaching, assessment in their academic and administrative activities. In relation to research ethics, the regulatory body is the Central Council for Ethics in Scientific Research (with the faculty representative in this Council) on the university level. The Faculty of Education has also appointed the Ethics Committee that is in charge of analysis and resolution of incidents in which conflict with ethical codes in place. During the interviews, no such cases were mentioned by the respondents. Policies, including anti-plagiarism and other forms of cheating are also in place, but current practice needs improvement. The Faculty of Education currently uses various open access instruments to deal with possible plagiarism, and the panel was informed that only this year the University of Pristina is in the process of buying the appropriate software to ensure a unified and more sophisticated approach to the issue. Disciplinary committee established by the Faculty of Education then monitors potential unethical behaviour of students, staff involved in the study program. The theme of artificial intelligence is at the stage of discussion about how to approach possible ethical aspects of working with it.

Policies and regulations as well as terms of reference and statements of responsibility that relate to the management and delivery of the program are reviewed on a regular basis, and changes are implemented if it is considered necessary. A concrete example of such a procedure from recent periods is the review of the pedagogical practice process which led to the revision of the

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manual for pedagogical practice and thus reform of this part of the program Early Childhood Education (in the academic year 2023/2024).

Compliance level: substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

- *Make sure students really know where and what regulations, rules, and procedures are in place, including those related to international mobilities, and can effectively use them.*
- *Make sure antiplagiarism measures include the use of appropriate technology.*

2.2. Quality management

The self-evaluation report (SER) outlines the university's quality management procedures. However, no evidence exists of using the PCDA methodology (plan-check-do-act). Although the SER states that evaluation and improvement planning (after evaluation cycle is completed) are integrated into regular planning processes, no practical evidence was presented on-site to demonstrate how this is accomplished and what methodologies are used at the Faculty of Education's quality assurance system.

University of Pristina, and Faculty of Education as its part, employs a set of questionnaires created as part of a European initiative, and the university has implemented a process of reviewing these questionnaires regularly. The university employs a survey instrument as part of its course evaluation process, which students complete and is accessible to instructors and administrators. However, there is no indication that the evaluation outcomes are discussed with the students, and this was confirmed during discussion with students. Apart from the course evaluation, the university administers other surveys, the results of which are utilised for internal quality management purposes. As a result, they are not discussed, and feedback is not provided - the transparency of these results is inadequate. Also, there is no evidence of surveys designed for alumni, employees, and other stakeholders.



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The self-evaluation report acknowledges (in the list of weaknesses) that there is a need for improvement in alumni tracking at the university (for example, creating a database). It was noted during the site visit that although the university maintains connections with alumni, there is a lack of institutional integration. Therefore, it is crucial to enhance efforts to engage graduates, such as establishing an alumni network and conducting formal surveys of alumni. It can be viewed positively, and it is evident from SER and the list of evidence, that when course evaluations reveal unsatisfactory results, appropriate measures are taken by the university/faculty. These measures and procedures are adequately documented. However, most cases that were presented in evidence are not contemporary.

There is enough evidence to conclude that quality assurance processes that deal with all aspects of program planning and delivery, including services and resources provided by other parts of the institution, are regulated according to the Quality Assurance and Evaluation Regulation at the University of Pristina. The Central Quality Assurance and Evaluation Commission oversees the assessment of university activities, with participation from all university stakeholder groups. The Quality Assurance Central Committee and Assessment at Rectorate formulate a five-year and annual action plan that outlines the activities to be undertaken, including evaluations of academic units. Quality assessments are conducted to identify issues related to program quality. The dean of the academic units (faculties) ensure that the academic development coordinator fulfils their responsibilities in conducting evaluations at the university and academic unit levels. After each evaluation activity, the deans draft an improvement plan and include the necessary measures in the academic unit's annual budget. Based on available documentation and on-site discussions, the expert panel confirms that the collected data is used for ongoing development, with clear responsibilities assigned to the relevant parties.

Based on the available documents and on-site discussions, the expert panel notes that the collected data is utilised for continuous development. The relevant parties have well-defined responsibilities, which are being effectively carried out. Previous evaluation results have also led to corresponding adjustments to the study programs, including study content, workload and professional qualification. However, it is extremely important that SER is written based on the new data. For example, in SER there is data collected several years ago which is not always relevant for the need of this accreditation process.



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Program administrators receive reports for each course delivery, which specify any planned content that could not be covered, and challenges faced in implementing planned strategies. After reviewing the course reports, suitable modifications are made to the teaching plans. Students evaluate the teaching quality of courses at the end of each semester. The course results are analysed by the faculty for academic staff, and information is provided regarding quality assurance measures, as well as a ranking of plans to enhance quality. However, there is no evidence or reports on how the public or university members are informed about quality development in a public report which points to a lack of transparency in that regard.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

- 1. Develop a rigorous quality management system based on a proven quality management framework (PDCA-cycle), communicate it to all stakeholders, and make it a basis for participatory actions involving all stakeholders.*
- 2. Create the system for alumni tracking and their subsequent integration into regular institutionalised surveys.*
- 3. Provide regular feedback to students and other stakeholders regarding survey results and actions that are results of surveys.*

2.3. Academic staff

The documentation provided by the Faculty of Education clearly informs about the staff involved in the study program. Permanent staff consists of ten academics. The standards and procedures for selection and advancement of academic staff are defined in the Statute of the University of Pristina. The responsibilities of the academic staff are in detail formulated in the decision of the Governing Council of the University of Pristina (No. 03/881, from December 11, 2020) and they include teaching, research, participation in exams, in evaluation committees, in decision-making forums of the academic unit, supervision and evaluation of seminar papers, mentoring and more. During the interviews, it became evident



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that the main emphasis is strongly on the teaching duties, while involvement of the staff in research is becoming a priority only in recent years. The engagement of the staff in so-called third role activities is present, but it is not clearly stated in the expectations to the academic positions and consequent performance appraisal either.

The teaching staff complies with the legal requirements concerning the occupation of teaching positions included in the Administrative Instruction for Accreditation 15/2008.

The University of Pristina, Faculty of Education makes sure that all academic staff are registered on the E-Accreditation platform and within the academic year they are not allowed to create other regular work relationships in a public or private institution.

As for the proportion of full-time employees in the whole teaching body, more than a half of them are full-time employees, and they account for more than half of the classes of the study program.

For the bachelor program Early Childhood Education (240 ECTS) there are four full-time academic staff members with PhD degrees.

The Faculty of Education seems to actively provide its academic staff with staff development opportunities, based on the evaluation of their performance and also analysis of their needs. The university's Centre for Excellence in Teaching is the unit providing opportunities for advancement of teaching practices of the academic staff. Professional development workshops and seminars are also the initiatives of the Faculty of Education. Some international projects, such as QATEK (Erasmus project), or Fulbright scholarships support opportunities are a part of these efforts, too.

As already mentioned above, the teaching staff of the Faculty of Education, including those who participate in the Early Childhood Education program are involved actively in the community, in agreement with the university mission. This involves activities with schools, parents and community organisations, and the initiatives such as events, workshops, conferences, sharing the experience with a wider audience.

Compliance level: substantially compliant

ET recommendations:



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- *Make sure the academic staff work descriptions include clearly and proportionally three roles of the university, as formulated in the institution's mission.*
- *Make sure a proportionate description of the three roles in the academic staff work is projected in the evaluation of academic staff performance.*

2.4. Educational process content

The study program Early Childhood Education is modelled on qualification objectives. They include subject-related but also interdisciplinary aspects, and this way students should have a chance to develop disciplinary, methodological as well as generic skills and competencies. The program is focused on preparing the students to be able to work as qualified professionals, future educators who are competent in the early childhood education field.

As already mentioned above, the study program complies with the National Qualifications Framework as well as the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. The individual parts of the program are well combined in order to achieve qualification objectives, thus providing adequate forms of teaching and learning.

The study plan contains the disciplines (courses) which are in a logical manner. These disciplines are divided into obligatory and elective sets, starting with electives from the second semester and providing students a chance to register two electives a term (these are open if at least 15 students register to the course). The disciplines lead to the development of general as well as specific competencies, and they are compatible with the study programs and curricula delivered in the European Higher Education Area. Ten results (learning outcomes) represent a relatively complex set of qualities that the graduate should possess. In concrete, they are as follows:

- “• Analyze, implement and evaluate contemporary practices for early childhood development and education;
- Break down the curriculum into planned activities for children according to age group,

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- orienting their work according to contemporary approaches with the child at the center;
- Apply contemporary methodologies while working with children, enabling them to develop holistically (e.g. develop physical, linguistic, mathematical, scientific, artistic skills and prepare for life, etc.);
 - Use technology to carry out educational activities and integrate it into education;
 - Use different forms of observation to identify and document the potentials, needs and interests of children in early childhood;
 - Enable a comprehensive approach in the process of implementing the plan and program, giving equal opportunities to each child;
 - Prepare the environment to ensure interactions between children, interactions between children and adults and to create opportunities for natural cross-field integration;
 - Promote preschool institution-family-community cooperation and apply different approaches for partnership with family and community;
- Continually analyze their professional practice and encourage a collaborative culture of reflection, sharing experiences and learnings together with colleagues and collaborators;
- Actively engage to keep up with scientific developments in order to advance professional skills and create a culture of continuous professional development;
 - Promote values, beliefs, attitudes on which social and national identity is developed based on democratic values for education and sustainable development in the country” (SER, p. 42).

Overall, the study plan contains the disciplines (courses) which are located in a logical manner. Minor changes for possible consideration are offered in the recommendations. They relate to the last semester in which the obligatory course Basics of Research in Education is offered parallel with Diploma these and Pedagogical Practice IV – it indicates the students may have problems to master timely basics of methodology to cope with the diploma thesis demands without much time pressure. The situation can be moderated for those who followed the course Research skills (third semester), but this course is only elective.

Also, the panel was surprised to learn that on the admission level to the program, the musical sense (hearing) is not part of the preconditions. The question arises how students with such a deficit can successfully pass the obligatory courses Music Education in Early Childhood (semester III), and especially Interpretation on Instruments (semester IV).



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The disciplines (courses) of the study plan have informative syllabuses that contain main information related to the discipline, its teaching/learning, examination, namely the discipline's objectives, the basic thematic content, learning outcomes, the distribution of classes, seminars and applicative activities, students' assessment system, the minimal bibliography, and more. Some of the learning resources (obligatory literature) are in English and students and teaching staff informed the panel that they try to help each other to reach an understandable version(s). This seems to be a prevailing problem not only in this program.

During the interviews, the students confirmed that the teaching staff members explain to them the intended curriculum, incl. learning outcomes and their relevance to the students' development.

This can be said that mostly the teaching strategies are fit for different types of learning outcomes which the program intends to develop. Also, in general, the teaching and assessment take into a consideration different groups of students and their needs.

The assessment mechanism seems to be clear and fair, and it is communicated with the students at the beginning of the courses, as confirmed by the students. Also, appropriate, valid and reliable mechanisms to verify standards of students' achievement are in place.

The Faculty of Education has developed policies and procedures that can be used in case of inadequate or inconsistent assessment of students' learning/work. The panel was informed about such practice by the students during the interviews, too.

The practical experience has been paid a specific attention to in the program. As a result, a Handbook for Pedagogical Practice was revised, as already mentioned. Still, the Faculty perceives problems in lack of stimulation for teachers to mentor student practice (SER, p. 48). The practice is partly integrated in some (mainly) obligatory courses, and it is also offered as the 8-week course Pedagogical Practice itself at the very final semester, with the allocation of 14 credits.

The practice of students is organised in cooperation with the institutions where students conduct it. For realisation of the student practice, the Faculty of Education has a number of agreements with relevant institutions where students can have their practice and learn.



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Compliance level: substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

- *Consider a possibility to harmonise courses focused on the development of research skills of the students in the study plan.*
- *Consider the viability of the program for students with the deficit of musical sense (hearing).*
- *Make sure students have obligatory literature in all disciplines available in the language which they master well.*

2.5. Students

The Faculty of Education has defined a clear and formal admission procedure offered to all interested participants. This procedure consists of an entrance examination test whose results are evaluated by theoretical knowledge deriving from the MSc programme. During the visit, it was stated by all parties involved that everything is clear on this standard – a transparent points system is used to assess applicants, with the aim of identifying qualified candidates.

The university has implemented an Electronic Management System for Students (SEMS) and made relevant documentation available for public viewing. This system records students' individual achievements and attendance in their courses. From the documentation available, it is apparent that the university utilises a highly advanced and modern IT-based system, which was confirmed on the site visit.

Study groups in the programs are designed to be small and seem to support effective and interactive exchange among study groups. The transfer of students between higher education institutions, faculties and study programs is clearly regulated in the formal internal documents.

Academic staff is available in sufficient time to advise students. All professors and assistants in coordination with the quality coordinator set the official schedule for giving advice and consultations to students. In addition to this schedule students can contact the teaching staff



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during their working hours for advice through their official email. Also, students seem to be always informed in all aspects regarding the relevant subjects through SEMS and this system automatically carries all notifications in the official e-mail of the student. Additionally, students receive career development advice through Career Development Centre and further professional counselling is envisaged by engagement of a psychologist.

Discussion with students level strongly implies that they are well informed on their obligations and rights – they are aware that they can take an exam in up to three attempts. If the student is unable to pass the exam after the third attempt, an evaluation is conducted by a commission. If the student still fails to pass the exam after the fourth attempt, s/he will fail the entire academic year automatically. All procedures are in place, and everything is well documented. The course syllabus provides students with information about the exam's number, date, and evaluation criteria. The academic year consists of three regular exam periods, and the university offers flexible treatment to students in exceptional circumstances. For instance, students who have lodged a complaint or are part of a specific study program may be assessed by an examination committee in addition to regular exams. Student rights and obligations are made publicly available in the statute of the university and regulations. They are both published on the university official website.

There are some weaknesses that were confirmed by both students and alumni. There seems to be a lack of clear procedure on how to notify students on possibilities of Erasmus or other exchange programs, as this issue was raised during the talks with both students and alumni. Furthermore, a lack of space for student associations, lack of connection between students and alumni and underdevelopment of some campus facilities (library) are all issues that need to be addressed.

Compliance level: fully compliant

ET recommendations:

- 1. Continue further developing the alumni organisation.*
- 2. Make sure there are developed productive links between alumni and current students.*



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2.6. Research

The study program Early Childhood Education (bachelor level) does not resign on the research. It is visible in the curriculum and syllabi of the program and also in the increasing expectations related to the academic staff performance. This is a part of a broader change - the Faculty of Education as well as the whole University of Pristina is increasingly stressing the importance of research and they make concrete steps to support this change/development.

This can be said the study program research plans and objectives are a part of the Research Groups Scheme which was drawn in 2021 and explicitly mentions nine research themes/groups that all are related to the child/pupil. They are as follows: Planning and implementation of teaching; Integrating technology in education; Being a teacher; Education policy and school development; Curriculum and textbooks; Inclusion and diversity; Assessment in education; Education, society and value in education; and Development, learning and child wellbeing. Some measures to support research activities financially and organisationally have also been taken by the Faculty of Education and the very University of Pristina.

As already mentioned above, there is a tendency to stress newly the expectations that academic staff shall be involved in research. But this is and still will be a long process to reach the point when expectations for teaching staff involvement in research and scholarly activities are clearly specified, and performance in relation to these expectations is considered in staff evaluation and promotion criteria. But this can be said the Faculty of Education has started to take effective measures towards this end.

This is also related to the fact that the University of Pristina, Faculty of Education has been establishing clear policies to define what is recognized as research. These policies are consistent with international standards and established norms in the field of study of the program.

The academic staff members related to the program publish in relevant journals and other forms of publications nationally as well as internationally. Yet this also needs to be said that the



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publication production of key academics related to the program is not very high, as documented by the lists of their publications from recent years.

Academic and research staff publish under the name of the institution in Kosovo they are affiliated to as full-time staff.

In general, this can also be said that academic staff are encouraged to include in their teaching information about their research and scholarly activities that are relevant to courses they teach, together with other significant research developments in the field. This is evidenced with the syllabi, and this was also proved during the interviews with the students.

At the University of Pristina, Faculty of Education, policies are established for ownership of intellectual property.

The panel recognizes specifics of the bachelor's degree program and the place of research within it. Yet, more explicit chances for students to enter the research-driven activities might be worth considering even at this level. This is linked to the panel comments on the position of research-related disciplines in the curriculum, too (see above).

Compliance level: substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

- *Make sure the publication production of academic staff related to the program is on a good level.*
- *Make sure students have chances appropriate to the level of studies to get involved in the research activities.*

2.7. Infrastructure and resources

According to the Statute of the University of Pristina, the Faculty of Education is obliged to allocate a percentage of the financial resources from student fees to improve educational quality and cover unforeseen expenditures for educational matters. This percentage is decided by the Steering Council of the University of Prishtina. This implies that the Faculty has no legal competencies for independent financial planning and management.

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While the number of computers seems sufficient for classes, the number of computers for open student access is limited. Since not every student owns a laptop (site visitation evidence), the Faculty of Education may invest in hardware accessibility. Internet accessibility, server and storage capacity are good.

The Faculty of Education has its own library and reading room. However, it has very little room for so many admitted students each academic year. At the same time, the Faculty of Education students are within walking distance of the National Library of Kosovo (KCB), which has over 400 places in reading and learning rooms. At present, the infrastructure of the Faculty of Education is not fully adapted to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

In addition to the above mentioned, it is imperative to address the broader scope of infrastructural development and resource allocation. Proactive measures aimed at bolstering research infrastructure can catalyse scholarly pursuits, fostering a culture of innovation and inquiry within the academic community.

In conclusion, while the academic institution boasts commendable facilities and strategic initiatives, there exist avenues for refinement and enhancement, particularly concerning inclusivity, digitalisation, and resource optimisation.

Compliance level: substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

- *Continue improving digitalisation of learning resources.*

3. OVERALL EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATION OF THE ET

The expert team would like to commend the University of Pristina, Faculty of Education for their proactive engagement during the re-accreditation process, including the site visit. Having



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considered the documentation provided and discussed it with the different actors across the institution and beyond, the expert team recommends the following:

Standard	Compliance Level
Mission, objectives and administration	substantially compliant
Quality management	substantially compliant
Academic Staff	substantially compliant
Educational Process Content	substantially compliant
Students	fully compliant
Research	substantially compliant
Infrastructure and resources	substantially compliant
Overall Compliance	substantially compliant

In conclusion, the Expert Team considers the study program Early Childhood Education **substantially compliant** with the standards included in the KAA Accreditation manual and, therefore, **recommends accrediting** this study program for a duration of **3 years** with a number of **60 students** to be enrolled in the first year of the program.

4. APPENDICES *(if available)*

None



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Expert Team

Chair

Milan Pol

Member – Student expert

Domagoj Švigir
